

Capitalism as Sociopathology

Book --> Charles Derber --> "Sociopathic society: a people's sociology of the United States"
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Book --> Stephanie McMillan --> "Capitalism Must Die"
(OCLC: 889560331, ISBN: 9780991604708 and 0991604709)

Book --> Derrick Jensen --> "Endgame" (2 volume set)
(OCLC: 64098342, ISBN: 158322730X 1583227245 9781583227305 9781583227244)

"Focus on climate change, capitalism, globalization, terrorism and the culture of hegemony" - Charles Derber

- = **Charles Derber** = -

- Do you think capitalism is a sociopathic system?
- Do you think it's possible to construct in your lifetime an economic system which is not sociopathic?
- The idea of sociopathy should be applied not only to individuals but to systems - economic and political systems - a system which is based on anti-social norms which prescribes and rewards sociopathic behavior.
- How can you be living in a sociopathic society if you're not a sociopath?
- Social norms are created by ruling elites in most societies and certainly in Capitalist society.
- Social norms can be anti-social in the sense that social norms are constructed by elites and therefore they're sort of rules and values which are reinforced in the larger society.
- The nature of a sociopathic system is that whether you're personally a sociopath or not, if you're living in this system, this system will essentially require or strongly incentivise you to act in a sociopathic way.

What he's talking about are the forms of behavior dictated by the society that will be carried out by you whether or not you're a sociopath. It's in the nature of the system to require behavior that may or may not be something that you would choose to do purely from your own psychological disposition. = The systemic social political characteristics of a sociopathic system.

How Sociopathy Operates

1. - The first idea in capitalism is that only individuals exist. That is the fundamental reality, only individuals and aggregates of individuals exist. There is no community. To be altruistic is to be immoral.

- The purpose of the individual is to pursue self interest on the market. That is the moral mission of the individual.

- This pursuit of self interest is the only good.

- Ann Rand -> “If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of altruism that men have to reject.” = If you act unselfishly, you are acting immorally. (A core Rand position.)

- Adam Smith, basically the founder of capitalist theology, embraced the idea that in society the well being of people will occur only if people act out of self interest.

2. The way that capitalist competition operates is if you don't act sociopathically towards your workers, towards consumers, toward your competitive rivals in the market, you will go under. It doesn't matter if you're a nice person, not a nice person or somewhere in between. The competitive structure of capitalism requires that you act in a way that is going to be brutal and bullying and violent toward your workers, consumers, etc.

3. The violence towards nature - Capitalism is inherently violent, moves toward ecocide, is going to destroy the environment. Why? Because there is only the concept of the individual, there is no concept of the commons. The commons does not exist in capitalism. (Which is why they are trying to privatize everything in the commons.) The head of the Chamber of Commerce said that every bit of air, water, natural resources should be privately owned. That is the only concept that works in a capitalist model. Capitalism drives climate change for at least four reasons:

1. It has no values other than profit. It will treat the earth as a commodity to be exploited for profit.

2. It externalizes environmental costs; meaning that these costs are not registering on the market. The market is blind to the environmental costs.

3. It requires unfettered growth.

4. It requires fetishised consumption. Consumption is the source of happiness and it kind of turns into an object of religion.

4. Militarism - Capitalism, ecocide and militarism are all connected. Why does capitalism drive sociopathic warfare? It's part of the competitive process. Capitalism is an expansive system. If you're going to beat the competition, you have to expand very often. You do that through trade, but very often you have to do that through militarism. Every leading capitalist order - not every capitalist country, because capitalism produces hegemony, dominate capitalist countries that manage the global capitalist order. The United States has that role today. We have far more military power because we are playing that role of hegemonic military force for the global capitalist system.

5. Capitalism is by its nature profoundly hierarchical and divided between people who own wealth and property and people who don't. That is the definition of capitalism - a division between two tiers of people. **Thomas Piketty**, a very mainstream economist, wrote a book called “**Capital in the twenty-first century**” (OCLC: 858914389, ISBN: 9780674430006 067443000X 9780674369542 0674369548) which shows that over 300 years and in 25 countries that capitalism with only one exception, has led to greater and greater polarization of wealth. He's predicting that we're moving into a 21st century where almost

certainly that the 0.1 percent of the richest one percent own and control 90% of the financial assets of the country.

Right now, the one percent owns about 50% of the wealth of the country. Fifty percent of the country has no wealth at all. Piketty writes, "The more perfect the market in the economist sense, the more likely inequality will get worse and worse." He's predicting a return to a pre-capitalist feudal era of nobility where their inherited wealth dominates the economy. Inherited wealth = cast ... we're moving from a class system back to a cast system where people are locked into a permanent economic station and cannot move. (doing away with the Estate Tax A.K.A. "Death Tax" - where the rich don't have to pay a tax on their wealth upon their death.)

- Another terrible thing about capitalism is because it produces things not on the basis of their value to people, but in terms of the profit that they can deliver, we are producing a glut of totally destructive products. America is full of products we don't need and are an assault on the planet. Junk food, tobacco, guns and weapons, toxic wall street instruments, oil, etc. We are glutting the planet with products which are sociopathic. They are destroying the social order, destroying the natural order.

- We have one real deficit that matters - a deficit of public goods. There is no concept of public goods in capitalism. Public goods are those created through the commons and through the state. In capitalism there is no value that can be created outside of private property. So the government and the community is perceived as incapable of constructing anything of value. What are public goods? - Education, healthcare, conversation, community, love, public transportation, etc. These are public goods. These are the basis of a good society.

There is plenty of room for production and growth in our society. We just have to eliminate this enormous growth of sociopathic products and move toward creating public goods which are consistent with the sustainability of the planet and with our well being and happiness. We live in a society where we don't even talk about the deficit of public goods because there is no concept of public goods. John Kenneth Galbraith noticed this when he said, "We live in an atmosphere of private opulence and public squalor" and the private goods have full sway. That's the way capitalism inherently works.

6. Politics - Sociopathic politics - democracy is fictive. It's a fiction. This idea goes back to Marx. The government is created to be the managing committee of the capitalist class. Because wealth is so concentrated in the United States, the state is simply a fig leaf for the organization of wall street, for the mission of wall street. The large corporations like Exxon, the coal companies and all of these sociopathic institutions which operate with the help and the subsidy of the state. We saw this happen with the bail out of the banks. We have procedures of voting. Capitalism is very, very clever about its way of maintaining the cosmetics of a democratic order while following the autocracy of a quite brutal sociopathic capitalist system.

"Corpocracy" - the word brings together corporations and democracy because it acts in the language of democracy and the people vote but whether you vote for Bush or Bush-lite you're going to be carrying out a corporate capitalist agenda. In the last election, 20% of

the people voted. People are just opting-out because they have some sense of the fiction of democracy. The sociopathy of capitalism is carried out by a large degree by the state, and it does so in the name of the people. The only way we can change the system is by changing the people's understanding of how politics in the capitalist system operates. Louis Brandeis, associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1916 to 1939, said, "We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few but we can't have both."

- = **Stephanie McMillan** = -

She said that Charles Derber did a very good job describing a lot of the tendencies and characteristics of capitalism. Stephanie is going to discuss the structural aspects of capitalism.

- We all know that capitalism is killing the planet. In order to stop it, we can't just keep resisting its effects. The solutions are not to be found within its framework and they are even less to be found at the individual level. We have very little power as individual consumers. They would like us to think that we do, but we can't buy or refrain from buying our way out of this. It is a social system (a class system) that can only be addressed at the level of collective organized class struggle. We need to understand capital, how it works, the mechanisms that keep it in place and that are at the core of its functioning.

- Capitalism is a mode of production based on the exploitation of labor and the generation of surplus value. This means that workers are paid a certain amount of wages for a day's work, but what the workers produce is worth more than that. The extra value is called surplus value and the capitalist just steals it. This is what all profit is based on. This is what private property is all about. It's considered normal for the social means of production, the factories, land, and everything that produces all the things that we all use, that these are privately owned - and for those owners to simply take whatever is produced in them or within them.

- Capitalism is not just an economic process but it is the whole way that our society is arranged. It is an ensemble or matrix of social relations. These comprise three main fields: the economic, political and Ideological. The economic field is determinate. Profit is the point and everything else is set up to solidify the relations of production that keep it coming. Capitalist ideology centered on competition and individualism is designed to make the way we live seem normal and inevitable. It is forced on us by its institutions - school, the church, the nuclear family, media, and culture. Why would we need advertising for example, if they didn't need to convince us to participate. Ideological domination is unrelenting conditioning and indoctrination to naturalize capitalism, to make us compliant, passive, greedy and self centered. To make us identify with it instead of understanding it as the enemy that it really is.

Political domination, the job of the state, has two main goals. The first, performed by the government and its laws is to regulate the relations within and between classes, to keep the flow of capital smooth and free of obstacles. The second is for when ideological domination fails, when we can no longer accept living this way, the state turns to coercion through terrorism. This function is performed by the states armed forces - its military and

police. If we don't comply, that is when the guns come out. We saw that with the occupy movement.

The entire purpose of this setup is economic. The accumulation of wealth by a small minority of people, those who own the means of production, mainly the factories, tools and land. This ownership was not ordained by a god, nor is it because capitalists are smarter or work harder than everyone else and earned that right, it is because they took it. They started with trading, which many societies considered and understood as thievery since it's the exchange of unequal values. This is still the way that mercantile capitalists accumulate wealth. They continued with land theft backed up by war and genocide, which is still going on today as we all know.

Stephanie just returned from Haiti where she had seen huge areas of land that had been stolen from small farmers and townspeople, their houses bulldozed over without warning so that the government could bring in foreign investors to build industrial parks and tourist resorts. They justified this by saying that the people would get jobs. They would be able to work in the new factories and hotels. This is the standard way that capitalists have been getting their work force for the past 250 years. The fundamental contradiction of capitalism, reproducing it and driving it forward is capital versus labor and the production of surplus value for private accumulation.

This process is what produces class divisions, class domination and class struggle. Classes are groups of people defined by their role in social production. There are those who own and control it and those are usually not the same people who use it, who are the ones exploited in the process. Besides exploitation capitalism also uses oppressive practices, like racism and patriarchy and has the terrible effects of ecocide and war, which we all have to deal with. It's a social system that dominates all of social life and all the dominated classes and social groups struggle against this in their own ways but the core of it is embodied in the struggle of workers against workers against exploitation.

Workers are the ones who face capital in the daily struggle for existence, in an inherently antagonistic relationship. They're the ones able to offer an alternative to capitalism, other classes can resist but can't break the framework. If we are to actually destroy capitalism, the working class needs to lead all the dominated classes in a revolution to overthrow the capitalist class. We are all social agents born into a structure that we didn't create. We're inserted into the existing relations of production funneled into particular social slots serving the various requirements of capital.

Capital confines our relationships within a framework of relations between things and it treats living beings including humans as objects. It has no moral or ethical framework because it's not alive. However, it does have emotional drives and imperatives of its own. Its only goal is self expansion and profit. Even capitalists are merely stewards of capital and have no control over it. If they have an attack of conscience and attempt to moderate it then they are replaced. Sociopaths are drawn to this role, in fact a higher percentage are found in this class than in the general population. Because to serve capital in this way requires a lack or total suppression of empathy.

Capital has no subjectivity and it doesn't recognize it in others. But it is animate, through

and embodied in its representatives. It imbues them with its own sociopathy. Surplus value is generated only in industrial production when labor power is exploited and the process of converting raw materials, otherwise known as the living world, into commodities and this is why its ecocidal. Other forms of capital expansion, such as mercantile and finance create inflated bubbles of fictitious value through unequal trading and speculation. All that must be based on the production of physical goods. For example, China builds 12 to 24 ghost cities every year, mile after mile of malls with no businesses in them and houses with no people living in them. Those empty buildings serve as repositories for capital investment. Objects to hold value and to speculate on. Surplus value must be reinvested as new capital or it will degrade. It will lose value.

Capital will do whatever it takes to prevent its own devaluation including all forms of brutal oppression, endless wars, total disregard for the needs of any living beings, stripping us of subjectivity and turning us into functions for its own reproduction, even up to the annihilation of all life on earth. This would of course mean its own destruction as well. Marx understood this when he said that class struggle will lead to either the overthrow of capitalism and the elimination of class domination in general or the common ruin of contending classes.

We may still have this choice to make but that window is closing. We each need to make our choice now and do the work required of us in this very intense and pivotal historical period. The work of understanding the structural crisis and vulnerabilities of the system that we're facing plus the work of organizing our forces so that we can become strong enough to weaken and ultimately destroy it.

- = **Derrick Jensen** = -

He said that he and Stephanie McMillan had written some books together and that they were discussing whether capitalism creates sociopathological behavior or whether it took sociopaths to create a rationalization for their preexisting issues, to create a system that rewards this terrible behavior. He thinks that the truth is that they are mutually reinforcing, that once you get a system in place that starts creating sociopaths then they will create additional rationalizations for their sociopathological behavior and additional ways to reward themselves. Especially when those in power are the ones who are making the rules for those in power, then of course they are going to codify their preexisting issues.

Take Jimi Hendrix for example. No matter how talented he was, if he had been playing his music in the 1920's he would not have found an audience. You have to have a receptive audience in order for something to become popular. So if you have a purely functioning community in the first place and someone says, "Hey, I got this great idea (which is everyone acting selfishly) that will create a greater good for our entire community," they will say you are nuts. The only way you can have people say, "Wow! That's a great idea!" is if they are primed for it.

- = **Discussion of the Topic** = -

We are battling a deeply embedded myth in our society that the solution to climate change is more capitalism, when it has been capitalism that is responsible for most of the climate change.

There is really no way to reform or fix capitalism. It's not a system that has gone to far or has run off the rails. The rails are constructed that way. The whole system was created that way. It's not something that can be restrained or reformed. It's not broken. It is doing exactly what has been predicted for the last 200 years. The accumulation of capital is an inevitable process. The concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. The monopolization of production, that's all how capitalism works. The only way that it can be gotten rid of is if we organize and become a powerful social force, more powerful than the likes, wealth and arms of capitalism - our enemy. We have to first recognize it as our enemy. A lot of people don't because we are very ideologically dominated and we have been conditioned for generations to accept this as normal. The whole propaganda that there is no alternative, everything else has failed - nothing else will work, this is our only choice - we have to break out of that.

Yes, there have been attempts at other systems that have failed, but if these were babies trying to learn how to walk, if they fall down are we going to say, this baby is never going to grow up and learn how to walk? We have to learn from the mistakes of people who have tried different things, modify that according to our current situation and collectively figure out a different way to live. We evolved as collective beings. We are not naturally like this idea of capitalism.

This capitalist society has turned us into unsocial creatures but humans are inherently social creatures, we are cooperative. This is our nature. We have to organize and collectively build a mass movement that is strong enough, that is lead by a politicized revolutionary class and overthrow them. Take over the political system, get rid of it and institute our own which will be built up in the process of the revolutionary struggle. We need to take over the means of production and instead of profit, convert it into human needs that are inline with the requirements of the natural world. That is not an impossible dream.

This is something that we would naturally do if we were not being prevented by a class of people who controls everything and enforces that control with their armed might. If we can become organized enough to break through their control over us and control society ourselves, we can do a lot better. It's not going to be utopia of course, there will be a lot to work through in the process and afterword, a lot of conflict among the people. But that's not an antagonistic conflict, we can work it out. The real antagonism is between all of us and those few at the top who are preventing a decent society from coming into being and who are killing us all. (global warming)

The discussion we are having here is not a conversation that is on the plate in the United States. How often you seen in the *New York Times* or *CNN* or even *MSNBC*, any of the mainstream media, a conversation about whether we should have or get rid of capitalism? You are seen as crazy if you raise this question. The idea is that capitalism is the only good way out is the only possible way of organizing society. The ideological forces of control have consolidated around this idea and it's only in very small niches of society where this kind of question would get on the table without getting laughed onto the floor.

We had an election where very right-wing groups took over not just Washington but also

most of the statehouses and many local state areas. On the other hand people are not paying attention to politics, so that was taken over with about a billion dollars of Koch brothers and related money and a very small percentage of people coming out to vote. When you actually question people about what they believe, it turns out that they believe capitalism is putting money into Washington and into political processes that are pretty sociopathic. They are pissed off about the bailing out of the banks. They believe that people who work at McDonald's or in nursing homes deserve a living wage, they believe that unions are good things and that community is important, they believe in the essential need to protect the environment.

Public opinion polls since through the Reagan era have found these statistics. The contradiction that we are dealing with is that on one hand you can't even talk about what we are talking about here. Capitalism is the only reality that the ideological apparatus of the country will accept as an acceptable dialogue and in a sense there is a resonance to that. There are not even in San Francisco, masses of people who are saying, "We want to talk about class revolution or about capitalism." On the other hand, when you actually carefully interrogate people about what it is they believe on real issues, they want health, they want good education for their kids, they want to save the environment for future generations.

There is a counter-resonance, a counter-culture, but it operates under the formal mechanism of politics which has become spectacle and money driven. Somehow, the practice of resistance and social change has to be sort of diving under the surface of that resonant controlling ideology and finding the way to speak to the parts of peoples lives that are telling them everything is wrong in this society and that we need drastic change. So we have to be really smart, in an emotional way, we have to find a way to viscerally hook into the deep discontents that people are experiencing about their lives, about their communities, about their kids prospects, about their own prospects, they know they are the subject of abuse.

It's a little bit like an abused child. You take an abused child and you try to pull them away from their parents, they will run to the parent that has been kicking them and hold onto their knees and say don't take me away. The body politic in the United States is operating a little bit like that. They know that they are being abused and they are holding on for dear life to the abuser. What a resistance movement has to do is provide a source of safety and community that will allow people to realize they can let go of that and actually get rid of it because its been destroying their lives. Harriet Tubman said she freed hundreds of slaves, but she could have freed hundreds more if they had only known they were slaves. It's the same thing with capitalism.

What happens every time a river floods is there is short term habitat loss and long term habitat gain. Why do we stay in bad relationships? We are afraid of the short term loss for the long term gain. Why do we stay in bad jobs? We are afraid of the short term loss for the long term gain. He is not in any way trying to dismiss the terror involved in the collapse of any system which is completely dreadful, but that is one of the biggest things that is holding us all back is a very real prospective of terrible short term loss in exchange for the very obvious long term gain that will be gained by getting rid of capitalism. This is a huge, very real barrier that we all face.