

ZEYNEP TUFEKCI'S TWO BLIND SPOTS CROSS AT DOGE

Zeynep Tufekci has a column at NYT scolding thousands of people on social media for taking glee in the murder of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson.

I don't care one way or another for the scold. I care about how she makes a remarkable claim and then uses it to engage in political nihilism.

Tufekci claims that she can't remember any murder being so openly celebrated in the US.

I've been studying social media for a long time, and I can't think of any other incident when a murder in this country has been so openly celebrated.

From there, Tufekci likens this moment to the Gilded Age, where social upheaval led to exploitation and political violence.

The Gilded Age, the tumultuous period between roughly 1870 and 1900, was also a time of rapid technological change, of mass immigration, of spectacular wealth and enormous inequality. The era got its name from a Mark Twain novel: gilded, rather than golden, to signify a thin, shiny surface layer. Below it lay the corruption and greed that engulfed the country after the Civil War.

The era survives in the public imagination through still-resonant names, including J.P. Morgan, John Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie and Cornelius Vanderbilt; through their mansions, which now greet awe-struck tourists; and through TV shows with extravagant interiors and lavish gowns. Less well remembered is the brutality that underlay that wealth – the tens of

thousands of workers, by some calculations, who lost their lives to industrial accidents, or the bloody repercussions they met when they tried to organize for better working conditions.

Also less well remembered is the intensity of political violence that erupted. The vast inequities of the era fueled political movements that targeted corporate titans, politicians, judges and others for violence.

But she suggests that rather than the reform that arose out of the Gilded Age, this moment will stumble because “the will among politicians to push for broad public solutions appears to have all but vanished.”

The turbulence and violence of the Gilded Age eventually gave way to comprehensive social reform. The nation built a social safety net, expanded public education and erected regulations and infrastructure that greatly improved the health and well-being of all Americans.

Those reforms weren’t perfect, and they weren’t the only reason the violence eventually receded (though never entirely disappeared), but they moved us forward.

The concentration of extreme wealth in the United States has recently surpassed that of the Gilded Age. And the will among politicians to push for broad public solutions appears to have all but vanished. I fear that instead of an era of reform, the response to this act of violence and to the widespread rage it has ushered into view will be limited to another round of retreat by the wealthiest.

So, unprecedented glee at a murder. And Tufekci's judgment that there's simply not the political will there was in the early 20th Century.

As a threshold matter, I find her claim that this is a unique moment of glee to be ... forgetful. Just two years ago, after all, Donald Trump and Elon Musk – whose platform has encouraged such mob celebrations – both led their mob in vicious jokes about Paul Pelosi's near-murder.

Indeed, Trump used attacks on Paul Pelosi at least twice in his campaign – most recently, campaigning with some cops in September.

How do you forget that the richest man in the world and the President-elect have engaged in just such celebration of political violence (and that's before he pardons seditionists)? Donald Trump got elected by celebrating political violence.

And then he proceeded to install at least 11 billionaires, ready to start looting government.

Which is where Tufekci's failure to find any will to push for systematic solutions gets curious. After all, Lina Khan's efforts to rein in monopolies played a role in last year's election. WaPo's coverage of all the billionaires Trump installed quotes Josh Hawley along with Elizabeth Warren and Noah Bookbinder.

Trump's team of rivals stands in stark contrast with President Joe Biden's Cabinet, which had a combined net worth of \$118 million in the first year of his presidency, according to Forbes. Trump's picks have not yet released their financial disclosures, but his 2025 Cabinet is likely to be even richer than the first Trump Cabinet, which had a combined net worth of \$6.2 billion.

[snip]

Trump's selections may be more inclined

to look out for the interests of their own businesses and their fellow billionaires than for working-class voters, said Noah Bookbinder, president of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

"It is hard to see how a Cabinet made up largely of the very, very wealthiest of Americans is going to have an understanding of what the needs of regular Americans are," he said.

[snip]

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Missouri) expressed concern about the business backgrounds of some of Trump's picks in an interview with Politico on Tuesday.

"All these Treasury secretaries, my point is, always end up being sort of Wall Street guys. Do I think that's a great trend? Not really," Hawley said.

[snip]

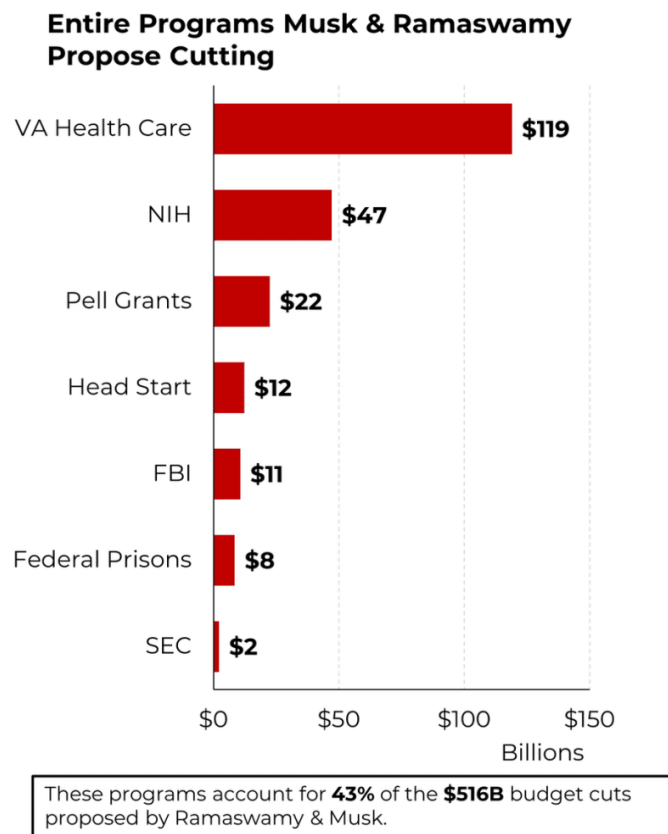
Democrats have roundly criticized Trump's choices. The Democratic Party on Tuesday put out a news release that said Trump was "stacking his Cabinet with out of touch billionaires." Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) told The Washington Post that the choices suggest Trump's presidency will "be one giveaway after another for the wealthy and well-connected."

"He's nominating his 'rich-as-hell' buddies to run every facet of our economy, corrupting our government at the expense of ordinary Americans," she said.

(NYT's version of the same story credulously repeats the Tech Bros' transparently bullshit claim that "A core goal of Mr. Musk and the Silicon Valley set has been to improve the efficiency of government services.")

And even beyond Khan's work, the Biden Administration took efforts to reverse the kind of concentration that made Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg rich. They've even taken action against ... United Healthcare.

The richest man in the world is about to come for VA Health Care and once that fails to make way for new tax cuts, Medicare.



No one knows where this moment of rage will go. The oligarchs have the means to exercise the power of the state against those complaining that Trump's billionaires plan to use bullshit claims about efficiency to make things far worse.

But the people who brought us to this moment where mobs take glee at political violence are about to loot the government.

And I'm pretty sure Senator Warren will be ready at hand to explain what is going down.