

Seeing Red: Our Ancient Relationship With Ocher And The Color of Cognition

05-03-2024 ~ *Extensive ocher use reflects the culture and cognitive abilities of early humans, who inherited an affinity for red from primate ancestors.*



Twenty-three million years ago, our distant ancestors gained trichromatic color vision through means of a random genetic mutation. Trichromatic color vision and trichromacy refer to the ability to perceive color through three receptors in the eye, known as cones, which are sensitive to different wavelengths of visible light. It has been [assumed](#) that primates ancestral to humans had two cones at the start of their lineage; the duplication and modification of genes coding for one of the two created another distinct, separate cone. Gaining a third cone allowed for the perception of red and other colors with long wavelengths in addition to the two preexisting receptors for blues and greens with shorter wavelengths—red was entirely unknown to primate species before this mutation, and the ability to see red remains rare among other mammals. Exceptions to mammalian dichromacy, the state of having two cones, are uncommon. Some primates lost one of their cone receptors, becoming monochromats. Having a single cone, monochromats like the nocturnal owl monkeys (genus *Aotus*) perceive light intensity in shades of gray without the ability to differentiate color values. Others, including the ancestors of modern apes, monkeys, and humans, happened to gain a third cone.

Michael H. Rowe, professor emeritus of neuroscience at Ohio University, confirms that random processes were involved in the evolution of primate trichromacy in his [study](#) of the underlying neurophysiological mechanisms, and outlines the two dominant theories for the maintenance of a third cone among primates. One

longstanding theory is that of enhanced fruit detection among diurnal primates, who are most active during the daytime. According to this theory, improved discernment of red fruits against green foliage led to a direct increase in efficiency when foraging for nutritious food. The second theory, however, suggests it was the consumption of leaves rather than fruit that more strongly influenced routine trichromacy. This alternate [“young leaf” hypothesis](#) emphasizes the importance of enhanced color vision when selecting nutritious leaves over their less beneficial counterparts, especially at times when fruit is scarce and surviving off of leaf consumption becomes critical. Rowe’s findings and the newer “young leaf” theory also align with the later evolution of [trichromatic vision in the howler monkey](#), a New World primate.

New World primates like the howler monkey and Old World primates, which include humans and apes, are two major groups within the order Primates that differ in anatomical features and geographic distribution. Since their last common ancestor did not have trichromatic vision, the trait evolved in both Old and certain New World species through convergent evolution. This occurs when similar traits evolve among distantly related species, usually due to similar environmental pressures and advantages to the trait.

Further down the evolutionary timeline, rocks and minerals became the cornerstones of technological advancement among hominins. Within the range of widely accessible raw materials, one pigment stands out with its broad spectrum of color: ocher. Ocher varies in shade depending on its [chemical and structural composition](#), appearing from light yellows and rusty browns to deep red-purple hues. Red ocher, for example, gains its color from an abundance of an iron oxide called hematite.

Known evidence for processing and crushing ocher pieces by early humans in Africa dates as far back as the Early Stone Age. In a 2022 [article](#) published by the Journal of World Prehistory, researchers Rimtautas Dapschauskas and his co-authors compared the frequency of ocher use over time between over 100 African archaeological sites. They found that ocher, particularly of the hematite-rich variety, grew in geographical distribution and frequency of use from 500,000 y.a. (years ago) and became part of the cultural behaviors habitual to site inhabitants as early as 160,000 y.a. Over a third of sites included in this study that were used at or after this date contained various forms of the material. Notable ocher finds from Early to Late Stone Age African sites include two intentionally shaped pieces

of red ocher from 307,000 y.a. at the [Olorgesailie basin](#) in Kenya, as well as a [workshop at Blombos Cave](#), South Africa, for processing ocher 75,000-100,000 y.a. Several of the Blombos Cave specimens display patterns of wear suggesting their use on hard surfaces in the same manner one would use a crayon today.

Ocher pervaded early human history, with many instances of use appearing throughout the archaeological record in accompaniment to technological/utilitarian developments and ritualistic behavior. A few utilitarian applications of ocher include its use in [hide-processing](#), as a skin protectant to guard against [mosquitos](#) and [excessive sun exposure](#), and in compound [adhesives for tool making](#). The latter is considered to be one of the best pieces of evidence for advanced cognitive abilities in early humans.

Processing ocher is not unique to *Homo sapiens*, either, and was a practice shared by other members of the *Homo* genus. A [2024 study](#) conducted by scientists Patrick Schmidt, Radu Iovita, and their colleagues investigates the use of ocher-based compound adhesives for Middle Paleolithic cutting and scraping tools crafted by Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) at Mousterian rock shelters in France. The researchers found that the adhesive's ratio of ocher to bitumen was optimal and exact—bitumen loses adhesive properties when mixed with ocher, but the ratio used by Neanderthals creates a mass malleable enough to be formed yet sticky enough to adhere stone tools to handles. The glue's formula is presumed to be a result of experimentation and costly investments of time and labor, akin to the behaviors and thought patterns of early *Homo sapiens* in Africa.

Past ritual applications are evident through the intentional selection of ocher based on color. Despite the prevalence of other pigments such as yellow ocher or black manganese in local landscapes, the [disproportionate abundance](#) of processed red ocher in large artifact assemblages points to a strong preference for saturated red hues over any other pigment color. Having no obvious instrumental value and inexplicable from a utilitarian perspective, the prolonged repetition of color-driven ocher collection exemplifies [ritual behavior](#). Burial decoration was another ritual application of ocher. The deliberate burial of human remains appears in many well-established cases from the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods throughout Europe and Asia. Burials often imply respect for the individual and adornment of the grave or deceased individual was sometimes used to honor the person's social status or to enhance their appearance.

Lawrence G. Straus and his collaborators describe a burial of “the Red Lady of El Mirón” in their 2015 *Journal of Archaeological Science* [article](#). The “Red Lady,” found in a cave in northern Spain, gained her name from an abundance of red ocher that coats her remains in a bright red hue. Those who buried her used a form of ocher not found in local sources, suggesting it may have been collected elsewhere for special burial rites or preservative use. Another example is a [discovery made at Sungir](#), northeast of Moscow, Russia, where a man and two young children were buried 27,000 years ago. Their grave contained objects including mammoth ivory spears, a variety of ornamental jewelry, and thousands of ivory beads. The burial was covered entirely in red ocher.

Researchers have suggested that the initial catalyst for ocher use may have been its colorful and aesthetic appeal, only later followed by practical applications. With this in mind, it is no surprise that ocher is one of the earliest natural pigments used for artistic expression, including bodily adornment and cave paintings. Two of the oldest known cave paintings are hand stencils in the Cave of Maltravieso of west-central Spain and painted stalactites, mineral formations that hang from cave ceilings, in the Ardales cave of northern Spain. The red pigment decorating these caves has been [dated through uranium-thorium](#) testing methods to at least 66,700 and 65,500 years ago, respectively. Today, artists primarily use a synthetic version of red ocher invented in the 18th century. Still, they carry on a very ancient legacy of using this pigment—to create meaningful symbols in meaningful places.

Red ocher has been heavily featured by people across time and continents compared to its undersaturated counterparts, and the color red continues to hold special significance on a global scale. In many East Asian cultures, red represents good fortune and is featured heavily during celebrations. In some Native American communities, red denotes courage and spiritual strength, while other groups associate life, vigor, passion, revolution, and other powerful concepts with the color. The power ascribed to red is also heavily reflected in language—different cultures group the visible light spectrum into categories of different sizes and names. However, an overwhelming majority have a designated word for red no matter how they differentiate between the rest of the rainbow.

Modern people with normal color vision may take the ability for granted, but the capacity to identify shades of red in natural settings served as a significant advantage for our diurnal primate ancestors in terms of survivability and

evolutionary fitness. Whether color vision was upheld by the consumption of fruit, foliage, or a combination of both, a new array of visual cues meant new survival strategies and perceptions of the world. In this regard, trichromacy, an accidental evolutionary milestone, paved the way for the widespread cultural gravitation of people toward red and red ocher long before anatomically modern humans existed themselves.

Although past interpretations of ocher have been complicated by its duality in symbolic and practical uses, special attention toward the mineral grows alongside the number of excavated finds. Current research initiatives increasingly recognize the value of the material as a reflection and potential driving force of cognitive and cultural evolution in early humans.

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PVV Blog 7 ~ Remembrance Day 2024



05-03-2024 ~The Netherlands commemorates the victims of the Second World War annually on May 4th. This remembrance takes place through a ceremony held at the central square 'de Dam' in Amsterdam.

During the yearly Remembrance Day event, wreaths are laid at the monument by the chairpersons of the Senate and House of Representatives. This year, Martin Bosma, a member of the Party for Freedom, will lay the wreath on behalf of the

House of Representatives. In 2023, Bosma was democratically elected as the chairman of the House of Representatives, representing the ideological stance of the Party for Freedom. Throughout this series, I heavily draw upon his book *'De schijn-élite van de valse munters. Drees, extreem rechts, de sixties, nuttige idioten, Groep Wilders en ik'* published in 2010. Below, I provide an analysis of several quotes from Bosma's book, followed by commentary on these quotes.

Quotes about Christianity

'There are few things the Dutch can be happier with than the Christian background of their country. Almost all of our crucial achievements have a relationship with Christianity. Democracy, separation of church and state, tolerance, but also values such as diligence and efficiency' (p. 94).

'Monoculturalism, supplemented with Christian-Western values such as diligence, discipline, honesty and efficiency, created an unparalleled high point in human history' (p. 188).

Quotes about Islam

'Islam brings us mutual distrust, certainly not multicultural enrichment' (p. 321).

'Maybe individual Muslims adapt here and there, but Islam cannot do that' (p. 304).

'The dominant factor that determines whether Sharia is introduced in the Netherlands is not so much the ummah (the international Islamic community) but it is the powerful left-wing church with its crucial positions of power' (p. 148).

'The limits of what you say in the Netherlands are no longer determined by democratically established laws, but by the assessment of whether by saying it you run the risk of being ritually slaughtered on a public road' (p. 130).

'In the long term, there is a huge possibility of the introduction of Sharia in (parts of) the Netherlands. In the medium term, the subject of Islamization will have a paralyzing effect on the political system' (p. 119)

Quotes about left-wing parties and multiculturalism

'As a result of the Sixties revolution, multiculturalism has become our national state ideology' (p. 320).

'The multicultural society is the result of an erosion of democracy' (p. 119).

‘Somewhere an immigration flow reaches a tipping point. Then it is not the immigrants who are adapted to the host country, but the host country is adapted to the immigrant (p. 141).

‘The war is a war about who is in charge on the left’ (p. 251), (i.e. Hitler’s National Socialists or Stalin’s Communists, JJdR).

‘Almost all multicultural states have disintegrated after a lot of misery’ (p. 188).

Bosma also quotes Adolf Hitler: ‘How can you be a socialist without being an anti-Semite?’ (p. 256).

‘Genocide as a policy instrument already appears at the origins of socialism’ (p. 258).

Quotes about Jews and Israel

‘Israel has become the symbol of our freedom and the desire to continue that freedom.’

‘The flag of Israel is therefore the flag of all free people.’

‘The country is a barometer of our future’ (p.275).

‘If the armies of Hamas and Hezbollah march through the streets of Tel Aviv, Amsterdam and Paris will be hopelessly lost’ (p. 275).

Other quotes

“Democracies rarely go to war, and certainly not with other democracies” (p. 188).

‘A hundred years from now, people will remember Geert Wilders (leader Party for Freedom) as someone who had the moral clarity to tell the truth that needed to be told’

Remembrance Day 2024

As a representative of the Dutch state, Martin Bosma stands on May 4th at Dam Square in Amsterdam, espousing the views expressed above. He contends that Christianity has played a significant role in shaping our democratic accomplishments.

He advocates for a monocultural society as a path to salvation, asserting that

Islam only leads to suffering and distrust. He attributes the blame for the Second World War to leftist ideologies, associating them with anti-Semitism and genocide, while regarding Israel as a bastion of freedom.

However, Bosma's perspective overlooks the contributions of the French Revolution to our democratic ideals, which emerged independently of Christianity. It also disregards the existence of successful multicultural societies that remain resilient.

Additionally, he fails to recognize that diversity can foster empathy and mutual support. Furthermore, Bosma neglects to acknowledge the persecution endured by social democrats in Nazi Germany.

Looking at the present moment, it's evident that some of Bosma's quotes have become outdated. The surge of anti-Islam rhetoric in the Netherlands and Western Europe, largely fueled by populist parties like the Party for Freedom, has effectively discredited the notion of 'multiculturalism' as a state-endorsed ideology, assuming it ever held such a status. Additionally, the once formidable left-wing influence has significantly waned.

In the context of international affairs, accusations abound regarding the current Israeli government's alleged genocidal actions in Gaza. Prior to October 7th, attempts to stifle the Israeli Supreme Court added to the mounting concerns. The perception of the Israeli flag as a symbol of freedom has undergone a transformation, evident in the stark divide between perspectives within Israel itself and those in Gaza and the West Bank.

Furthermore, it's worth pondering the assertion that democracies seldom engage in warfare. The historical trajectory of post-World War II America, marked by military interventions in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, challenges this notion.

Reflecting on the relevance of Martin Bosma's statements from a book published thirteen years ago, one might question the validity of using them as a cudgel.

However, the absence of any retractions from Bosma over the intervening years raises concerns. Coupled with the recent impassioned rhetoric of his party leader, Geert Wilders, at the [Hungarian CPAC event](#), it seems prudent to remind the public that the individual solemnly laying wreaths at Dam Square on May 4th represents an ideology with potential implications for inciting conflict.

Singapore: Lawrence Wong To Lead Amid Economic And Political Challenges



*Geography of Singapore -
en.wikipedia.org*

05-03-2024 ~ Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong is set to become Singapore's next leader on May 15, succeeding Lee Hsien Loong. His leadership will be closely watched as he takes the helm.

Singapore has announced that Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong will take over as the country's next leader on May 15. Wong, 51, has garnered unanimous support from lawmakers within the People's Action Party (PAP). He will succeed Lee Hsien Loong, who has held the top job for 20 years.

Wong, who earned praise for his management of the island's pandemic response, has been regarded as Lee's successor since April 2022. During this time, the ruling party selected him to lead the "4G" or fourth generation of leaders in Singapore's political parlance—politicians the party aimed to have govern the country in the future.

Before that, Heng Swee Keat, a former central bank chief and education minister and choice for the post of Prime Minister, suddenly stepped aside in 2021, throwing the party's succession plans into disarray.

The term "generation" suggests a significant transition rather than a complete overhaul of cabinets, as some ministers served under more than one prime minister. The first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, led the first generation of leadership from 1965 until 1990. He was succeeded by Goh Chok Tong, who held the premiership for the following 14 years until 2004 when Lee Hsien Loong assumed leadership.

Wong began his political career in 2011 and has since held various ministerial positions, including defense, education, finance, and national development. Following his successful leadership during Singapore's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Wong was selected by his fellow cabinet ministers in early 2022 as a leader of the next generation through a selection process that excluded Lee and other senior ministers. Shortly thereafter, Lee appointed him as Deputy Prime Minister.

Singapore adheres to a parliamentary system, where general elections are conducted once every five years. Since gaining independence, Singapore has been characterized by a one-party dominant state led by the ruling PAP. Despite this, the opposition led by the Workers' Party has made notable strides, securing seats and now overseeing two group representation constituencies, marking a substantial breakthrough in the electoral landscape.

Lawrence Wong confronts numerous challenges as he readies to assume office on May 15. Singapore is grappling with significant concerns regarding the escalating cost of living. The ruling party has also been shaken by a corruption scandal.

In February 2024, Singapore's core inflation, which excludes private transport and accommodation costs to better reflect household expenses, surged to 3.6 percent year-on-year. This marked a significant uptick from January's rate of 3.1 percent and surpassed market expectations of a 3.4 percent increase. It represented the highest reading for core inflation since July 2023.

The acceleration in inflation was primarily driven by elevated services and food inflation, partly attributed to seasonal effects linked to the Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year or the Spring Festival, stands

as one of the most significant and widely celebrated holidays in Singapore. During this period, there is typically an increase in consumer spending, leading to price hikes.

This year, overall inflation also rose to [3.4 percent](#) in February from 2.9 percent in January.

The ruling party has also encountered an uncommon setback in recent years, which has tarnished its renowned clean image. This was an indictment on corruption charges of then-senior minister, S. Iswaran. He faces 35 charges (and more pending) linked to bribery and corruption. The prosecution alleges that he accepted various gifts from a Malaysian tycoon and developer, as well as from another contractor.

Singapore's record on freedom of speech has been a subject of considerable concern. The 2021 People Power under Attack report by CIVICUS Monitor highlighted a decline in the country's civic space rating from "obstructed" to "repressed." This shift underscores a recurring pattern of infringements on civic rights, especially concerning freedom of speech. Throughout 2021, Singapore utilized restrictive laws such as the Public Order Act, the 2017 Administration of Justice (Protection) Act, the Protection Against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), and defamation laws to target human rights advocates, journalists, and critics.

A significant event occurred when the government applied legal pressure on independent news platforms. In September, the police gave a "serious warning" to [New Naratif and its managing editor](#), Thum Ping Tjin, for publishing unauthorized electoral advertisements in 2020. Furthermore, in October, the national media regulator canceled the license of the Online Citizen after the platform allegedly refused to reveal its sources of funding.

The introduction of the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act further threatened freedom of expression, allegedly in the name of preserving national sovereignty. These actions, ostensibly taken to uphold order and protect national interests, have raised substantial concerns about the diminishing of civil liberties and the silencing of dissent in Singapore.

But most importantly Singapore, once adept at harmonizing its economic ties with China alongside its security partnerships with the United States, now faces

mounting difficulty in upholding this equilibrium, especially compared to the initial years of Lee's premiership. The burgeoning economic sway of China in the vicinity has become markedly pronounced.

China's assertiveness in regional waters has escalated. While the Philippines, led by Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., seems inclined towards siding with the United States on security matters despite China's economic prowess, the remaining Southeast Asian nations (excluding Laos, Cambodia, and strife-torn Myanmar) continue to navigate a delicate balance among the dominant powers in the region.

Yet, even for a nation as affluent and diplomatically adept as Singapore, managing the delicate equilibrium between these two forces is becoming increasingly challenging. China's efforts to extend its influence into the domestic affairs of every Southeast Asian nation are evident. Within Singapore, apprehensions regarding Chinese interference in domestic politics are mounting among senior officials, prompting the passage of stringent legislation to counter foreign intervention.

The conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, which strikes a chord with Singapore's substantial Muslim minority, has negatively affected the reputation of the United States in the city-state.

In the lead-up to Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's impending leadership, Singapore finds itself at a critical juncture. The transition represents a continuation of the People's Action Party's (PAP) governance, yet it also exposes the party to challenges and criticisms. Wong's ascent to power is not devoid of complexities; he steps into a role overshadowed by economic uncertainties and recent damage to the PAP's once-pristine image due to a corruption scandal. He faces the delicate task of navigating these turbulent waters.

By Pranjal Pandey

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May Day May Have Been Obliterated From US History, But It's Legacy Continues



05-01-2024 ~ *Progressive economic ideas have been on the whole an anathema to the U.S. political establishment and violence against labor militancy has always been the norm for almost all of the country's political history. Nonetheless, the U.S. labor movement has not yet been defeated.*

May 1st is International Workers' Day and was established as such in celebration of the struggle for the introduction of the eight-hour workday and in memory of Chicago's [Haymarket Affair](#), which took place in 1886. May 1st is celebrated in over 160 countries with large-scale marches and protests as workers across the globe continue to fight for better working conditions, fair wages, and other labor rights. International Workers' Day, however, is not celebrated in the U.S. and has in fact been practically erased from historical memory. But this shouldn't be surprising since U.S. capitalism operates on the basis of a brutal economy where maximization of profit takes priority over everything else, including the environment and even human lives.

Indeed, the U.S. has a notorious record when it comes to worker rights. The country has the [most violent and bloody history](#) of labor relations in the advanced industrialized world, according to labor historians. Subsequently, unionization has always faced an uphill battle as corporations are allowed to engage in widespread union-busting practices through manipulation or violation of federal labor law. The recent activities of [Amazon and Starbucks](#) speak volumes of the anti-union mentality that pervades most U.S. corporations. Accordingly, unionization in the

U.S. has been on decline for decades even though the [majority of Americans](#) see this development as a bad thing.

The backlash against unionization and worker rights in general in the U.S. also takes place against the backdrop of an insidious ideological framework in which it has been regarded as a self-evident truth that individuals are responsible for their own fate and that government should not interfere with the free market out of concern for social and economic inequalities.

Social Darwinism first appeared in U.S. political and social thought in the mid-1860s, as historian Richard Hofstadter showed in his brilliant work *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915*, but it would be a gross mistake to think that it ever went away. The conservative counterrevolution launched by Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s and refined by Bill Clinton in the early 1990s aimed at bringing back the loathsome idea that the government should not interfere in the “survival of the fittest” by helping the weak and the poor. Progressive economic ideas have been on the whole an anathema to the U.S. political establishment and violence against labor militancy has always been the norm for almost all of the country’s political history.

Long before the movement for an eight-hour workday in the U.S., which can be largely attributed to the influx of European immigrants mainly from Italy and Germany, radicalism had set foot across a number of post-colonial states. Rhode Island, often referred to as the [Rogue Island](#), had one of the most radical economic policies on revolutionary debt, which was wildly popular with farmers and common folks in general, and experimented with the idea of radical democracy. At approximately the same time, [Shays’ rebellion](#) in Massachusetts was also about money, debts, poverty, and democracy. Naturally, the elite in both states pulled out all stops to put an end to radicalism, and the pattern of suppressing popular demands has somehow survived in U.S. politics across time.

The pattern of suppressing social and political movements from below continued well into modern times. The Red Scare, climaxed in the late 1910s on account of the Russian revolution and the rise of labor strikes and then renewed with the anti-communist campaign of the 1940s, played a crucial role in the establishment’s fervent dedication to crushing radicalism in the U.S. and putting an end to challenges against capitalism.

In light of this, it is nothing short of a shame that May Day has been all but forgotten in U.S. political culture even though the day traces its origins to the fight of American laborers for a shorter workday.

Last year, after marching on May Day with thousands of other people in the streets of [Dublin](#), one of the questions that was posed to me was how could it be that International Workers' Day is not celebrated in the U.S. I am still struggling to come up with a convincing explanation, as may be evident from this essay, but Gore Vidal was not off the mark when he said, "we are the United States of Amnesia."

Nonetheless, the U.S. labor movement has not yet been defeated and is surely not dead. In spite of the bloody suppression and the constant intimidation over many decades, the U.S. labor movement has made its presence felt on numerous historic occasions, from the [Battle of Cripple Creek](#) in 1894 and the 1892 [Homestead Strike](#) in Pennsylvania to being behind the historic 1963 [march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#), and continues doing so down to this day. [Scores of victories](#) for the working class were achieved last year—and all against prevailing odds. Moreover, in 2023, [labor strikes](#) in the U.S. jumped to a 23-year high and some of the [largest labor disputes](#) in the history of the U.S. were also recorded last year.

So, while May Day may have been formally obliterated by the powers that be from U.S. public awareness, the labor movement is still alive and kicking. Even a small victory is still a victory, though time will tell of the historic significance of each step forward. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that the unionists, socialists, and anarchists that made Chicago in 1886 the center of the national movement for the eight-hour workday had foreseen what the impact of their actions would be in the struggle of the international labor movement for democracy, better wages, safer working conditions, and freedom of speech. All these social rights have been amplified over time, though much remains to be accomplished and the struggle continues.

But this is all the more reason why we must not forget—and indeed celebrate every year with marches and protests—May 1st.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/>

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