



From the Editors

AS A SERIES OF SEVERE WINTER STORMS battered most of the United States in mid-February, over 75 percent of the country was covered in snow. It was the people of the state of Texas whose struggles shocked the world¹ as the lights went out for days on more than 4.5 million homes and businesses.² The “largest forced blackout in U.S. history” left an estimated fifteen million people in the dark and without heat in unprecedented cold temperatures.³ Some people froze to death in their living rooms and cars; others watched their walls and roofs collapse as frozen water pipes burst.⁴ Over thirteen million Texans had to boil their drinking water.⁵

Amid this suffering, corporations rejoiced at “hitting the jackpot.”⁶ How could a state, which enters 2021 as the world’s ninth largest economy, leave its residents to die in the cold?⁷ Energy is so deregulated in Texas that each stage of the electricity grid functions in an open market: one set of companies produces power, transmission companies transport the power, and retail providers sell it to residents and businesses. Despite their awareness of the grid’s vulnerabilities for at least a decade, Texas officials prioritized the short-term profits of electricity providers over the well-being and safety of 12.6 million customers, failing to protect the system against extreme weather.⁸

Naomi Klein, who introduced the concept of “disaster capitalism,” has explained that “Texans are living through the collapse of a 40-year experiment in free-market fundamentalism.”⁹ Corporations and their allies in government mobilize disasters to introduce free-market policies and enrich elites. Thus, the Texas energy market is not simply designed to “protect investors and harm consumers in each instance of disaster; it is a market that’s tailor-made to *induce* disasters.”¹⁰ As the price of electricity fluctuates widely over short periods of time based on small changes in supply, “providing *less* power generates *more* money.”¹¹

Crucial as disaster capitalism and unbridled corporate greed are to fathoming the heightened precarity of everyday life, understanding Texas—and Palestine—requires a temporality that transcends the lifespan of neoliberal hegemony. The story is longer and deeper than the last forty years of the social contract’s demise in the United States; it is inextricable from the processes of settler colonialism. In this context, Texas and Palestine are in deep conversation, and Texas may have more to teach us about Palestine than we imagine.

Spaniards began settling what is now Texas beginning in the 1690s. Native peoples, including Apaches, Wichitas, and Comanches, retained control of their lands until Spanish colonial power broke their hold in the eighteenth century.¹² They continued to lose land and freedom in the nineteenth century as Mexico opened its northern territories to Anglo-American settlers who insisted on maintaining slavery despite its illegality in Mexico.¹³ The Republic of Texas was born of the battle over slavery between abolitionists and Anglo-American settlers who took Texas into the Union as a slaveholding state. Thereafter, the Texas Rangers, local law enforcement, and Anglo-American citizens continued to settle south and west Texas using state policing built on the scaffolding of white supremacy.¹⁴ The descendants of dispossessed Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans suffered most intensely from the collapse of the Texas electrical system this last February. They are also the ones who have borne the brunt

of the Covid-19 pandemic: Texas has registered the second highest number of cases in any state, over 2.7 million, and the third highest number of deaths, at forty-five thousand. At this writing, it is fifth from the bottom of all fifty U.S. states in vaccinations.

Like Texas, Palestine is the site of a complex, unique, and specific form of settler colonialism whose impact is part of an enduring structure. This structure has taken various forms under different regimes, with their complexities and specificities being perhaps as crucial as their similarities. After four centuries, it may be easier to forget this history in Texas than in the contemporary archipelago of dispersion that is Palestine. Whether unchained neoliberal disaster capitalism built on the foundations of settler colonialism and enslavement, or an apartheid regime that dictates how much electricity two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip will be deprived of, the enduring structures of settler colonialism shape who lives and dies when disaster strikes.

Over half of Israelis have been fully or partially vaccinated. Yet Israel continues to actively deny five million Palestinians under occupation access to vaccines, an obligation incumbent upon it under the Fourth Geneva Convention. As a result, Israeli Jewish settlers illegally occupying Palestinian lands enjoy widespread inoculation, while Palestinians are left waiting. There are few better illustrations of Israel's hierarchical structure of discrimination than the current conditions of vaccination and medical apartheid.

The suffering this system has produced, and Israel's impunity in the process, are not contingent on the positions of one or other U.S. political party. The Biden administration's commitment to imperialism has already left its mark on Palestine and the Middle East. To date, this record includes the bombing of Syria; maintenance of Trump-imposed sanctions on Iran; condemnation of the International Criminal Court's decision to probe Israeli war crimes; opposition to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement; and, most recently, the administration's "enthusiastic support" for the International Holocaust Remembrance Association's definition of anti-Semitism.¹⁵ The latter positions any critique of Israel—indeed any engagement with the Palestinian past, present, or future—as "anti-Semitic." If this last year of pandemic catastrophe has taught us anything, it is that we have to think together about shared, if differentiated, conditions of precarity, disenfranchisement, and dispossession.

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Endnotes

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