

As History Erasure Intensifies, Independent Internet Archives Are Helping Fortify The ‘Digital Preservation Infrastructure’



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04-25-2025 ~ *These online resources hold crucial information on history, social issues, and activism.*

Despite Donald Trump’s [disavowal](#) of Project 2025, his administration began enforcing that initiative’s agenda immediately after his second inauguration. This includes efforts to [erase history](#) through [education cuts, classroom and book censorship, website scrubbing](#), and the silencing of media outlets and institutions like [PBS, NPR](#), and [the Smithsonian American Art Museum](#).

One week after Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2025, in a post on the online platform Free Government Information, data services librarian emeritus from the University of California, San Diego, James A. Jacobs [wrote](#), “There is a difference between the government changing a policy and the government erasing information, but the line between those two has blurred in the digital age... In the digital age, government publishing has shifted from the distribution of unalterable printed books to digital posts on government websites. Such digital publications can be moved, altered, and withdrawn at the flick of a switch. Publishing agencies are not required to preserve their own information, nor to provide free access to it.”

While noting that “digital government information was being lost before President Trump,” Jacobs stressed that “[t]he scale of loss and alteration of information under Trump may prove to be unprecedented” and that “librarians, archivists, and citizens” must create a “new distributed digital preservation infrastructure.”

Organizations like the [Freedom Archives](#) in Berkeley, California, have been working for decades to preserve online information on history, social issues, and activism. [Established](#) in 1999, this nonprofit educational facility houses audio, video, and print materials that “chronicle the progressive history of the Bay Area, the United States, and international movements for liberation and social justice,” according to the organization’s [website](#). Its [digital collection](#) of content on progressive movements, culture, and activism includes materials on subjects like Black liberation, gender and sexuality, and Indigenous struggles.

The Freedom Archives’ co-director and co-founder, Claude Marks, notes that conservative extremists “are purposefully rewriting history to eliminate references to slavery of Blacks from Africa and genocide against Indigenous people, and the purpose of that is to reify and reinforce white supremacy. Oftentimes, the truth lies more with the resisters who may have been defeated in various struggles with their colonizers. If that’s your shared point of view, you want to protect access to material that gives voice to those people who were engaged in liberatory struggles and were fighting for justice and human rights.”

For instance, nearly 37 states in the U.S. have measures in place “that limit how America’s undeniable [history of racism](#)—from chattel slavery to Jim Crow—can be discussed in public school classrooms,” according to a 2023 [article](#) in the Conversation.

Many fear this attempt to rewrite history, especially under the Trump administration, might have far-reaching consequences. “The danger isn’t just that they’ll purge accurate data from the past but that if and when that data is ever reposted that some of it will be modified with false information,” [said](#) Charles Gaba, a health care policy data analyst and web developer, according to a February 2025 Salon article.

As an independent organization, the Freedom Archives is largely funded through grassroots efforts. “We’re not vulnerable to: ‘Oh, we didn’t get that big grant through the Department of Education,’ which will no longer exist [soon],” Marks

says.

The Freedom Archives' staff has collaborated with archives and organizations like the [Manilatown Heritage Foundation](#), the [Bay Area Lesbian Archives](#), and the Los Angeles-based [Southern California Library](#), which “documents and makes accessible histories of struggles that challenge racism and other systems of oppression so we can all imagine and sustain possibilities for freedom.”

It has also worked with [Interference Archive](#), a Brooklyn, New York-based organization that curates in-person and online exhibits of “cultural ephemera” such as posters, books, zines, and flyers created by activists and participants in social movements. Interference Archive uses these materials “to animate histories of people mobilizing for social transformation” and to preserve and honor “histories and material culture that is often marginalized in mainstream institutions,” its website [states](#).

Highlighting the importance of these efforts to archive information, the New England Archivists [state](#), “Archives are the foundation of a democratic society. They exist to safeguard the rights of individuals, ensure transparency, and hold public servants accountable.”

Another notable online library is the [Internet Archive](#), whose [Wayback Machine](#) contains “more than 928 billion web pages saved over time,” the site explains. In March 2025, the Wayback Machine’s director, Mark Graham, [told](#) NPR that the Internet Archive was the only place to find an “[interactive timeline](#)” of the January 6, 2021, attack on the United States Capitol and that “it’s in the public’s interest to save such records.” More people have been referring to the information on the Internet Archive website since Trump took office.

In April 2025, the San Francisco Standard [reported](#) that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had cut funding for the Internet Archive while the organization “was halfway through an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant of \$345,960.” Jefferson Bailey, the Internet Archive’s director of archiving and data services, said that funding from other sources would help the organization stay afloat, but he worried about the impact of the cuts on smaller nonprofits.

One such nonprofit is the [HathiTrust Digital Library](#), which contains digital copies of more than 18 million items from research libraries. The universities of the [Big](#)

[Ten Academic Alliance](#) (formerly known as the Committee on Institutional Cooperation) and the 11 libraries of the University of California launched the archive in 2008 “to ensure that those digitized collections—and the libraries that steward them—remain strong and serve scholarship into the future,” the website [explains](#). “Our reach now includes members outside of the United States. Over 18 million digitized library items are currently available, and our mission to expand the collective record of human knowledge is always evolving.”

Meanwhile, [the Zinn Education Project](#) (ZEP) provides educational materials for middle and high school teachers. “Based on the approach to history highlighted in [Howard Zinn’s](#) best-selling book *[A People’s History of the United States](#)*, our teaching materials emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history,” the site [states](#). Free downloadable lessons and articles are categorized by [theme](#), time period, and reading level.

A worldwide network of volunteers curates the [Marxist Internet Archive](#), a storehouse of writings by nearly 1,000 authors “representing a complete spectrum of political, philosophical, and scientific thought.” The site’s content comprises more than 180,000 documents published in 83 languages. Its founders’ primary motivation for starting this archive was to dispel misinformation and misconceptions about Marxism, the site [explains](#).

[Open Culture](#) consolidates, curates, and provides free access to culture and educational media, including [history](#), [politics](#), [education](#), [life](#), and [current affairs](#). “Web 2.0 has given us great amounts of intelligent audio and video,” the archive’s website [states](#). “It’s all free. It’s all enriching. But it’s also scattered across the web, and not easy to find. Our whole mission is to centralize this content... and give you access to this high-quality content whenever and wherever you want it.”

The Public Domain Review’s archives cover subjects like culture, history, politics, and war. “It’s our belief that the public domain is an invaluable and indispensable good, which—like our natural environment and our physical heritage—deserves to be explicitly recognized, protected, and appreciated,” the nonprofit’s [website](#) notes.

Many of these organizations’ ties to progressive movements extend far beyond archiving. For example, Marks says that “as participants in a broader struggle for

liberation, justice, and global values that are liberatory instead of oppressive and colonial,” the Freedom Archives’ staff participates in local and national activism and stays conscious of “the importance of causes like international solidarity—defending the right for Cuba to exist without an embargo, the right of the Palestinians to survive the genocide, and the right to their own identity and state. As long as we’re doing that, I have faith that all these movements will survive the brutality and the willingness of the powers of the empire to try to destroy them and snuff them out.”

By Damon Orion

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How Can We Balance AI’s Potential And Ethical Challenges?



23-04-2025 ~ *While AI is transforming industries with powerful capabilities, challenges like data quality, bias, transparency, and privacy concerns must be addressed to ensure fairness and accuracy, especially in areas like fraud detection.*

Artificial intelligence is transforming industries by [automating processes, improving efficiency, and detecting patterns](#) that humans might miss. However, as AI continues to evolve, so do the challenges associated with its implementation.

Issues such as [data quality, bias, transparency, and privacy concerns](#) raise critical ethical questions. Ensuring that AI operates fairly and effectively requires continuous improvement and careful oversight, especially in sectors such as insurance, where accuracy and trust are crucial.

The primary issues of concern include:

Low data quality: The effectiveness of AI largely depends on the quality of the data it uses. If the data is inaccurate or incomplete, the AI's performance will suffer.

[Data quality](#) is crucial in artificial intelligence because it directly impacts AI models' performance, accuracy, and reliability. Poor data quality is the primary obstacle to deploying and executing artificial intelligence and machine learning projects and operations. "Garbage in, garbage out" (GIGO), a concept familiar to computer users for generations, is just as applicable to AI. If an AI model is of poor quality, inaccurate, or irrelevant, the system's output will also be of poor quality, inaccurate, or irrelevant.

Even the most sophisticated AI algorithms can produce flawed results, leading to poor performance and [failure](#). A high-quality AI model should aim for accuracy, consistency (meaning that the data follow a standard format and structure to facilitate processing and analysis), completeness (to avoid missing essential patterns and correlations), timeliness, and relevance.

To ensure the AI model is efficient, developers need to collect relevant data, which depends on the choice of sources from which to draw the data. This challenge is compounded by the need to maintain quality and standards to eliminate duplicate or conflicting data. Then, the data must be labeled correctly, a process that can be time-consuming and prone to errors. At the same time, data must be stored to prevent unauthorized access and corruption. [Data poisoning is another risk](#): it refers to a deliberate attack on AI systems, where attackers inject malicious or misleading data into the dataset, resulting in unreliable and even dangerous outputs.

Bias in AI Models

Sometimes, AI can be biased, meaning it might unfairly treat certain groups of people differently. For example, if an AI system is trained on biased data, it may

make decisions that discriminate against specific individuals based on factors such as race, gender, or other characteristics.

There are [two basic types of bias](#): explicit and implicit. An explicit bias refers to a conscious and intentional prejudice or belief about a specific group of people. An implicit bias operates unconsciously and can influence decisions without a person realizing it. Social conditioning, the media, and cultural exposure all contribute to these decisions.

[Algorithmic bias](#) can creep in because of programming errors, such as a developer unfairly weighting factors in algorithm decision-making based on their own conscious or unconscious biases. For example, indicators like income or vocabulary might be used by the algorithm to discriminate against people of a certain race or gender unintentionally. People can also process information and make judgments based on the data they initially selected (cognitive bias), favoring datasets based on Americans rather than a sampling of populations worldwide.

[Bias in AI](#) is not merely a technical issue but a societal challenge, as AI systems are increasingly integrated into decision-making processes in healthcare, hiring, law enforcement, the media, and other critical areas. Bias can occur in various stages of the [AI pipeline](#), especially with data collection. Outputs may be biased if the data used to train an AI algorithm is not diverse or representative of the actual data. For instance, training that favors male and white applicants may result in biased AI hiring recommendations.

Labeling training data can also introduce bias since it can influence the interpretation given to the outputs. The model itself might be imbalanced or fail to consider diverse inputs, favoring majority views over those of minorities. To make AI more accurate and fairer, researchers need to retrain it regularly. Companies, especially insurers, must ensure that they use accurate, complete, and up-to-date data while also ensuring their models are fair to everyone.

Transparency

Transparency is a key issue, as it can be challenging to explain how AI makes its decisions. This lack of clarity can be a problem for both customers and regulators who want to understand how these systems work. Transparency in AI is essential because it provides a clear explanation for why AI's decisions and actions occur, allowing us to ensure they are fair and reliable.

Using [AI in the workplace](#) can help with the hiring process, but understanding how AI does so without bias can only be achieved if it is transparent. As AI becomes increasingly important in society, business, healthcare, the media, and culture, governments and regulators need to establish rules, standards, and laws that ensure transparency in the use of AI.

Transparency is closely related to [Explainable AI \(XAI\)](#), which allows outsiders to understand why AI is making its decisions. Such explainability builds customer trust. This is referred to as a glass box system, as opposed to a black box system, where the results or outputs from AI are transparent and the reasons for their decisions are known, sometimes even to the system's developer.

Errors in AI Predictions

AI can sometimes produce incorrect results, known as false positives or false negatives. This happens because the data used to train AI systems is often imperfect, leaving room for errors. It's human nature to overestimate a technology's short-term effect and underestimate its long-term effect. This tendency certainly applies to AI predictions. The question, of course, is how long the long run is.

The rise of generative AI confronts us with [key questions about AI failure](#) and how we make sense of it. As most experts (and many users) acknowledge, AI outputs, as astonishing and incredibly powerful as they can be, may also be fallible, inaccurate, and, at times, completely nonsensical. A term has gained popularity in recognition of this fallibility—"AI hallucination."

The scholar and bestselling author [Naomi Klein](#) argued in an [article](#) for the Guardian in May 2023 that the term "hallucination" only anthropomorphized a technical problem and that, "by appropriating a word commonly used in psychology, psychedelics and various forms of mysticism, the tech-industry is feeding the myth that by building these large language models, we are in the process of birthing an animate intelligence."

Nonetheless, all major AI developers, including Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI, have publicly addressed this issue, whether it is called a hallucination or not. For instance, an internal Microsoft document stated that "these systems are built to be persuasive, not truthful," allowing that "outputs can look very realistic but include statements that aren't true." Alphabet, the parent company of Google, has

admitted that it's a problem "no one in the field seems to have solved." That means AI outputs cannot be entirely relied upon for their predictions and need to be verified by reliable sources.

Privacy Concerns

In many cases, real data cannot be used to train AI due to privacy issues. Instead, fake data is created based on real data, which can lead to inaccuracies and lower performance in the AI system.

[AI privacy](#) refers to the protection of personal or sensitive information that is collected, used, shared, or stored by AI systems. One reason AI poses a greater data privacy risk than other digital technology is the sheer volume of information AI needs to be trained on: terabytes or petabytes of text, images or video which often includes sensitive data such as healthcare information, personal data from social media sites, personal finance data, and biometric data used for facial recognition.

As more sensitive data are being collected, stored, and transmitted, the risks of exposure from AI models rise. "This [data] ends up with a big bullseye that somebody's going to try to hit," Jeff Crume, an IBM Distinguished Engineer, explained in an [IBM Technology video](#).

Data leakage from an AI model can occur through the *accidental exposure* of sensitive data, such as a technical security vulnerability or procedural security error. Data exfiltration, on the other hand, is the [theft of data](#). An attacker, hacker, cybercriminal, foreign adversary, or other malicious actor can choose to encrypt the data as part of a ransomware attack or use it to hijack corporate executives' email accounts.

It's not data exfiltration until the data are copied or moved to some other storage device under the attacker's control. Sometimes, the attack may come from an insider threat—an employee, business partner, or other authorized user who intentionally or unintentionally exposes data due to human error, poor judgment, ignorance of security controls, or out of disgruntlement or greed.

The Future of AI in Fraud Detection

As AI technology improves, it is expected to become more effective at detecting

and preventing complex fraud. For example, let's consider phone insurance fraud. [Phone insurance fraud](#), also known as device insurance fraud (because it can refer to fraud involving laptops and tablets as well as smartphones), occurs when someone intentionally makes a false claim on their device's insurance company, falsely asserting that their device was lost, stolen, or damaged, or exaggerating the extent of the damage.

One [survey](#) showed that 40 percent of all insurance claims are fraudulent. For companies, fraud can result in significant losses and increase the cost of premiums for consumers. Rates of fraud incidents have increased significantly. A survey by Javelin Strategy Research found that fraudulent claims on mobile phones increased by 63 percent between 2018 and 2019.

Phone theft has also become more sophisticated and organized, leading to phishing attacks and social engineering used to access stolen devices and perpetrate fraud and false claims. In some instances, phone owners will buy [multiple policies](#) on the same phone and then claim theft, loss, or damage to obtain money for the phone from numerous insurance providers.

There's another [type of fraud](#) to be aware of. According to Jonathan Nelson, director of product management for Hiya, an insurance and finance provider, insurers need to be mindful of how their customers are being misled or unwittingly targeted. "The most common thing that you'll experience when you're becoming a victim of... an automobile, insurance, or warranty scam, is what we call illegal lead generation. Effectively, the goal is to manipulate the recipient into signing up with a different third-party insurance company [that] may or may not be aware of the fact that their new customers are coming through this illegal sort of scam-like channel."

AI to the Rescue

One promising development is the use of deep learning models, which can quickly compare new insurance claims against millions of past claims. These models look for unusual patterns that might suggest fraud, such as strange damage descriptions, multiple claims from the same person, or inconsistencies in location data.

These advanced models don't just follow fixed rules; they learn and improve with every new piece of data they analyze. For example, they can examine pictures of

damaged phones, compare them with large databases, spot signs of image manipulation, and assess whether fraud may be involved.

The [Internet of Things](#) will enhance these fraud prevention efforts by connecting data from various devices, such as smartphones and wearables. This will allow insurers to gather real-time information about how devices are used, where they are located, and any unusual activity. Additionally, [new platforms are being developed](#) to help insurance companies share anonymous data on fraud, making it easier to identify repeat offenders and stay ahead of evolving fraud tactics.

As AI continues to develop, striking a balance between innovation and ethical considerations will be key. While AI has the potential to revolutionize fraud detection and many other industries, it is essential to address biases, improve data quality, and ensure transparency. With proper oversight and responsible implementation, AI can be a powerful tool that benefits both businesses and consumers.

By Gaurav Mittal

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Archaeology Can Now Tell Us How People Have Muffled And

Challenged Economic Inequality Across History



Gary M. Feinman

04-19-2025 ~ Without archaeology, there is no way to truly examine economic inequality, its causes, and its consequences over very long time spans on a global scale. Until recently, most grand narratives that purported to tell the story of human inequality over time tended to focus either on European history of the last five to six centuries or snapshots of recent societies, derived following colonial encounters with people around the world. These were then pyramided into proposed stepped sequences of change that were presumed to mimic unilinear temporal processes. Whereas the former was not global, the latter was not even historical.

Well into the 20th century, European history and its colonial global impact empirically underpinned our conceptual lenses on inequality. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that to the present, our grand narratives on the topic tend to see increasing wealth disparities as inevitable. Inequality is seen as a byproduct of population and economic growth, only potentially reversible through the spread of a supposedly nascent rationality birthed at the outset of the modern era, with the rise of the West and the program of governance and education it offered. Alas, over the last decades, as inequality spirals, nowhere more than at the heart of the West in the United States and the United Kingdom, the long-entrenched grand narratives now seem naive and out-of-date.

Fortunately, over the last half-century, archaeologists have gone to work looking beyond ancient temples and tombs and, instead, have been mapping sites and excavating houses. By broadening their vantage beyond kings and courts,

archaeologists in many regions of the world have and continue to gather data on diverse segments of past societies; farmers as well as rulers. The systematic cumulation of these data, with a focus on houses, lies at the core of the [GINI project](#), a broad collaborative effort led by Timothy A. Kohler (Washington State University), Amy Bogaard (Oxford University), and Scott Ortman (University of Colorado), which has measured and coded more than 50,000 houses from more than 1,000 archaeological sites.

During the past and present, disparities in housing have been one of the best measures of wealth differences. And with this unprecedented sample, it is now feasible to trace economic inequality across much of the globe over time. Now, for the first time, we can see that neither farming nor population growth nor urban aggregation are simple determinants of inequality. Nor can we point to a uniform, unilinear sequence that accounts for patterns of change across every continent. Nevertheless, when we look across humanity's past, there are broader tendencies, patterns, and even lessons to absorb and learn.

One clear trend is that through time, across the broad sweep of human history, the potential for inequality has grown due to advances in technology (domesticated crops and animals, enhanced communication, and advances in transport) and the increasing size of human aggregations and nations. These factors are important as they contribute to the growing extent of economic inequality. Yet alone, they are not determinative.

The deeply held story that sedentary settlement, along with farming, prompted the advent of private property, which generated intra-community inequality that was then a basis for the emergence of top-down, autocratic governance simply does not fit most, if any, global regions. It often took millennia after reliance on farming for degrees of economic inequality to tick significantly upward, and only in specific places.

For the regions we examined as part of this research project, the potential for inequality was not uniformly realized or consistently reached. In fact, in general, within global areas, the variances or ranges in the degree of inequality expanded through time. Over and over, and in different ways, people have devised institutions, modes of governance, and leveling mechanisms to muffle that expansive potential for rises in inequality.

Regarding the realized degrees of inequality, population size and the hierarchical complexity of governing institutions do matter in line with long-held narratives. But how those governing institutions were organized, how democratic or autocratic they were, is also a relevant factor—and one not considered in the past when Athens and the Roman Republic were wrongly presumed to be the only political democracies before the modern era. Across human history, people at certain times and places have made choices that quell ever present agentic selfishness and leverage the unmatched human abilities to cooperate and collaborate with large numbers of non-kin.

And yet, past and present, democratic or collective institutions are hard to maintain and sustain. Human cooperation tends to be situational and contingent. Institutions that are organized democratically require constant nurturing and participation. When that is disrupted, participatory, inclusive institutions break down, which is why we see temporal cycles and spatial variation in the degree of inequality across time and geographic space.

Our global sample, along with other recent studies, also holds clues as to why the institutions of governance shift along the axis of concentrated (or personalized) power and more democratic formations with checks and balances. What we see is that when our governing institutions are financed by monopolized resources that are not drawn from the labor and fields of the local population, but rather through external resources, power in governance will likely become concentrated in the hands of a few.

Herd animals, access to metals, and the control of long-distance exchange routes all seem to have a relationship to greater potential for inequality. Whether today or in the deep past, when political power is wielded autocratically, the checks and leveling mechanisms that dampen inequality will tend to break down, and, over time, disparities in wealth will move closer toward their maximal potentials. In this way, the past is a mirror for what we now see.

By Gary M. Feinman

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A Nation of Sheep? Trump's Fascist Tactics Working All Too Easily



C.J. Polychroniou

04-19-2025 ~ Where are the nationwide protests? The national strikes against the destruction of what is left of U.S. democracy? As for the eerie complacency of the Democrats, it is hardly surprising why there is such a huge loss of trust in the leadership of the Democratic Party.

Trump's historic first 100 days are just around the corner. How is the U.S. doing? What are the global implications, including for climate and the environment, of Trump's policies to create a "[new world order](#)" and "[Make America Wealthy Again](#)? In the interview that follows with independent French-Greek journalist Alexandra Boutri, political scientist/political economist, author and journalist C.J. Polychroniou argues that both the future of U.S. democracy and of humanity as a whole are at great risk because of an ignorant, self-serving autocrat at the helm of the world's most powerful nation.

Alexandra Boutri: Trump's first 100 days are nearing the end. What have we

learned so far about Trump's second term and his direction for the country?

C. J. Polychroniou: The first thing that ought to be said is that there are significant differences between Trump's first and second terms. This time he has a much clearer agenda, largely thanks to Project 2025, and is better prepared to see it through to the end. The aim is to undo race and gender progress, restore white dominance, deregulate the economy and use whatever means are available to further enrich the super-rich, and use economic coercion to secure U.S. hegemony. It's a thoroughly anti-democratic, blatantly neofascist vision that spells serious trouble for the future of democracy, especially given America's fragile democratic convictions. Indeed, one of the most shocking things so far is the ease with which the country is heading toward a 21st century version of fascism under Trump's second term.

This disturbing development speaks volumes of the weaknesses of the U.S. labor movement as well as of the overwhelmingly apolitical nature of civil society. Where are the nationwide protests? The national strikes against the destruction of what is left of U.S. democracy? As for the eerie complacency of the Democrats, it is hardly surprising why there is such a huge loss of trust in the leadership of the Democratic Party.

Alexandra Boutri: Are we witnessing a revolution in the making?

C. J. Polychroniou: With regard to what Trump is doing to American society and its institutions, the right word is "counterrevolution." Trump is carrying out a fascist destabilization of society in order to stop a progressive agenda, establish new forms of political legitimacy, and suppress, if not eliminate, threats from below. With regard to foreign affairs, he sees the world as a zero-sum game. But it would be naïve to think that what he is after are the interests of the average American citizen. Trump has nothing but contempt for working people. He is both after a world order and an economic regime at home that enriches corporations and the ultrawealthy at the expenses of the many.

Alexandra Boutri: Why is the Trump administration so keen in controlling education and taking over cultural institutions, such as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts?

C. J. Polychroniou: Exerting power over education, taking control of cultural

institutions and silencing the press are primary aims of every self-respecting authoritarian regime that wishes to take over civil society in order to transform a country's political landscape and colonize the consciousness of its citizens. Mussolini did so in Italy; Hitler in Germany; Franco in Spain; and even the colonels of Greece. What Trump and the thugs surrounding him are doing are precisely just that: they are trying to suppress ideas they despise, silence dissent, and convert citizens into a nation of sheep. Fascist goals, fascist tactics. Pure and simple. And, sadly enough, he seems to be doing it with great ease as a huge portion of the American citizenry has already been turned into a nation of sheep. Now it's only up to that small but courageous community of American dissenters and radicals to stand up to the ignorant and stupid autocrat.

Alexandra Boutri: China is standing up to Trump's bullying tariffs, but the same cannot be said about Europe. Why is that?

C. J. Polychroniou: You have here two entirely different situations. China is a single, unified country. The European Union (EU) is a group of 27 independent countries with different histories, cultures, languages, customs, and interests. These member states work together to promote peace, security and economic efficiency. But the EU lacks a unified military and a centralized fiscal authority. Moreover, Europe is more dependent on trade than either China or the U.S. And since the end of the Second World War, Europe's defense is also too reliant on the U.S. It is thus hardly surprising that EU senior officials have been desperately trying since the start of Trump's tariff actions to appear conciliatory and even willing to bend over backwards to appease America's new King. They were forced to impose [new tariffs](#) on specific U.S. products in retaliation for Trump's 25 percent tariffs on imported steel and aluminum. But don't forget that Trump even [rejected](#) EU's offer to drop tariffs. And, of course, the EU has now [paused](#) its countermeasures on U.S. trade tariffs as a response to the U.S. delaying by 90 days its so-called reciprocal tariffs.

China is not backing down because it can afford to do so. Its leadership knows that it can deal with the side effects of a trade war far more effectively—and less painfully—than the U.S. can. The extent to which Trump seems to understand the realities of the U.S.-trade relationship, let alone of the mechanisms that the Chinese government has at its disposal to deal with economic side effects, is highly questionable.

Indeed, it's safe to say that a U.S. trade deal with Europe will eventually take place no matter what. Italy's neo-fascist but politically savvy prime minister [Giorgia Meloni](#) may be able to secure an EU-U.S. trade deal in a fashion that no top EU official could, perhaps only because Trump is smitten with her. But what happens with China is anyone's guess. There are both economic and geopolitical considerations behind Trump's hostility towards China. And the Chinese no longer view their country as a semi-peripheral country in the global capitalist world. China's global influence is growing, so its leaders are not going to be intimidated by Trump's chicken game over tariffs.

Alexandra Boutri: One last question. How would Trump's energy and deregulation policies impact the fight for climate change?

C. J. Polychroniou: When all is said and done, this is the most important issue of all facing the future of humanity. We have a planet on the precipice. I hate to sound pessimistic, but the odds are already stacked against us. Trump's manic energy and deregulation policies, which come on top of a mania to deny climate change, will make the task of net-zero emissions by 2050 simply impossible to achieve.

I say this because Trump's energy and deregulation policies will encourage other fossil-fuel hungry nations to continue with the further exploration and consumption of the poisons that are destroying the planet. In addition, and indicative of what's happening on the ground with regard to the fight against global warming, a new study by the [Political Economy Research Institute \(PERI\)](#) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst reveals that "governments throughout the world continue to subsidize both the consumption and production of oil, coal, and natural gas." Overall fossil fuel subsidies, for 2023, amounted to \$1.1 trillion. Obviously, such a staggering amount in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry seems to indicate that governments across the world only have worries about short-termism and think very little about the future of humanity. But that's what capitalism is all about, isn't it?

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/is-trump-fascist>

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Lustrous Surfaces: Easy On The Eyes, Easy On the Nervous System



*Irina Matuzava - Photo:
The Observatory*

04-13-2025 ~ The attraction to luster is rooted in our evolutionary history and has persisted among prehistoric artifacts, ancient civilizations, and consumer culture.

Our ancestors' ability to recognize water sources was crucial to their survival. As a result, the attraction to lustrous materials is deeply rooted in our evolutionary history and is evident among prehistoric artifacts, ancient civilizations, and modern consumer culture.

During the Pliocene Epoch, early hominins likely traveled between semi-permanent rain pools, restricting their movement to warmer and wetter regions.

During the Late Pleistocene, [humid forests declined and grassland-savanna habitats expanded](#). [1] Thus, the ability to detect water sources became extremely important. In the dry savanna conditions of East Africa, early humans relied on small lakes and rain pools to survive seasonal droughts, and many fossil hominid remains have been found near ancient lakeshores, supporting the idea that access to water played a key role in early human migration. The [savanna hypothesis](#) suggests that the expansion of African grasslands led directly to the divergence of hominins from apes and the [emergence of the genus *Homo*](#). [2]

Natural selection likely chose individuals who could recognize water and wet surfaces, and, according to evolutionary anthropologist Dean Falk's [radiator theory](#), the success of finding drinking water daily to prevent dehydration and conserve energy played a substantial role in shaping hominin evolution. [3]

Water still significantly impacts our neurological system, influencing physiological and psychological well-being. Psychology professor Richard Coss and his former student, Craig Keller, conducted a [pair of studies](#) published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology in 2022 showing that "[gazing at bodies of water can help lower your heart rate, blood pressure, and increase feelings of relaxation](#)." [4]

The first of Coss and Keller's studies showed that viewing a swimming pool lowers heart rate and blood pressure versus looking at a street sign and a tree in a parking lot.

The second study measured heart rate and blood pressure when viewing six sites with different amounts of visible water. Viewing water compared to the adjacent ground produced effects consistent with a relaxation response or a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure. Moreover, the studies found that looking at wider portions of water produced higher states of relaxation than narrow portions of water, suggesting that abundant amounts of water have a greater potential to limit dehydration. Clear water also produced a higher state of relaxation than murky water, which may be linked to the health of the water, as clear water is less likely to contain harmful bacteria and [produce an unfavorable future state](#), such as illness. [5]

Meanwhile, a [2010 study](#) by Richard Coss investigated the connection between glossy surfaces and their association with water or wetness. Coss designed an experiment using four different papers with varying surface finishes: matte

watercolor paper, glossy silk-screen paper, gritty sandpaper, and sparkly glitter paper designed to be reminiscent of an ocean surface. The study's participants were asked to examine the surfaces using a questionnaire to assess their wet and dry connotations as well as their overall attitude toward each paper type.

The results demonstrated that glossy surfaces appear significantly wetter than sparkling surfaces, and both the glossy and sparkling surfaces were perceived as wetter than the matte and sandy finishes. The participants' assessment of the sparkling surface, having been rated lower on the wetness scale than the glossy silk-screen surface, suggests that sparkle does not consistently indicate the presence of moisture.[6]

This discrepancy may stem from the historical uncertainty of sparkling surfaces as an indicator of water since sparkly surfaces can be found in both pools of water and dry materials, such as quartz crystals and other rocky formations. Sparkly surfaces, while being visually stimulating, do not reliably indicate wetness unless they are accompanied by a glossy visual texture. The study's findings reinforce the point that glossy surfaces convey strong optical information about moisture.

Some researchers have previously assumed that children's aesthetic preferences were highly influenced by media consumption created by adults, along with innate and learned preferences. However, other research has found that many of these preferences, especially regarding [human](#) and [animal faces](#), may develop in early infancy.[7] Researchers Katrien Meert, Mario Pandelaere, and Vanessa M. Patrick conducted a [series of experiments](#)—published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* in 2014—to expand upon this innate quality of having certain aesthetic preferences and establish that there is an inherent preference for glossy surfaces among humans.

Their first experiment demonstrated the preference for glossiness among both adults and children. Leaflets were given to participants, half printed on glossy paper and the other half on matte or non-glossy paper. The participants were asked to arrange the leaflets according to their preference, and the results showed a statistically significant preference for glossy leaflets over non-glossy ones. The latter half of the first experiment investigated the preference for glossiness in young children, using pictures of Santa Claus, half of which were glossy and the other half non-glossy. The children also significantly preferred glossy pictures over non-glossy pictures.

The second experiment tested whether the preference for glossiness was related to the content of the images presented on glossy paper. A random combination of four landscapes was provided to the participants, half printed on glossy paper and the other half on non-glossy paper. This was done to evaluate either the image's content, the type of paper, or both. The type of paper influenced the responses of all respondents, and glossy images obtained a higher "liking" score. When the type of paper changed, all participants changed their preferences to the image on glossy paper, regardless of the participants' previous choices and the depicted landscapes.[8]The two experiments show that liking glossiness manifests before exposure to contemporary cultural stereotypes.

The longstanding affinity for gloss and luster is showcased well by the [Aurignacian culture](#), which is marked by a greater diversification within toolmaking and artistic innovation. This culture spread from the Atlantic Coast to the Iranian Plateau and Western Eurasia and spanned from 43,000 to 30,000 years ago, during which *Homo sapiens* produced objects of artistic representation.

Luster is a common shared quality of the raw materials chosen by the Aurignacian to make personal ornaments.[9] Such materials included ivory, soapstone, talc, chlorite, mother of pearl, amber, and even polished tooth enamel from [adult human teeth](#). Ivory is lustrous when manipulated through polishing and was often found during this period, especially in the form of [basket-shaped beads](#). Soapstone had no technological purpose and was not found anywhere before the Aurignacian culture, yet it was sourced from the faraway Pyrenees Mountains, presumably for its surface and visual appeal. Talc and chlorite have a soapy texture when polished, mother of pearl is shiny and iridescent, and the Aurignacian produced some of the oldest known [amber pendants](#).

[According to Randall White](#), early humans manipulated materials to create objects for visual pleasure, a phenomenon exemplified by the members of the Aurignacian culture who actively sought out and crafted objects with a lustrous sheen. Another example comes from the Blombos Cave in South Africa, which dates from 82,000 to 75,000 years ago. People here produced evidence regarding the preference for glossy textures even before the Aurignacian culture. An [analysis of 28 bone tools](#) from the cave identified three carefully polished points. The high polish gives a distinctive appearance to these artifacts, but the high shine has no apparent function and was likely done to give the points "[added value](#)."[10]

In southwest France, excavations across multiple archaeological sites have uncovered polished, spherical gravels dating to the Upper Gravettian and Solutrean periods. These gravels have garnered interest because of their lustrous appearance and, in some instances, deliberate placement. The 2023 journal article "[Multiproxy Analysis of Upper Paleolithic Lustrous Gravels Supports Their Anthropogenic Use](#)" studied key sites such as Fourneau du Diable, Casserole, Pech de la Boissière, Laugerie Haute, and the [Landry site](#), which was excavated in 2011.

Detailed analysis of these gravels confirms that their polished surfaces were intentional modifications. Experimental replication of the polishing process was done by tumbling gravels with animal skins or leather, ocher, and fat. In contrast, abrasion against silt from the Landry site did not produce the same results and ruled out environmental causes of weathering. Furthermore, the uniform amount or degree of shine on each archaeological gravel supported the hypothesis that they were deliberately selected, manipulated, and curated over time.

The high concentration of lustrous gravels in areas associated with domestic activities suggests that their placement was purposeful and meaningful within prehistoric communities. The deliberate selection and modification of these gravels indicate that during the Upper Paleolithic, humans actively pursued and valued lustrous surfaces. These findings align with the broader evidence of prehistoric humans' appreciation of shiny surfaces.[11]

Throughout history, many ancient civilizations flourished on riverbanks and in river valleys, such as the Sumerians and the Indus Valley Civilization—reliable access to fresh water supported agriculture, trade, and large population growth. The evolutionary preference for both water and glossy surfaces remains evident in modern human behavior, as many modern cities are situated near water, and the pursuit of shine persists.

People are consistently drawn to landscapes featuring water in both reality and paintings. [Children prefer paintings depicting water](#) as a central element even at a young age, according to a study published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology in 1983.[12] Real estate trends also reflect this bias, as homes with aquatic views, whether lakes, rivers, or oceans, are significantly more desirable and often valued at higher prices. A [pair of studies](#) published in 2010 investigating preferences in both natural and built environments showcased a

strong preference for places incorporating aquatic features and a stronger willingness to book a hotel room with water views.[13] Individuals also tend to associate water with [positive memories](#), linking it to childhood experiences such as swimming and playing near streams.[14]

Author Wallace J. Nichols explores water as a “therapeutic landscape” in his book, [Blue Mind](#), which analyzes studies that suggest being near water can have powerful effects on the human psyche.[15] The book provides evidence that water generates a meditative state more powerful than hypnosis techniques and makes us healthier, happier, and more creative.

The association between glossiness and luxury is prevalent in modern marketing strategies. [Research by Rui \(Juliet\) Zhu and Joan Meyers-Levy](#) explores how display surfaces influence the perceptions of products from the consumers’ perspective. They demonstrated that the material beneath a product can alter how trendy, natural, or modern it appears. These results suggest that the glossiness of a store display, when comparing shiny glass versus wood, has a positive impact on the products displayed on it and increases the connotation of modernity.[16]

Understanding the evolutionary basis of the preference for symmetry, gloss, and luster can allow designers and mental health professionals to create environments that align with our deeply rooted preferences. As neuroscience continues to [emerge in the design landscape](#), designers can use scientific advancements to create better designs that consider their impact and potential benefits on human emotions and psychology.

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Trump's Tariffs Buck The Global Neoliberal Order – But Still Serve The 1 Percent



James K. Boyce - Photo by Matthew Cavanaugh

04-13-2025 ~ *Trump's tariffs threaten to widen inequality in the US, making the rich richer and impoverishing the working class.*

Since assuming office, the Trump administration has taken actions resembling

those of an absolutist state: undermining civil rights and democracy at home while introducing a [reciprocal tariffs](#) plan that has unleashed chaos around the world. Indeed, Donald Trump's "liberation day," a declaration of economic war on the rest of the planet, wiped several [trillions](#) of dollars in market value from Wall Street on April 4, the very same day it was announced, and ignited fears of destructive trade wars. After a brief recovery, global markets tumbled again as Trump imposed a [125 percent tariff](#) on China. Furthermore, his plan to "[make America wealthy again](#)" via tariffs fuels fears of a U.S. recession — and even of a global economic meltdown.

However, Trump has now reversed course in his global trade war by announcing a 90-day pause of "reciprocal tariffs" for most countries except China. Whether this was due to market backlash or constitutes a market manipulation scheme on the part of Trump is hard to say. But confusion still reigns in the business community and the trade war with China will surely put the global economy on edge.

The poor and the middle classes will bear most of the burden of Trump's tariffs, political economist James K. Boyce told *Truthout* in the interview that follows. Boyce contends that tariffs alone will not make the U.S. trade deficit disappear, and that Trump's obsession with tariffs could start the next Great Depression.

James K. Boyce is professor emeritus of economics and a senior fellow at the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is the author of scores of books and academic articles, and the recipient of the 2024 Global Inequality Research Award and the 2017 Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought. The interview that follows has been lightly edited for clarity.

C. J. Polychroniou: Trump's economic agenda focuses on "border security," deregulation, energy, tax cuts and tariffs. Some have described the strategy behind Trump's political economy as neo-mercantilism, but it also seems to be strengthening neoliberal economic policy at home. Can we call it a strategy of nationalist neoliberalism?

James K. Boyce: In its heyday, beginning under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism was the reigning economic ideology both nationally and internationally. In the U.S., its hallmark was downsizing the state's role in the

economy in favor of “free” markets. Internationally, its hallmark was the reduction of barriers to the movement of goods, services and capital in favor of “free” trade. Both served an underlying agenda of increasing the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few.

It turns out that these two components — the national and the international — are separable. Trump is doubling down on the neoliberal agenda at home, while ripping it asunder internationally. China, as the economist [Branko Milanovic](#) recently observed, has followed the opposite strategy.

The combination of greater state control in international trade and downsizing the economic role of the state at home does not yet have a widely accepted name. Most important is understanding what is happening.

Trump has had a longtime obsession with trade deficits, so it should not be surprising that he has announced sweeping tariffs on goods imported from the rest of the world. He recently claimed that “for decades our country has been looted, pillaged, raped and plundered by nations near and far.” Can you discuss the myths and realities of the U.S. trade deficit? Are trade deficits necessarily bad? Do they make a country poor?

The U.S. has been running massive trade deficits since the Reagan era. This has been good for some Americans — most notably corporate elites who profited from low-cost foreign labor and less regulation aiming to protect workers and the environment, and bad for others — most notably workers in manufacturing industries that were hard-hit by imports. Trade deficits do not necessarily “make a country poor” — on the contrary, for a time, they allow a country to live beyond its means, importing more than it exports and therefore consuming more than it produces; but they do make some people poorer.

In a normal country, it would be impossible to run enormous trade deficits for so many years. Imports need to be paid for in hard currency — that is, an internationally acceptable medium of exchange. If export earnings do not cover the import bill, the country eventually depletes its hard currency reserves, and a devaluation of the national currency ensues. This makes imports more expensive at home and exports more affordable abroad, curbing the deficit. This relationship between trade deficits and foreign exchange rates is textbook Economics 101.

Capital inflows, in the form of foreign investment and foreign borrowing, can

shore up the exchange rate for a time, in effect financing the trade deficit. But sooner or later these inflows must be repaid, with profit repatriation in the case of investment, and with interest in the case of debt — again, in hard currency, at which point the trade deficit becomes unsustainable. The inexorable result is what economists used to call “structural adjustment”: the structure of the nation’s economy adjusts as more resources are shifted to produce tradable goods and services (exports and import substitutes) away from non-tradables, such as spending on health and education.

However, in two respects the U.S. is not a normal economy. First, it creates its own hard currency. Second, and more important for our story, the U.S. was able to continue drawing in foreign capital by serving as a “safe haven” both for clean money from legitimate sources and for dirty money from illicit sources including embezzlement and organized crime. These inflows not only supported the dollar’s exchange rate but also escalated prices in [real estate markets](#), especially in major metropolitan areas.

But to imagine that massive trade deficits can persist forever is to live in a never-never land. Just as Peter Pan insisted that he would never grow up, most U.S. politicians and economists bought into the fantasy that perpetual trade deficits had become the new normal. This view ignored not only the laws of economics but also the political realities that ultimately contributed to Trump’s rise to power. The illusion that everything was hunky-dory up to now has been shattered.

How do tariffs work, and who will they impact? Also, is there anything behind Trump’s claim that tariffs will bring in enough revenue to “make America wealthy again?”

Tariffs raise the price of imports, forcing consumers to tighten their belts and encouraging them to buy domestically produced goods and services instead. Sometimes the import substitutes are readily available, but sometimes they are not, at least not until industries can be built or rebuilt to produce them. Either way, prices to consumers go up — in the first case by a little, in the second by a lot.

The Trump tariffs amount to a [\\$750 billion sales tax](#) on imports, as Diane Swonk, the chief economist for KPMG U.S., recently put it. Like sales taxes in general, the tariffs will hit the poor harder than the middle class, and the middle class harder

than the rich. Those living on tighter budgets have less of a cushion to protect themselves against the impacts of higher prices. They also typically devote a larger fraction of their household income to consumption rather than savings. In other words, the impact of across-the-board tariffs is regressive.

Trump and his squad of cheerleaders are telling Americans that the short-term pain of the tariffs will be [worth it](#) for the long-term gain. But tariffs alone, no matter how draconian, will not banish the U.S. trade deficit as long as foreign capital keeps flowing into the country unchecked. By propping up the dollar, the capital inflow will continue to enable the trade deficit. Simply relying on tariffs to curb spending on imports is like trying to plug the drain in a sink while leaving the faucet wide open. A serious adjustment policy would focus first and foremost on turning off the tap, by implementing controls on capital inflows. But so far, this has not been part of the Trump agenda.

As to revenue, tariffs can be a useful way for governments to fund themselves, particularly in low-income countries where other taxes are not yet well-developed. Tariffs were the main source of federal government revenue in the U.S. prior to the 20th century. But for tariffs to serve this revenue-raising purpose, the imports to which they are applied must continue; if imports shrink, the revenue shrinks along with them. In other words, there is a core tension between the goal of using tariffs as a source of revenue and using them as a spur to the substitution of imports by a revival of domestic manufacturing.

The idea that Trump's tariffs will "make America wealthy again" is a bit silly. As always, the policy will make some people richer and some poorer. We know that the price increases triggered by the tariffs will hit the poor and middle class hardest. The net effect depends on how the tariff revenue is used. If it were used to increase spending on things that benefit working people — like housing, education and health, or recycled directly to households as equal per-person dividends — that would help to offset the impact of the price increases. Instead, the Trump administration says it wants to cut income taxes, in which case the lion's share of the benefits will go into the pockets of the uppermost strata of the country's income pyramid. These people are already wealthy, and the shift from progressive income taxes to regressive tariffs will make them even wealthier. This is the reality thinly concealed by the smokescreen of making "the country" wealthy.

What's the logic behind imposing tariffs on poor countries that have little use for many of the goods produced by the U.S.?

There is a difference between the nation's trade deficit — the trade balance with the rest of the world — and the trade balance with any one country. Even if we had no overall trade deficit, there would be some countries from which we import more than we export in return, and some for which the reverse is true. Taking the trade balances with individual countries as the basis for tariff policy, as the Trump administration is doing, is a clumsy way of addressing the overall trade deficit.

There is a place for [smart tariffs](#) as part of a strategy to build a strong and resilient economy, alongside other tools of industrial policy such as channeling credit on attractive terms to key sectors. Smart tariffs differ from across-the-board tariffs in that they are targeted to counter predatory pricing and to penalize trading partners that violate labor rights and the right to a clean and safe environment. But the Trump tariffs are a far cry from being smart.

There is a difference, too, between putting tariffs on imports from countries with robust economies — here I would include China and the European Union — and imposing them on some of the poorest countries in the world, where economic setbacks come at the highest human cost. Trump's "reciprocal" [tariff hit-list](#) includes the sub-Saharan African nations of Mozambique, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have per capita incomes of less than US\$2 per day and contribute less than one-tenth of 1 percent to the U.S. trade deficit.

Why are markets crashing and how likely is it that Trump's sweeping tariffs will cause the U.S. and global economies to fall into a recession this year?

The turbulence that Trump's tariffs have unleashed in stock markets worldwide is not surprising. The escalating U.S. tariffs, coupled with the [retaliatory tariffs](#) they are provoking from other countries, threaten to seriously disrupt world trade and hence the world economy. In the absence of abrupt policy reversals, which cannot be ruled out, recession seems to be a likely outcome. In the worse-case scenario, we could see a depression unlike anything since the 1930s.

The European Union is the United States' largest trading partner. How should Europe respond to Trump's tariffs? Retaliate or capitulate?

If I were charting EU trade policy at this time, I would clearly regard the U.S. as an unreliable partner. Retaliatory measures, particularly if strategically focused on key sectors in the U.S. economy, might eventually encourage the Trump administration to relent. But such predictions must be hedged with a wide margin of uncertainty. What would make no sense would be for the EU and other countries to generalize the trade war beyond the U.S. by imposing across-the-board tariffs on each other as well. At the same time, however, the present turmoil dramatically exposes the dangers of over-reliance on foreign trade to meet a nation's essential needs, as did the global supply chain disruptions of the pandemic not long ago. We should not let the follies of Trump's tariffs overshadow the follies of the gung-ho globalization that preceded them and helped to set the stage for the current debacle. Whatever the outcome of the current crisis, in the future I think we will see moves toward greater self-reliance in key strategic sectors, like food, energy and pharmaceuticals, in many parts of the world. This will not be an entirely bad thing.

Trump reversed course in his global trade war by announcing a 90-day pause on "reciprocal tariffs" for most countries except for China. What's behind this pause, in your view?

This sequence of events — the shocking announcement, the resulting economic tailspin, followed by the pause — is part-and-parcel of the Trump administration's style of governance, sometimes called "[flooding the zone](#)." Feints, jabs, bombshells, abrupt reversals — all are part of the mix. But beneath the day-to-day churn, we see the systematic unfolding of a strategy to further concentrate wealth and power in the hands of ruling elites. In this respect, the combination of downsizing the state at home coupled with greater state intervention in international trade is not paradoxical: both serve the same remorseless goal.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/trumps-tariffs-buck-the-global-neoliberal-order-but-still-serve-the-1-percent/>

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