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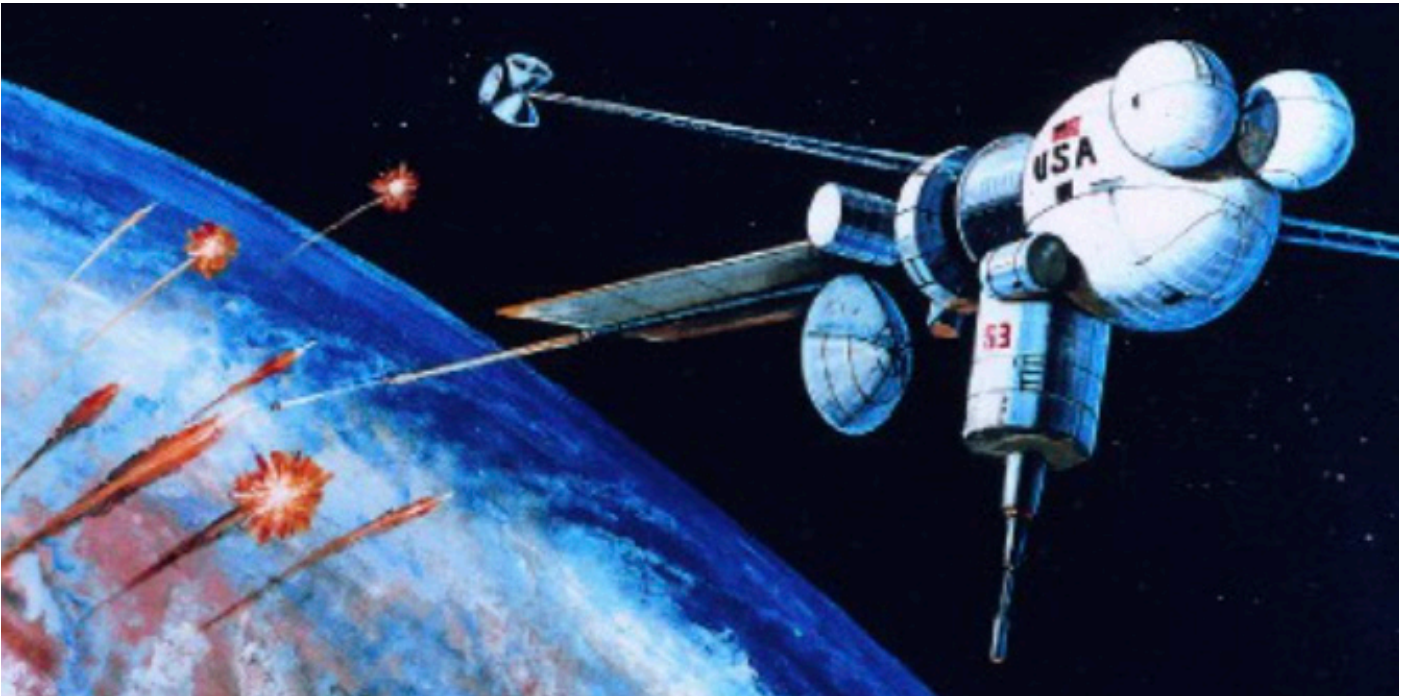
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# DONALD TRUMP'S PLAN TO RESURRECT 'STAR WARS'

By Felix Steele



Source: Military News

After a June 2024 campaign rally in Wisconsin, Donald Trump took to social media to announce his signature defense initiative: to “PREVENT WORLD WORLD III” by building “A GREAT... MISSILE DEFENSE SHIELD OVER OUR ENTIRE COUNTRY!” He has been inspired by the success of Israel’s Iron Dome, a short-range missile defense system that has proven itself capable of intercepting missiles from non-state players like Hamas, Houthi rebels and Hezbollah, as well as nation-states like Iran. Yet, Trump wants a far more expansive and reliable system for the United States— and he wants work to begin immediately. What will be the effects of Trump’s ambitious “IRON DOME FOR AMERICA” (as the executive order is titled) plan, and is he serious about the proposition?

Donald Trump sees the United States’ military might as an instrument for forging a new “golden age” of American military dominance – but has been inconsistent in his expression of military policy. On the one hand, Trump has long pledged an America First” approach that would extricate the U.S. from Ukraine and the Middle East. Yet the president’s sense of himself is as a dealmaker, and he has turned his gaze abroad, invoked the name of William McKinley and so far announced plans to buy (or conquer) Greenland, Canada, Panama, Gaza and Mars.

The Iron Dome for America is equally confused. Trump compares the proposal to Israel’s system of the same name, which was built for about \$3 billion with U.S. backing. However, the scopes of the two projects are entirely different.

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DONALD TRUMP'S PLAN TO RESURRECT 'STAR  
WARS'  
By FELIX STEELE

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Where Israel hopes to stop militant groups' small, homemade rockets from pockmarking Tel Aviv, Trump has pledged a system that would be capable of withstanding simultaneous nuclear attacks from China and Russia — whose missiles move at 20,000 miles per hour and reach the edge of space — across all U.S. territory.

This is a proposition more closely related to the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (or, as it was derisively dubbed by critics, "Star Wars") — a scheme to end the Cold War by creating a system of satellites, loaded with heat-seeking missiles, that would shatter a Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) attack. The project got nowhere: it was well beyond the technical capabilities of the day and would have devoured the federal budget. Trump's scheme shares many of the same limitations: launching, as he has described, hundreds of satellites over Russia, China, North Korea and Iran would not just provoke considerable ire, it would also be disastrously expensive. The figure cited by some news outlets has been \$2.5 trillion. Trump's allies point out that, even if this figure were true, it is not totally without precedent: the U.S.'s F-35 fighter jet program is projected to cost \$1.9 trillion over fifty years. Still, that the Iron Dome would not bankrupt the U.S. military doesn't make it fis-

cally responsible — nor does it make it the best way to spend defense money. Indeed, programs in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence would, as the agility of Ukraine's armed forces has demonstrated, be far more suited to 21st-century conflict.

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agility of Ukraine's armed forces has demonstrated, be far more suited to 21st-century conflict. Suppose, though, that Trump can overcome these technical hurdles and create an impenetrable missile shield that will last in perpetuity. Besides the U.S.'s vulnerability to other forms of attack that would be borne of a defense budget substantially expended on a missile shield, the paradoxical effect of a fully effective ICBM defense system could be to make nuclear conflict more likely. Game theory holds that no rational actor will ever launch a nuclear attack — because the enemy's warheads are hidden underneath lakes, inside mountains, and in railcars: it is impossible to eliminate them all without suffering a devastating retaliatory attack. The knowledge that a nuclear attack could be stopped with near-perfect accuracy could empower future leaders to lob nukes around as readily as they do conventional missiles, knowing that they are safe behind a missile shield.

Where, then, should Trump invest new defense spending? A natural priority is cheap automation, which has proven effective in Ukraine, as AI-enabled drones costing a few thousand dollars have eliminated million-dollar tanks. The U.S. has a few companies trying to produce inexpensive military hardware at scale — most notably the Costa Mesa-based Anduril Industries — but their products remain



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far more expensive than foreign ones. At the same time, foreign adversaries like China are tendering contracts for millions of mass-produced drones at a time: large-scale drone warfare is a frontier in which the U.S. desperately needs to innovate. Driving costs down in these new sectors, rather than investing in senseless and technically absurd missiles for the sake of out-rocketing other nations, should be Trump's priority.

## SIGHTS AND SOUNDS FROM THE GROUND AT THE 2025 PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

By Adia Stokes



All photo credits to Adia Stokes

Hopeful and optimistic before the 2024 presidential election, my family booked a hotel room in Washington, DC, for the weekend of January 20, 2025, hoping to watch the inauguration of the first female president of the United States. When we booked it, we agreed that no matter the result of November 5th, we would go. The room was, after all, nonrefundable. When the result in question became clear, our resolve held. We

packed our bags and loaded the car before setting out for Donald Trump's inauguration weekend in Washington, DC.

Although the ceremony was on Monday the 20th, Trump's supporters began celebrating days earlier. Getting to lunch on Sunday afternoon was difficult, as we ran into Trump's pre-inauguration rally. Thousands of people lined the streets for blocks, trying to get into Capital One Arena. We were surrounded by tables full of merchandise covered in American flags, eagles, and Trump's face. Notable mentions include a t-shirt with a photo of Trump giving two middle fingers and the words "You Missed," as well as a towel showing Trump in front of the White House with "Daddy's Home" in large red letters. Supporters were holding signs plastered with everything from "Repent or Perish," to "Homosexuality" crossed out, to "Face Diapers Not Required."



The next day was Monday — the big day. The streets were filled

with chants and a buzz you could hear blocks away. Although the official inauguration was held inside the Capitol Building's main rotunda, twenty thousand people secured seats in Capital One Arena, where they watched the inaugural ceremony on the Jumbotrons before Trump flew on Air Force One to address them in person. Everyone else congregated in the sub-freezing temperatures, in the company of those with whom they agreed. As camera crews swarmed the masses, interviewees could be overheard speaking about how "freeing" it felt to not have to hide their political beliefs, as many did in their home states.



The other overwhelmingly common sentiment was one of "unity." Almost every conversation touched on the excitement of uniting the country under one president. One man we overheard being interviewed remarked that he was looking forward to "law and order, bringing the world back to normal, I guess, I don't really know how to—" before settling on "unity" as his response. When asked about the theme of his inauguration, Trump himself told reporters, "Unity. It's going to be a message of unity."



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Brandon Tensley of Capital B News calls the cries for unity “hollow.” He goes on to emphasize that “These empty calls for comity also downplay the political violence and racial tensions that the former president and his allies have inflamed, and smother valid criticism of the party.”



When storming the Capitol is seen as acceptable, almost anything else goes. Somebody stood at the front of the World War I memorial waving a German flag. The Proud Boys, a group labeled by many as terrorists, flew banners reading “Proud Boys Did Nothing Wrong.” People held signs reading “Same-Sex Marriage = Hell.” The largest cry of Trump’s speech erupted at his statement, “As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female.” People were much more willing to act out because others were — because their president does.

In times of uncertainty, people often turn to powerful fig-

ures for a sense of security. For many Trump supporters, this means deification. The night before the Iowa caucus, Trump shared a video, beginning with the line, “God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So God gave us Trump.” Since then, there have been numerous examples of what NPR calls Trump’s “Messiah Complex,” or self-deification. Many of his Christian supporters have bought into the idea, thinking that America’s increasing secularization poses a threat to the unification of Church and state. After the first assassination attempt on Trump’s life, he spoke to a crowd in Florida, telling them, “Many people have told me that God spared my life for a reason, and that reason was to save our country and to restore America to greatness.”



Although a strategy Trump already used before the assassination attempts, this became one of the most prominent messages of Trump’s campaign: that he was sent by Heaven to rid us of the Leftist Evil. As Aleem Maqbool of BBC put it, “Millions of Americans felt guided by their faith to support the former, and now future, president.” Hank

Kunneman, an Evangelical pastor, described Trump’s campaign as “The Anointing.” This deification was on full display on the streets of DC during inauguration weekend. Signs and shirts declaring his “resurrection” and “second coming” were plentiful, as were pictures of Trump with a bandage over his ear, fist in the air. Prayers could be heard through loudspeakers, asking God to protect our country and our president. During his speech, Trump claimed, “I was saved by God to make America great again,” further pushing his own deification. This begs the question of what we Americans want to follow: a president or a God?

Attending the 2025 Inauguration felt somewhat dystopian, yet also realer than life. It’s easy to ignore what is on your phone or TV. However, that does not mean it’s not happening. Facing the ideas of those with whom you disagree is crucial to understanding how others form their opinions. I do not agree with the vast majority of the ideas I encountered, but I gained a deeper understanding of the Republican party by being amongst its most ardent supporters, an experience and understanding I will bring with me into discussions for the rest of my life.



## TRUMP'S REINTERPRETATION OF THE 14TH AMENDMENT: THE WAR ON BIRTHRIGHT CITIZEN- SHIP

By SAM FIROOZI

On January 20, 2025, the day of his inauguration, Donald J. Trump, the 47th president of the United States of America, signed a slew of executive orders. The executive order that perhaps caught the most media attention, however, was titled "Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship". This head-spinning executive order has been viewed by some observers as a blatant attempt to reverse what was a universally accepted, and undeniable part of the Constitution of the United States - birthright citizenship. Trump has weaponized the executive order to further his border-closing immigration agenda. The title of the executive order, utilizing the two words meaning and value, adds to Trump's increasingly isolationist attitude toward immigrants seeking asylum in the US. The message is clear; being born on American soil, according to this executive order, does not automatically guarantee American citizenship.

The purpose of this executive order was described in Section 1.0: "The privilege of United States citizenship is a priceless and profound gift. The Fourteenth Amendment states: 'All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of



Source: CAIR

the United States and of the State wherein they reside.' That provision rightly repudiated the Supreme Court of the United States's shameful decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857), which misinterpreted the Constitution as permanently excluding people of African descent from eligibility for United States citizenship solely based on their race."

The document goes on to explain that the 14th Amendment never meant to automatically give citizenship to anyone who is born in the U.S., arguing that certain people born in the U.S. don't fall under the "jurisdiction thereof" clause of the amendment, and as a result, don't qualify to become citizens just because they were born in the United States. These individuals are described very specifically in the same section of the order.

"Among the categories of indi-

viduals born in the United States and not subject to the jurisdiction thereof, the privilege of United States citizenship does not automatically extend to persons born in the United States: (1) when that person's mother was unlawfully present in the United States and the father was not a United States citizen or lawful permanent resident at the time of said person's birth, or (2) when that person's mother's presence in the United States at the time of said person's birth was lawful but temporary and the father was not a United States citizen or lawful permanent resident at the time of said person's birth."

Trump, with the simple stroke of his sharpie, intends to reverse a centuries-old section of our constitution. To understand this executive order, one must first know a little about the original writing of the 14th Amendment and the early legal cases surrounding it. To understand this executive or-



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It begins with the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case, which was tried in front of the Supreme Court of the United States in 1857. The *Dred Scott* decision ultimately declared that an enslaved person's birth in a free state did not entitle that person to freedom, because that individual was property and not a citizen. Since *Dred Scott* was a slave and not a citizen, he did not receive equal rights and protections under the law. This has gone down in America as one of the most unjust and infamous Supreme Court decisions. The 14th Amendment, however, would later guarantee that any person born on American soil, including former slaves, has the right to U.S. citizenship.

The 14th Amendment was also used in the case of *Wong Kim Ark v. U.S.* in 1898. The catalyst of this case was the Chinese Exclusion Act, which denied citizenship to Chinese immigrants for a 10-year period. *Wong Kim Ark* was a 1st generation American citizen. His parents were Chinese immigrants who, at the time, resided in the United States. When *Wong Kim Ark* was 21, he went to China to visit his parents, who had moved back to their home country after living

in the U.S. for 2 decades. Upon his return to the United States, he was denied entry with the authorities claiming that he was not a U.S. citizen. This case was brought in front of the Supreme Court and ended in a landmark decision that reinforced the idea of birthright citizenship. The majority decision was in favor of *Kim*. It was affirmed that the 14th Amendment indeed qualified him as a United States citizen, as a result of his birth in the United States, along with the fact that he was not employed by the Chinese government. The new Trump executive order on birthright citizenship aims to upend this long-accepted legal precedent.

The Trump administration's main argument hinges on the 'subject to the jurisdiction thereof' in the Constitution's statement. The legal loophole is based on Trump's idea that children born to illegal immigrants, or individuals in the US with visas temporarily, are not technically subject to the jurisdiction of the US. Since these people are allegedly not under the jurisdiction of the US, they cannot be considered citizens. The executive order was intended to go into effect on February 19, 2025, and would not apply to anyone born before that date. There has been enormous legal pushback since the release of this controversial executive order.

To date, according to Gene Johnson and Mike Catalini from the Associated Press, a total of 22

states have filed suit to stop the executive order. On January 23, 2025, 3 days after this executive order was issued, U.S. District Court Judge John Coughenor from Seattle granted a request by attorneys from Arizona, Illinois, Oregon, and Washington to temporarily halt the executive order for 14 days. Judge Coughenor described the executive order as "blatantly unconstitutional." Another federal judge from the District Court of Maryland has also blocked Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship. According to Judge Deborah Boardman, who made the announcement on February 6, 2025, "Today, virtually every baby born on U.S. soil is a U.S. citizen upon birth. That is the law and tradition of our country." The ruling has put a permanent block on the executive order until the legal process is completed, which many legal experts believe may take months to years.

Meanwhile, several Senate Republicans in support of this new executive order, are playing their part in this war on birthright citizenship. According to Peter Pinedo from Fox News, a new bill, entitled The Birthright Citizenship Act of 2025, aims to put an end to the automatic granting of citizenship to children born on American soil. The bill was introduced to the Senate on January 31st, 2025 by Republican senators Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Katie Britt of Alabama, and Ted Cruz of Texas.

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The senators claim this would put an end to “illegal aliens” or people temporarily here on a visa assuming their children born in the U.S. will become citizens through birth. In addition, the senators believe this new bill would put an end to “birth tourism,” which is the act of wealthy foreign nationals coming to the U.S. temporarily to have their children in the U.S. for automatic citizenship. Lindsey Graham was quoted as saying, “I also appreciate President Trump’s executive order to address birthright citizenship. It is time for the United States to align itself with the rest of the world and restrict this practice once and for all.” The likelihood of this bill getting passed is extremely low given the lack of Democratic support. However, the bill itself helps to further normalize the formerly unpopular argument against birthright citizenship for many Americans.

Most experts appear to believe Trump’s war on birthright citizenship will be a huge legal uphill battle. There has already been significant legal blowback just weeks after this executive order. Yet still, the question remains: what is Trump’s endgame with this executive order? Some speculate he may want to use it merely as a deterrent to immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S., effectively telling those people birthright citizenship

may be in danger in the future. Or is Trump banking on the legal process to lead its way to the Supreme Court? After all, he was the architect of the current conservative court that has a 6-3 majority. Does Trump believe his conservative judges may interpret the 14th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States the same way that he does? The future appears uncertain, but what is guaranteed is a legal fight for the ages.

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## CONGESTION PRICING AND THE MTA’S MONEY PIT

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By JACKSON WANG

Having survived years of legal battles and political wrangling, New York City’s controversial congestion pricing plan officially took effect on January 5th, 2025. Now, drivers entering Manhattan’s bustling business district south of 60th Street must pay a hefty 9 dollar toll. This article will explain why congestion pricing is more than just an everyday hassle — it’s a microcosm of a bigger issue.



Source: CNBC News

First proposed by then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2007 and eventually adopted by current

Governor Kathy Hochul, the congestion pricing plan is intended to reduce traffic and raise revenue for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) by encouraging commuters to take the subway. Herein lies the folly of the city’s alleged intentions.

Proponents of congestion pricing have campaigned around New York’s gridlocked traffic and endless commuting times. And they’re not wrong. Traffic congestion remains a growing problem, especially in Manhattan, where in certain areas, a vehicle’s average velocity is approaching walking speeds. Yet, the primary driver behind the implementation of congestion pricing lies not with the city’s traffic, unpleasant though it may be, but with the MTA’s desperate need for funding. Kathryn Freed, a retired New York State Supreme Court justice, claims the plan “was about money, it wasn’t about congestion.” Before his tenure ended, former Governor Andrew Cuomo began drafting a plan to patch the MTA’s growing budget deficit, stating, “We have to pass a dedicated funding stream so the MTA has the funding it needs. Congestion pricing is the only alternative.”

While money remains the heart of the congestion pricing strategy, Governor Hochul’s administration focused its campaigning on congestion and slow ride times, knowing that doing so would help New Yorkers swallow the congestion pricing pill more smoothly.



## CONGESTION PRICING AND THE MTA'S MONEY PIT

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The MTA currently has an annual deficit of over \$8 billion and projects this figure to remain constant in the following years. This comes even after the city received \$26.5 billion in federal Covid relief funding. Part of this is due to declining ridership, an issue most mass transit systems nationwide have faced since the pandemic.

However, the MTA's budget problems predate the Covid lockdowns, owing to generous union contracts that inflate wages and hinder efficiency. For instance, a "telephone maintainer" makes \$43.72 per hour and receives a "platinum" health care plan, while a "track supervisor" on the Metro-North could bring in \$500,000 yearly. Additionally, turnstile jumping (practically an official New York City sport) costs the MTA hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

The MTA's congestion pricing scheme is nothing more than a band-aid for its own financial inefficiencies, forcing hardworking, cash-strapped New Yorkers to face the brunt of its mismanagement. While traffic has eased slightly since its initiation, the toll remains an unavoidable tax on daily life. For those who can take the Subway, it represents an inconvenient trade-off to avoiding a costly tax.

Despite its hefty deficit, the MTA approved a 68 billion dollar cap-



Governor Kathy Hochul at a congestion pricing rally in Union Square in December (Source: Don Pollard)

ital plan to improve its existing systems. The subway is undoubtedly in need of repair and renovation. Railcars and power systems have been neglected for decades, and replacement parts are so outdated they can only be found on eBay. But now is certainly not the time to approve a complete transit makeover that will cost more than eight times the MTA's annual deficit.

Congestion pricing will bring in only \$500-800 million a year for the MTA—a drop in the bucket compared to what's needed to fund the capital plan or make a meaningful dent in its deficit. Governor Hochul has repeatedly assured New Yorkers that she would not raise taxes. Yet, with no other funding streams in sight, higher taxes or a new fee system seems inevitable.

Tax initiatives like the congestion pricing plan make a notoriously unaffordable city even more un-

affordable. No wonder New York City is among the fastest-contracting cities in all of America. If the population continues on its current downward trajectory, the MTA's financial woes will only worsen.

Fixing New York's public transit system, both literally and financially, is by no means a trivial matter. But in the short term, there are certain areas in which the MTA can improve. First, the MTA must cut costs. Unnecessary expenses, like its generous union contracts, will cause the transit authority to continue to suffer financially. Additionally, getting rid of revenue blackholes like fare evasion and pausing major spending projects will help put the MTA on track to reach financial equilibrium. Congestion pricing and other tax plans should be a last resort, not the first place the MTA looks when its books start bleeding red.



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## “BLEACH BLOND, BAD BUILT, BUTCH BODY”: A HISTORY OF INNER-CONGRESSIONAL RACIAL POLITICS

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By ZEKE TESLER

During a House Oversight Committee on May 16th, 2024, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene attacked the appearance of freshman Democratic Representative Jasmine Crockett, saying that her “fake eyelashes were messing up her reading.” In response, Crockett posed a hypothetical: “If someone on this committee then starts talking about somebody’s bleach blond, bad built, butch body, that would not be engaging in personalities, correct?”

In official video footage of the incident, the camera pans to Crockett, who sports a knowing smirk, before landing on Representative Jamie Raskin, who tries (and fails) to suppress his laughter.

Viral clips promptly circulated, and Representative Crockett made various media appearances, standing by the decorum of her “only hypothetical” insult.

Moments like these in modern American politics are more frequent than ever—we live in the era of the congressional screaming match, of large props during congressional hearings and angry outbursts punctuated by the sound of a gavel.

However, this exchange didn’t just die down—it prompted the

interruption of Representative Anna Paulina Luna, who repeatedly said that Crockett was “out of control” and must “calm down.” Her words were racial dog whistles, painting Crockett as irrational and angry despite her calm manner and the context of her response, forcing her neatly into the stereotype of the “angry Black woman.”

As we enter a second Trump presidency backed by a Republican-controlled Congress, there’s much focus and worry about the racist policies his administration might sponsor. From stripping DEI to fueling anti-immigration sentiment, the Trump presidency certainly poses many threats, but it’s equally important to look inward. Both historically and currently, racism has stained the internal dynamics of Congress—and if racism permeates the institutions that make laws, then the policy outcomes are hardly surprising.

Congressional representation for oppressed groups has not been an easy road. The first Black members of Congress, Representative Joseph Rainey (R-SC) and Senator Hiram Revels (R-MS), weren’t elected or seated respectively until 1870, nearly a century after the country’s founding. That shaky foundation set the stage for the following 150 years of racial politics in Congress.

Unsurprisingly, the first Black members to enter Congress did not signify a new age of racial harmony in the halls of the Unit-

ed States government. Their tenure was symbolic of the radical (yet ultimately temporary) reforms of the Radical Reconstruction period, which gave suffrage to Black men—they were allowed little power once inside the Capitol. Joseph Rainey worked towards passing civil rights legislation and funding public schools, though his legislative record was limited. One of his most substantial contributions was advocating for the Ku Klux Klan Act, which was eventually signed into law by President Grant. He was especially known for giving impassioned speeches throughout his tenure. While he served, he was often a target of death threats, and constantly feared racial violence. Revels also worked to advance the interests of Black Americans, but from the start his very right to serve in Congress was questioned using Dred Scott to undermine his citizenship. Throughout his time in Congress, he advocated strongly for recovery and improvement in his home state of Mississippi, but he was soon out of office as the term of the seat he was filling ran out. Through the following decades, the end of Radical Reconstruction and the re-intensification of segregation and disenfranchisement effectively eliminated Black Americans from public office.

Between 1887 and 1901, there were only five Black members of Congress, and they had very limited power in an institution that forced them away from leadership and good committee assignments.

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After 1901, it was another 28 years before a Black American served in Congress, and another 72 years until a Black American served in Congress representing the South.

When Black Americans began returning to Congress in 1929, they were entering a workplace that had spent years ignoring or fighting against any form of civil rights. However, the Second Great Migration of Black Americans from the South to northern states, which spanned the 1940s to the 1970s, increased Black political power, as they could freely vote and helped build up local chapters of the NAACP. While there were plenty of problems in the North, there was still a greater sense of political enfranchisement, and the Great Migration arguably helped spur the Civil Rights Movement. As the Civil Rights Movement grew over the following decades, and Black congresspeople accrued more power within the Capitol, they still only constituted a small minority. However, many important figures emerged in Congress during this time period.

In 1945, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. entered Congress as the first Black American to be elected from New York. Over his decades spent in Congress, Powell rose in the ranks of the Democratic Party, becoming one of

its most prominent figures. He worked tirelessly for civil rights causes, especially after assuming chairmanship of the Education and Labor Committee. Within Congress, as one of only two black Congressmen until 1955, Powell was often at odds with Southern segregationists and discriminatory practices within the Capitol.

Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman to be elected to Congress in 1968, and later became the first Black woman to seek the presidential nomination from either of the two major political parties. While in Congress, she introduced more than 50 pieces of legislation, and fought strongly for racial and gender equality. She also worked to expand programs for low-income and working-class Americans, while rising in the ranks of the Democratic caucus.

In a post-Civil Rights Movement America, Black representation in Congress reached new highs. The vast majority of all Black congresspeople have served since 1970. As numbers swelled, the Congressional Black Caucus formed in 1971, which has worked to advance the interests of Black Americans ever since. Since then, Black members of Congress have finally obtained committee Chair positions and party leadership positions.

In 1972, two Southern Black representatives, Andrew Jackson Young Jr. (D-GA) and Barbara Jordan (D-TX) finally broke the decades-long streak of no Black

southerners serving in Congress after winning their congressional races. Andrew Jackson Young Jr. was an important part of the Civil Rights Movement, serving as a senior aide to Martin Luther King Jr. in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He decided to run for office to attempt to make change from inside the political system rather than from outside, and while he lost in 1970, he won in 1972 on a campaign that focused on public education. Once in government, he advocated liberal policies at home and abroad, fighting against government contracts with foreign companies practicing discrimination, supporting wage increases for the working class, and advocating for voting rights. When Jimmy Carter took the presidency, Young resigned from Congress to become U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations where he advocated Carter's human rights positions, and later became mayor of Atlanta. Through these positions, Young cemented his legacy—his story contrasts with how inner congressional politics changed overtime, as he was able to accrue power, and often worked across the aisle while in Congress. Jordan similarly left an impact, becoming chair of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, delivering a memorable opening statement at the Nixon impeachment hearings, and advocating expansion of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

However, increased representation has still left Congress far from racial harmony.

## “BLEACH BLOND, BAD BUILT, BUTCH BODY”: A HISTORY OF INNER-CONGRESSIONAL RACIAL POLITICS

By ZEKE TESLER

While there may be more representation than ever, Congress still fails to reflect the diversity of the American populace by a noticeable margin.

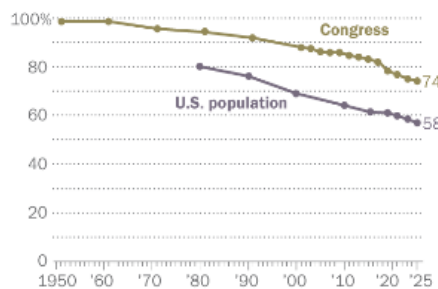
Proportionally, White Americans make up a larger share of Congress than of the U.S. population by 16 percentage points, and as the racial diversity of the U.S. continues to increase, it's uncertain that the racial makeup of Congress will change to match that reality.

Additionally, representation in congressional membership isn't everything.

In 2024, Dr. James R. Jones published a book called *The Last Plantation: Racism and Resistance in the Halls of Congress*, based in part on his three years serving as a congressional intern

### White Americans make up larger share of Congress than U.S. population

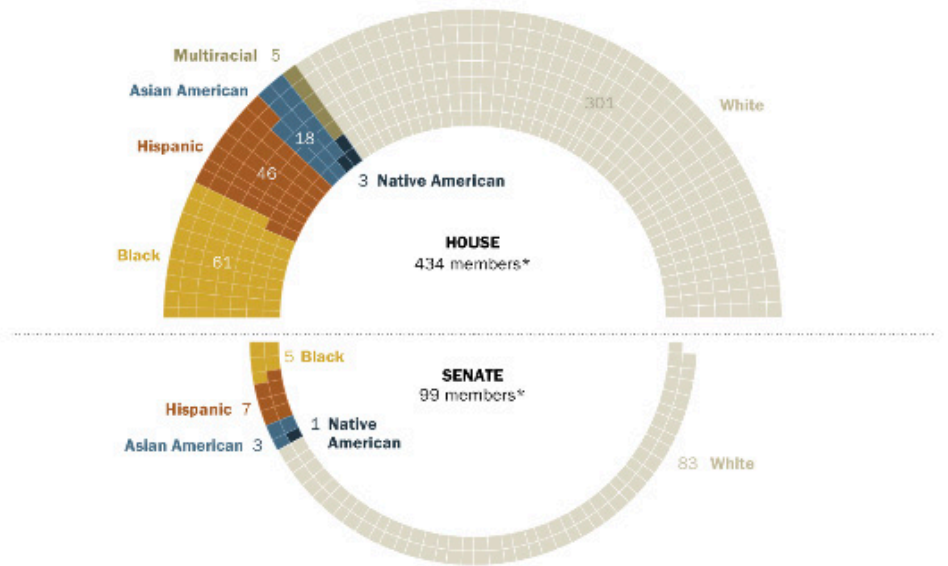
% of \_\_\_ who are White



Note: Congressional data excludes nonvoting delegates and commissioners. Figures for the 119th Congress reflect members seated as of Jan. 3, 2025. For 1980 and 1990 population figures, White Americans include only non-Hispanics. For 2000 and later, White Americans include only non-Hispanics who reported a single race. Source: Congressional Research Service, CQ Roll Call, Brookings Institution, Census Bureau population figures.

### In 119th Congress, U.S. House is more racially and ethnically diverse than Senate

Number of members of Congress who are ...



\* Excludes nonvoting delegates and commissioners. Figures reflect members seated as of Jan. 3, 2025.

Note: Categories are single-race only; Hispanics are of any race. There are no Alaska Native or Pacific Islander members in the 119th Congress. The five members who have more than one racial or ethnic identity are counted only once, as multiracial: Two are Black and Asian, and three are Black and Hispanic.

Source: Congressional Research Service, CQ Roll Call, Brookings Institution.

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in the early 2000s. His insight is damning—his experiences point out that many lawmakers, especially white ones, had exclusively white offices. Dr. Jones believes that “The unequal racial makeup of our congressional staff is one of the most important problems subverting our multiracial democracy,” and leads to a Congress that “operates as an inequality regime.” These are alarming claims when paired with the amount of policy that staffers directly shape. One of the big examples he points out is that even though federal anti-workplace discrimination legislation gained traction in the 1960s, Congress has historically been exempt from those laws, and not tracked or reported its hiring data. To change the con-

gressional workplace, and thus change how Congress operates internally, these data are crucial. Since publishing his findings, Senate Democrats have begun reporting data, but Republicans have not—it's an improvement, but a fundamentally incomplete one. Additionally, narrowing in on senior staffers, representation for people of color has increased only marginally in recent years, from 7 percent in 2015 to 11 in 2024.

Through interviewing primarily Black staffers, Jones unveils a picture of underrepresentation in a stifling and unchanging workplace—Congress still has a lot of internal work to do in increasing diversity to change that atmosphere.



# The Fieldston Political Journal

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## “BLEACH BLOND, BAD BUILT, BUTCH BODY”: A HISTORY OF INNER-CONGRESSIONAL RACIAL POLITICS

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By ZEKE TESLER

With the context of historical and contemporary Black existence in Congress, we return to Marjorie Taylor Greene and Jasmine Crockett in the House Oversight Committee. Greene's racist remark about Crockett's eyelashes and the subsequent response is surrounded by a plethora of similar situations that have taken place in Congress in the contemporary era.

In January of 2024, Representative Barbara Lee shared an anecdote during a CNN interview. When trying to enter the Capitol to vote, Representative Lee was stopped by a white man and asked “Whose pin did you steal?” in regards to the pin that denoted her as a member of Congress. That same year, Representative Greene “accidentally” referred to Somali Representative Ilhan Omar as “Representative Ilhan Omar of Somalia.” Representative Tony Nehls called the Black husband of Representative Cori Bush a “thug,” and said that the death threats Bush had received were because she was “so loud all the time.” During the TikTok hearing, Senator Tom Cotton repeatedly asked Singaporean TikTok CEO Shou Chew if he was Chinese or connected to the Chinese government, despite repeated reminders of his nationality.

These moments can be explosive or subtle, widely publicized or kept in secret—but no mat-

ter what, they are prevalent, recurrent, and concerning. They speak to the long history of racism and lack of representation in Congress and show how even if representation has improved, Congress still suffers from deeply entrenched racism that creates a hostile work environment for its non-white members.

While moments like the Crockett-Greene or Cotton-Chew exchanges may go viral and spawn thousands of hours of social media content, they cannot be taken as jokes. When the institution refuses to effectively reprimand its own for blatant racism, the problem is undeniably profound.

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## IS THE UNITED NATIONS STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

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By AARAV DALAL

Since its birth, in the midst of World War II, the United Nations has been at the forefront of discussing and addressing global challenges. As the world faces unprecedented health crises, climate change, geopolitical conflicts and mass displacements, the relevance of the UN in modern international relations continues to be a vital question. The UN's effectiveness in addressing global issues is evident through its recent initiatives and responses, which serve as case studies for evaluation.

The COVID-19 pandemic called for a global coordinated response. It highlighted the UN's fundamental role in managing international health emergen-

cies through research, coordination of efforts, and deployment. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) collaborated with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in strengthening healthcare facilities and developing logistical functions in vulnerable regions. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the UN drew lessons from past health crises such as Ebola, HIV and SARS. Further, the UN established the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund to support national health plans and essential services, which include vaccines and maternal health services. These actions underline the UN's capacity to direct resources towards crisis mitigation, showing its relevance in global health governance, and other global issues.

Climate change remains a pressing global issue. The UN plays a critical role in fostering international cooperation to mitigate its impacts. The integration of climate response with sustainable development goals (SDGs) has been a strategic focus since 2015. The UN's goal is to achieve at least 70% of the 17 SDG goals by 2030. The UN's efforts in hosting forums like the 2024 Adaptation Forum also emphasize its role in promoting sustainable development that addresses both climate resilience and achievements. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, The seventh Adaptation focused on the theme of “promoting solutions toward achieving the global goal on ad-

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aptation: opportunities for action and collaboration.” Participants reflected on needs, challenges and corresponding opportunities for action and collaboration across all four stages of the iterative adaptation cycle. This shows the organization’s adaptability to evolving global needs.

According to the European External Action Service, The UN’s peacekeeping mission and conflict resolution is where its relevance is most challenged today. In response to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, which was backed by 141 nations against only 5. Unfortunately, this resolution is not legally enforceable. Still, it moves public opinion and in turn, creates pressure on states to comply with majority international opinion. Therefore, the resolution highlights how the UN has the means to globally display public opinion, but it falls short in action. This result provokes many to question the UN’s efficacy in addressing these issues. If countries like Russia choose to ignore the opinion of a staggering majority of 141 to 5, and there’s no collective institution to hold it accountable, in essence, international anarchy reigns. Unfortunately, that has become the silent perception of many today.

The UN’s ability to coordinate a global response to COVID-19 is proof that it is able to mobilize help across the globe, yet its structure holds it back. Especially in matters of international law, the UN can display a landslide in international opinion, but lacks the enforcement mechanisms to truly act.

Therefore, the UN’s relevance and efficacy cannot be measured solely by its successes or failures in immediate conflict resolution or by the enforceability of its resolutions. Rather, it ought to be seen in its ability to uphold international cooperation and adapt its methodologies in the face of the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. It must address the criticism of inefficiency and ineffectiveness by altering its internal structures to increase its enforcement capabilities in such cases of unanimity. While the UN may seem like a relic of an older era, its fundamental role as a forum for international engagement remains indispensable. The objective today ought not to be questioning the United Nations’ relevance, but renewing its mission, ensuring that the UN remains a relevant symbol of international unity.

On International Cooperation and Crisis Management:

According to Mx. Amore, international cooperation remains of vital importance, even if it’s not always easy to achieve. They acknowledge that the UN’s work can be slow and impeded by bureaucracy or states holding dis-

proportionate power. Despite imperfections in the current system, they emphasize that response to climate change and other global crises affecting the world would only be possible with collaborative efforts.

On the limits of UN Enforceability:

Mx. Amore points out the global emphasis on state sovereignty. When the General Assembly passes a resolution, it carries symbolic influence and falls short of enforceability under international law, which is primarily due to states being selective of which laws to adopt within their own borders. While there are treaties that create certain legal obligations, those are only to states that have signed and ratified them. Mx Amore further points that pooled sovereignty has seen success in regional entities like the European Union, but such experiments have remained regional and have not been able to appear on a global scale.

On the UN’s Continued Relevance: Despite these challenges, Mx. Amore insists the UN remains relevant. They highlight the UN’s symbolic influence and power to shape public opinion and diplomatic outcomes. Therefore the UN is able to be an effective platform for dialogue and debate, consensus-building and global cooperation.





## THE GREEK RECOVERY: HOW PRIME MINISTER KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS BROUGHT AN ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL REVITALIZATION TO GREECE

By CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

Greece is a country largely known for its history, food, and natural beauty. It's a country with more than four millennia of continuous jam-packed history, from the era of the Minoans to now. Containing Athens, the birthplace of democracy and therefore the cradle of Western civilization itself, Greeks have made priceless contributions to the world of politics, philosophy, math, and more. In recent years, however, Greece has been in and out of global headlines thanks to a high degree of economic struggle and mismanagement.

In the late 2000s, a global financial crisis hit the entire world. Countries around the globe suffered massive job losses, business closures, and a host of other symptoms of economic failure. While almost every country was in some way affected by the crisis, Greece was hit particularly hard. Prior to the crisis, Greece, which had only recently joined the Eurozone (the currency union of European states that all use the Euro) in 2001, had been experiencing a period of plentiful economic growth. This growth, however, was largely supported by a great deal of debt that Greece had been taking on. Once the crisis hit, the debt problem quickly grew enormous; it was



Source: Politico

soon evident that Greece had borrowed far more money than it could bring in through tax revenue. In 2010, Greece made public the enormous deficit that it had been forced to adopt, and as a result, was removed from bond markets (markets where debt securities are traded), only making things worse. As the Greek economy spiraled out of control, it became clear that Greece would need emergency bailout loans (money loaned to Greece with interest) as a lifeline. So from 2010 to 2015, Greece took on €289 billion (\$330 billion) in loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union over the course of three packages. While this may have been necessary at the time, it came with a big cost.

In order to get these loans, the Greek government was required to put a number of major but much-needed austerity measures in place. These included cuts to public spending, higher taxes on the people, and lowered salaries

and pensions. This resulted in massive economic hardship for the Greek people, especially young people. At its peak, the overall unemployment rate in Greece was 27.5% while the unemployment rate for Greeks under 25 was a staggering 58%. Overall, the Greek economy contracted by about 25%. Unsurprisingly, the Greek population was quite dissatisfied with the state of things.

The economic failures and hardship led to problems in the political world, including contributing to the presence of extremist parties. In the May 2012 Greek Parliamentary elections, the Communist Party of Greece and the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party both achieved their all-time greatest electoral successes, gaining more than 500,000 votes (8.5%) and more than 400,000 votes (7%) respectively in a country of (at the time) 11 million people. Both parties gained more than 20 seats in the parliament of 300 seats and entered the European parliament.

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Clearly, things weren't going well economically or politically in Greece. In the 2015 election, a non-mainstream left-wing populist government was brought into power under the leadership of the SYRIZA party (Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance) and new prime minister Alexis Tsipras. Right-wing populist parties also saw success, and Golden Dawn was the third biggest party in parliament, further evidence of dissatisfaction with the existing Greek government.

As prime minister, Tsipras failed to deliver on his main promise of ending the austerity measures. He was forced to accept the third bailout, which disappointed his supporters. While unemployment fell to 19% during his leadership and Greece exited the bailout restrictions in 2018, Tsipras lost massive popularity and ultimately lost the 2019 election. It was in this election that Kyriakos Mitsotakis, leader of the center-right New Democracy party and son of former prime minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, would rise to the position of prime minister.

In the years since, this Harvard- and Stanford-educated prime minister has brought about tremendous change and success for Greece. Elected on a pro-growth platform in 2019, Kyriakos Mit-

sotakis has certainly delivered on his promises. His election proved that Greeks wanted to move past populism and onto more mainstream politics, and his tenure has shown that they made the right decision.

While in office, Mitsotakis drastically adjusted Greek economic policy. For one, he has reduced taxes. This has included bringing the corporate tax rate from 28% to 22%, the dividend tax rate from 10% to 5%, reducing the property tax, and more. By lowering taxes, the government allows citizens to take home more money which they can then spend, thereby stimulating business in the country. Increased capital may also allow businesses to increase the efficiency with which they produce goods and services. He has also reduced red tape and encouraged investment. Investment helps benefit growth by helping businesses increase their

capacity to produce the goods and services which they intend to provide. This, again, increases overall economic output. But Mitsotakis is not all Laissez-Faire, as he has also facilitated significant increases in the minimum wage and pensions. While this may hurt some businesses and could even potentially discourage them from opening in Greece, it also contributes to the overall take-home pay of workers and economic equality. So, while he promotes overall economic growth and decreased restrictions on the economy, he also wants to see increased economic equality and fairness for Greeks.

The changes instituted by Mitsotakis have led to major successes for Greece. Greece has gone from an economy that many worried might bring down the whole Eurozone to now being one of the fastest-growing economies on the continent.



Source: Greeka



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By stimulating growth in the Greek economy and allowing Greek citizens to hold on to more of their own money, Mitsotakis and New Democracy have changed the course of the country's history. Greek unemployment is at its lowest in a decade and is back in the single digits. In fact, the Greek government has even been paying back the loans it received ahead of schedule. Importantly, credit rating agencies have at this point increased their appraisals of the Greek economy, at long last enabling foreign investment to flow into the formerly starved economy. And a good deal has indeed flowed in. Multinational companies like Microsoft, Pfizer, JPMorgan, and more are investing in Greece, with, for example, Microsoft planning the construction of a \$1 billion data center outside Athens. All this is not to mention Greece's back-to-booming world-famous tourism and shipping industries. Thanks to the leadership of Mitsotakis, Greece was named The Economist's top economic performer of the year for 2022 and 2023 and the magazine's country of the year in 2023.

While this wouldn't have been possible without the bailouts and indeed the austerity measures, Kyriakos Mitsotakis deserves enormous credit for

bringing about this unprecedented Greek comeback. The Greek people recognize this. In the 2023 Greek election, Mitsotakis and the New Democracy party won an outright parliamentary majority, now holding 156 seats in a 300-member parliament. In terms of votes, this was the best electoral performance of any Greek incumbent in half a century. Unlike many countries with similar parliamentary systems, this means New Democracy does not need to form a coalition with more radical right-wing parties and can retain its moderate conservative identity. Furthermore, with Golden Dawn now entirely out of the Greek government, and SYRIZA replaced by the more moderate mainstream center-left PASOK party as the largest opposition party, the Greek political scene is looking far more stable. However, the Communist Party and not-quite-neo-Nazi far-right parties do hold a number of seats in parliament.

Outside of his economic policies, Mitsotakis is a strong leader. In terms of immigration, which is widely seen as the most controversial issue in European politics today, Mitsotakis takes a moderate conservative stance once again. Sitting as the bridge between the Middle East and Europe, Greece is in a unique position as far as the immigration crisis goes. Mitsotakis has supported and emphasized the importance of legal migration into Greece while working hard to stop the flow of illegal migration

into Greece and the European Union. Unlike many of his peers on the European right as well, Mitsotakis does not dehumanize migrants and understands their cause. Under his leadership, however, Greece has seen a number of (in some cases horrific) tragedies involving immigrants occur in or just outside its territorial waters; some of these situations even included death or migrants being turned away in potentially unsafe ships. These cases have garnered the Greek Coast Guard a great deal of criticism.

Internationally, Mitsotakis has been a strong supporter of the European Union and European cooperation and has aligned Greece firmly with its fellow Western partners. He has strongly supported Ukraine in its defense against the Russian invasion, even in spite of shared historical bonds between Greece and Russia. He has also met with Turkish leader Recep Erdogan numerous times in order to work towards resolving the longstanding differences between the two countries.

In order to learn more about Mitsotakis and his influence on everyday Greeks, I interviewed my grandfather, Kostis (Konstantinos) Svoronos. Svoronos is a retired lawyer who has lived in Greece his entire life. He has witnessed various Greek governments (including dictatorships) and has seen the country go through numerous tough and prosperous times alike.

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After decades of seeing Greece change, Svoronos told me that now, "I am living in the best period of my country since I can remember." He described in great detail how the situation for Greece has improved in recent years, providing tremendous praise for Prime Minister Mitsotakis and his leadership. He asserted that Mitsotakis "is doing everything possible to improve the daily problems of Greek citizens." Svoronos elaborated that the increased prosperity under Mitsotakis is not confined to economic issues. He mentioned the conditions of hospitals as yet another example of how Mitsotakis has helped the lives of Greek citizens. Although Greece has seen its press freedom rankings decline to subpar levels in recent years due to a number of factors, Svoronos' first-hand account as a Greek news enthusiast tells another story: he feels that television news has become increasingly objective in recent years, something he greatly values and attributes to Mitsotakis.

Svoronos also commended Mitsotakis's performance on the world stage. He mentioned the relative state of "calm" in which Greece and Turkey – age-old foes – are living at the moment, something that he feels will add to the perceived safety of Greece and increase tourism. He discussed how Mitsotakis

has "greatly improved" Greece's relations with the E.U. and U.S. as well, an important endeavor given the strain placed on E.U.-Greece relations in the midst of Greece's financial crisis.

Thanks to all of the progress made by Mitsotakis, Svoronos is optimistic about the future of Greece, though he has reservations. He feels that the threat of Communism to Greece is certainly no longer the greatest one as was the case in the past, though it remains present. Rather, he feels that the two biggest threats are Turkey and the rise of populism, including the right-wing populism that continues to exist in Greece, even as the Golden Dawn party is out of parliament. Nevertheless, Svoronos happily said that he now feels that "Greece is slowly becoming a truly European country."

And this is true. While Greece's economic crisis may have helped the country and its people to feel isolated from the rest of Europe, its recent successes have undone that phenomenon. It is now a relatively economically stable country like its continental peers. The future is bright for Greece, and Kyriakos Mitsotakis deserves much of the credit for that. While threats remain present for Greece, among them a declining population, Greece has plenty to celebrate.



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## THREADS OF POWER: THE ROLE OF FASHION IN POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

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By ZAUDITU SAUNDERS

Fashion is more than about just looking good; it is a powerful way for people to express themselves. Throughout history, fashion has been used as a tool in politics, helping to shape public opinion and influence society.



TLC with Dr. Dre. Source: Facebook

Throughout history, fashion has not only reflected societal values, but has also acted as a form of political resistance and a tool for protest. In the ancient and medieval worlds, clothing signified your class, trade, social status, religious or regional affiliation. Clothing was part of a caste system that let the world know who owned you and reminded you of your place in that world. Clothing was hierarchical and patriarchal. The use of fashion as a political statement against the weight of tradition and authority can be traced back to the French



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Revolution in 1789 when red, white and blue, borrowed from the American Revolution, became a powerful symbol of solidarity with the rebellious Third Estate and the Revolution. It was shorthand for “liberty, equality and fraternity” as well as “the republic.” People stopped being peasants and subjects, they’d become “Citizens.” Those who wore the cockades, a type of decorative ribbon, signified their support for the movement, while those who chose not to wear them were seen as enemies of the Revolution and threatened with the guillotine. Wearing a certain style of clothing became a way of saying, “I’m with you!” as well as “I’m not going to stand for the way things are.” The privileges of the aristocratic wig and legging gave way to the democratized tradesman’s suits, ties and coveralls.

In the same way, conquered people lost their traditional garb and identity. The Indigenous rights movements have reclaimed some of those stolen identities through the resurgence of Indigenous, native or pre-colonial designs. The parliamentary salt and pepper suits of Great Britain would eventually yield to the “Nehru” designs of independent India.

Resistance in fashion is about using style and clothing as a powerful tool to push back against



Source: Rodama

societal pressures - be they cultural, political, economic, or environmental. It's about making statements that challenge, liberate, or bring attention to issues at hand, often acting as a form of protest or defiance against dominant norms, political systems, or oppressive structures. This has been evident throughout history, especially in movements such as the women's suffrage movement, where fashion became a key form of political resistance.

During the 1920s in the United States, fashion played an important role in the Women's Suffrage Movement. The suffragists, primarily white women fighting for the right to vote, chose white bloomers as a symbol of resistance and unity. However, Black women were excluded from this symbolism. Many Black women had been forced to wear pants during slavery, so for them, the white pants did not carry the same empowering meaning. Later on, white dresses — and eventually the color white itself — became a political symbol for



the Women's Suffrage Movement and a representation of solidarity between women across racial divides. The suffragists, primarily from middle-class backgrounds, used fashion to express respectability, as the era's cultural ideals often tied a woman's worth and morals to her outward appearance. By choosing white dresses, they were not just advocating for the right to vote but also to counter anti-suffrage accusations that women who sought the right to vote were morally corrupt. White signaled their alignment with middle-class values of decorum, purity, and respectability.



Source: National Geographic



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However this emphasis on respectability did not extend to all women equally. While white suffragists used clothing to project an image of dignity, Black women in the movement—such as Ida B. Wells, who fought for both women's suffrage and racial justice—were often forced to navigate the complexities of race and class in ways their white counterparts did not. For Black women, clothing could be both a form of resistance and survival. They had long understood how fashion could communicate their social status, but they also had to navigate pervasive racial stereotypes that worked against them. Their clothing choices were for that reason more careful, often carrying layers of meaning related to both their racial identity and their activism.

This shift in symbolism, from bloomers to white dresses, also signified a shift from the “traditional women” to the “new woman” of the early 20th century. The “new women” were characterized by increased independence and more comfortable clothing. The change from corsets and heavy layers to shorter skirts, shorter hair, and looser garments marked a break from traditional women, from the idealized Victorian view of womanhood that had been confined to the home. The new woman was politically engaged, active in the workforce, and participated in



social, political, and cultural shifts of the time. Overall there was a tension between the desire for empowerment and freedom and the continued pressure of social expectations that women faced, especially in terms of how they were seen in the public sphere. For the new women, clothing became a tool of self-expression and political power. However, it still had to be carefully manipulated in order to fit into social standards, and not be too oppositional. Fashion, particularly in political movements, can hold vastly different meanings depending on one's background.

The 1920s, known as the Jazz Age, marked a period of rebellion against traditional norms, particularly in fashion, music, and social behavior. The “flapper” style, known for its short skirts, bobbed hair, and more free silhouettes, symbolized women's growing independence and rejection of modesty culture. Jazz emerged among African American communities: it was deeply rooted in Black musical traditions. As it gained popularity among white audiences, some saw this as a threat to established cultur-

al norms and color lines. So for that reason especially, participating in this type of fashion was a form of political resistance. This era was significantly influenced by Black women's fashion, which celebrated vibrant styles, intricate beadwork, and expressive dance movements rooted in the Harlem Renaissance. Black Jazz musicians and dancers, such as Josephine Baker, not only redefined entertainment but also introduced aesthetics that flappers emulated, from fringed dresses that enhanced movement to bold accessories that embodied the spirit of modernity. Baker's performances, especially her “Danse sauvage” in a banana skirt, challenged conventional notions of race and gender, leaving a lasting impact on fashion and culture. Additionally, the accessibility of ready-to-wear clothing and department stores allowed fashion trends to spread rapidly across racial and socioeconomic lines. Historians argue that this era represented both a cultural revolution and a form of appropriation, as mainstream society often overlooked the contributions of Black designers and artists while adopting their styles. The Jazz Age shows both progress and tensions and women of all backgrounds challenged societal expectations through self-expression and style.

Fashion as a symbol of political resistance can also be seen throughout the 20th century. During the Great Depression, class divides became starkly visible through the

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fashion of the wealthy versus the poor. During this time period, the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer, so while the elite wore increasingly extravagant garments, the working class was forced to get creative. Women made clothes for their families out of food sacks and repurposed fabric to suit their needs. This fashion became a visual representation of the economic disparity between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Photographers like Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bouke-White, and Walker Evans documented this era, capturing images of torn, second-hand, and faded clothing that starkly represented the class divide. Additionally, the emergence of women wearing uniforms and coveralls indicated new roles in the workforce, challenging traditional gender norms and expanding avenues for women's participation in society.

During World War II, women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, taking on roles that were traditionally occupied by men. As women took on these positions, their clothing adapted accordingly. They began wearing what had once been considered men's attire — pants, overalls, suits, and workwear — as they performed jobs essential to the war effort. Initially, their transition into the workforce was met with resistance, but this shift in women's fashion sym-



bolized a broader transformation within society. During this period, clothing also became a symbol of patriotism, with many garments featuring the colors of the American flag — red, white and blue.



The Zoot Suit. Source: Myles Anthony

One of the most iconic fashion statements of this era was the Zoot suit, which became popular amongst Black Americans and other communities of color during the Harlem Renaissance. The oversized, extraverted suit, made from wool, became a symbol of rebellion against white middle-class values and racism. However, as the war effort began to intensify, the Zoot suit was condemned by the U.S. government as wasteful. Eventually, this clash between the U.S. government and young people of

color wearing these clothes led to the Zoot Suit riots in Los Angeles, which targeted Mexican American youth. As a result, the Zoot Suit became a lasting symbol of non-conformity and resistance against racial and political oppression.

The 1950s ushered in a return to traditional gender roles in the aftermath of World War II, as fashion began to reflect a backward shift to a more patriarchal and polished ideal. The rise of the polished housewife aesthetic, backed by many popular brands like Dior, reinforced the cultural narrative in America that women were expected to embrace modesty and subservience. However, this didn't last long, as the 1960s brought a revolutionary change — protest fashion. The Civil Rights Movement and the fight for racial justice inspired Black Americans to wear their “Sunday Best,” a reference to what Black communities wore to church and protests. These outfits, inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., were chosen to show that Black Americans deserved dignity and respect, serving as a form of political protest to assert Black communities' demand for equality and human rights in the face of systematic racism.



Source: Dior



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## THREADS OF POWER: THE ROLE OF FASHION IN POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

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The 1960s saw fashion as an increasingly powerful tool of protest. Here there were times when others deliberately dressed in more “humble” practical attire. Students, particularly young Black Americans and others who wanted to demonstrate solidarity—showing unity and support for the collective struggle for civil rights—adopted denim overalls as a uniform of rebellion in their fight for justice. This “humble” garment became a symbol of resistance, as well as an emblem of defiance against a society that relegated them to second-class status.

On a global scale, coming out of the aftermath of World War II, the black beret became a symbol of resistance, originally worn by the French resistance, became adopted by intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and later spread to American college campuses in the late 1950s. The beret, along with the Black turtleneck, became strongly associated with existentialism and growing counterculture movements in the United States, including the Beats. This then evolved into the fashion of the 1960s when younger people began to curate their styles to their growing resistance to mainstream norms. The colorful, splashy psychedelic, androgynous fashion of the era was a rejection of the restrained uniform appearance of

earlier decades. The visual language of the time was over the top—bright patterns, bold, flowing fabrics was defiance in itself. It wasn't just about aesthetics—it was a declaration of freedom and individuality in the face of oppressive societal structures.



Source: Vintage Dancer

The Black Panther Party, which emerged in the 1960s, used fashion as a powerful symbol of resistance. The Party's members donned black leather jackets, berets and sunglasses — clothes that were both practical and symbolic. These garments represented defiance against white supremacy and police brutality. The Black Panthers' style was also designed to challenge the idea that Black people should conform to white standards. The leather jackets, often worn for practical reasons, symbolized strength and resilience. The berets, reminiscent of the French Resistance during World War II, further emphasized their stance against authority and oppression.



The 1970s brought more dramatic changes in women's fashion as the women's liberation movement gained momentum. Feminists rejected traditional, restrictive clothing, embracing comfort and freedom through styles like tube tops and braless outfits. Radical feminists used fashion to break free from societal expectations, and queer women played an important role in pushing these boundaries. For example, the term “Lavender Menace” was coined by Betty Friedan, an early leader of the women's movement, who referred to lesbians as a threat to the movement. In response, a group of queer women created and wore Lavender Menace shirts when presenting proposals that aimed to carve space for themselves within feminist movements.



Source: Isabella Josie

The 1980s saw a shift in how women presented themselves in the workplace. Power dressing, specifically known for its shoulder-padded suit jacket, symbolized women's growing independence and desire to be seen as equals in the corporate world. Fashion became a reflection of women's financial autonomy,

## THREADS OF POWER: THE ROLE OF FASHION IN POLITICAL EXPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

By SAUDITU SAUNDERS

signaling their entry into the male-dominated workforce. Meanwhile, hip-hop culture was emerging in the South Bronx. No matter how successful hip-hop artists got, they would still wear “street clothes” from designers who represented the working class, using clothing to challenge the elitist fashion world. Other artists, most notably Dapper Dan, made streetwear into high fashion, challenging narratives about streetwear as a whole. These narratives often portrayed streetwear as inferior or unrefined, something that couldn’t be associated with high-end fashion. By blending luxury materials with bold, urban designs, Dapper Dan not only elevated streetwear but also redefined what luxury could represent, creating a space for self-expression, identity, and cultural significance in the fashion world.

At the time, homosexuality was illegal in 49 states, which stayed true until 2003. Being openly queer was dangerous. To stay safe, rules such as the “three article rule” were invented. The rule stated that one should wear three articles of clothing that allied with their sex assigned at birth. One of the main ways queer people were “caught” for being queer was by dressing in a way that didn’t conform to standards. Ironically, queer people are still targeted in the same way every way. Many individ-

uals wanted to share that they were queer in less obvious ways to avoid discrimination, so subtle messaging was adopted, including ear piercings, Doc Martens and the white vest.

The AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 90s served as a political tool that also had an important impact on fashion. The red ribbon, which was worn in solidarity with those affected by the epidemic, became a symbol of both activism and compassion.



Source: CNN

The 90s also saw the rise of punk fashion. Punk’s DIY spirit manifested itself in spiky hair, torn clothing and graphic tees, which embodied the anti-capitalist, anti-establishment ideals that defined the movement.

After 9/11, fashion began to reflect a heightened sense of nationalism. Wearing the American flag took on a new meaning. However, this period also saw an increase in discrimination, particularly against South Asian and Arab communities. Hijabi women especially faced unique challenges during this time, illustrating how what one wears can make them a target for the current political climate.

More recent moments have used fashion as a means of protest. The 2017 women’s march saw thousands wearing pink beanies. The 2018 Golden Globes showcased the “Me Too” moment on television for the first time, with many celebrities wearing black attire in alliance with victims of sexual assault. The COVID-19 pandemic further politicized fashion, with masks becoming a symbol of ideological division. Those who chose not to mask ended up associating themselves with certain political groups, even without the intention of doing so.

Public figures and everyday individuals use clothing to communicate their values, as seen when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez otherwise known as AOC wore a “Tax the Rich” dress at the Met Gala in 2021, or similarly when Kamala Harris wore a white pantsuit during her vice presidential victory speech — an outfit that she stated aimed to honor suffragists as well as Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress and a trailblazer for women of color in politics.

In 2018, Debra Haaland, the first Native American woman elected to Congress, wore a traditional Pueblo dress, necklace and boots, demonstrating her cultural pride. Marilyn Stickland, one of the first Korean-American congresswomen, wore a traditional Hanbok for her oath of office in 2020. Ilhan Omar made history in 2019 by being the first to wear a hijab in Congress.



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Debra Haaland. Source: NBC News

Social media also personalizes fashion trends based on user interests and political beliefs. For instance, TikTok links fashion to different political movements, from conservatism to punk. This is true for your own identity too. If you've ever heard of a "side" of TikTok, you know it's a very real thing. A side of TikTok refers to the way specific communities on the platform form around shared interests, values, or identities, creating spaces where people can express themselves freely without fear of criticism or judgment from outsiders. These "sides" offer a sense of belonging and support, allowing individuals to connect with like-minded people who understand and appreciate their views, fostering the perfect environment for personal expression and growth. Popular culture also plays a big role. Entertainers like Chappell Roan use fashion to make political statements. At the Grammys, she wore a Jean Paul Gaultier outfit inspired by the renowned French artist Edgar Degas' paintings of ballerinas. Poor ballerinas — such as the ones depicted in Degas' paintings — were often reliant on wealthy old patrons to survive. Roan's outfit was likely meant to symbolize the contin-

ued struggles faced by creatives and draw attention to exploitation in the music industry. She later addressed this issue during her Grammy acceptance speech, highlighting the ongoing challenges artists face today.



Olso Grace. Source: Vintage Dancer

The increasing visibility of non-binary and trans individuals further demonstrates the role of fashion in political expression. The act of dressing outside of societal expectations and being yourself in the face of adversity is an act of political rebellion. Transgender people face the constant tension of navigating a world where their gender identity is up for political debate. This creates a dynamic where their clothing choices are often inherently political, whether they are conforming to or rejecting societal norms.

Clothing styles of the Trump era. The "trad wife" look and the "old money" aesthetic, rather than being a celebration of tradition seem to reflect a longing for an idealized past that may never have truly existed. With their focus on modesty, and looks that mirror what was popular in the 1950s, these styles embodied a narrative of traditional family values and a desire to "Make

America Great again" but they did so by painting a distorted and often reductive vision of domestic life, one that hinged on rigid gender roles and a hierarchical social order that I would argue is out of touch with the realities of modern life. The "trad wife" aesthetic, in particular, played into antiquated ideals of femininity, presenting women as devoted homemakers, reinforcing the belief that their worth should be tied to domestic figures like Nara Smith and Ballerina Farm promoted as a wholesome, rural lifestyle that seemed to push back against the fast-paced, urban world. However, this aesthetic pushed a sanitized escape from the pressures of modernity, a nostalgic refuge that in reality masked the real often difficult, economic and social conditions many Americans faced. In stark contrast to the "girl boss" era that encouraged women to break through corporate ceilings, Trump-era fashion symbolized a retreat from empowerment, opting instead for a vision of stability rooted in the idea that the past was in fact stable. This longing for "old money" status and security only highlighted the growing dissonance between aspiration and reality. While many Americans live paycheck to paycheck, the desire to look affluent became a form of cultural escapism—a way to project a sense of wealth and privilege that was, for most, unattainable. At the end of the day the fashion of the Trump era was less about clothing and more about signaling a political and cultural identity. It served as a reflection of the tensions with a nation trying to reconcile its past with its present, its ideals with its realities.





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