

Quinn Slobodian's work has risen to public prominence in the last eight years, especially after the publication of *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (2018). His books have been translated into 10 languages, and alongside his role as Professor of International History at the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University, he is currently a Guggenheim Fellow for 2025–2026. *Project Syndicate* put him on a list of 30 Forward Thinkers and *Prospect* named him one of the World's 25 Top Thinkers. In this interview, Slobodian discusses the importance of the late 1990s anti-globalisation movement in his intellectual formation, and he reflects on the need to re-historicise the 1990s as not simply a period of unfettered globalisation, an argument he develops in *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (2021). The interview then turns to his understanding and use of the term 'neoliberalism', and how we can find the fingerprints of the contemporary far right in the history of neoliberalism, as illustrated in his new book, *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (2025).

# The Twilight of Progressive Neoliberalism

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QUINN SLOBODIAN

INTERVIEW BY NEIL VALLELLY

**Neil Vallelly (NV):** In the Acknowledgements of *Globalists* you write that the book was a ‘long simmering product of the Seattle protest against the World Trade Organisation in 1999’.<sup>1</sup> I wonder if we could start there, and if you could elaborate more on the significance of those anti-globalisation protests and how they came to shape your work.

**Quinn Slobodian (QS):** I grew up in different parts of the world, in rural British Columbia, going to a First Nations reserve school, then in southern Africa, and also in Vanuatu in the South Pacific, so I had a pretty open and cosmopolitan mindset, but I didn’t really have a sense of political contestation or struggle in my own upbringing. My parents were Bahá’í and that’s what drove them around the world. There was a sense of being a non-national citizen and a globalist, actually. The interesting thing about 1999 was the generational feeling of political action amongst my liberal arts college peers, where many people felt motivated to go up to Seattle and protest for different reasons, such as concerns about social justice, environmental damage, or just an anti-authoritarian sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo. It

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<sup>1</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 363.

politicised me, not in the sense that I was part of it, but by seeing other people politicised. The Iraq War would affect me directly a few years later and I was in the streets as part of that movement against the war.

With the war on terror, the idea of geopolitics, civilisational crusading, and struggles against Islamophobia took centre-stage. But protests against economic globalisation remained something like a childhood memory that niggled at the back of my mind, and I always wanted to go back to ask whether we had missed a moment before 9/11 when there was both a broad-based opposition to the existing form of global governance, and a sense that there might have been a better alternative. In a roundabout way, Globalists was a way of me returning to that memory.

**NV:** It's especially interesting to think about the end of the nineties and how we conceptualised that moment. In *Crack-Up Capitalism*, you note that a narrative develops in the 1990s around globalisation that sees it as the collapsing of boundaries and the smoothing of global space, but you point out that there's an alternative timeline there, if you look closely, one that was marked as much by fragmentation as by unity. You argue that '[g]lobalisation has both centripetal and centrifugal force. It binds us together while it tears us apart'.<sup>2</sup> Do you think we're at a point now where we need to re-historicise the 1990s? What might a revisionist history of the 1990s look like today?

**QS:** It's funny, because if you think about when the heavy revisionism of the 1960s took place – when the sixties really became the topic of widespread mainstream discussion – it was in the nineties. There was a delayed reckoning with 1968 and its associated social movements that became salient in the nineties, partly because Bill Clinton himself was more or less of that generation, and in Germany, the head of the Greens and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was also a child of the sixties. Here we are now, 30 years after the nineties, and there's nothing overtly similar taking

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2 Quinn Slobodian, *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (Metropolitan Books, 2023), 7.

place. There aren't endless television programmes about the meaning of the nineties and people don't refer to themselves as ninety-niners because they were in Seattle, Genoa, or Gothenburg, even though, if you are a person in your mid-forties as I am, almost everyone who's on the left in academia was formed by that moment of alter-globalisation.

There is a curious absence of confrontation with the legacy of that period. My last three books could be seen all as attempts to re-historicise the nineties. They ask: what was the World Trade Organisation (WTO) intellectually? What were these forms of fragmentation that existed alongside integration in the 1990s? In my most recent book, *Hayek's Bastards*, I look at political developments beyond post-Cold War triumphalism – things that foreshadow the world that we're in now.<sup>3</sup> It would have been common sense in the nineties to make the sixties the subject of history. I'm trying to make it common sense that the nineties are the field of reinterpretation now.

**NV:** I agree. In the current conjuncture, it's essential to start looking back at the nineties and think about the narrative we developed about where we were heading in that period, because that narrative is very different from the position we find ourselves in now.

**QS:** That's a question I've been asking myself recently, partially because I'm reviewing a book about sanctions called *Chokepoints*, and the way I want to start the review is to say something like: when did America go on the defensive?<sup>4</sup> The peculiarity of the nineties is the uncontested nature of American hegemony, where the US felt it could deign to subscribe to international economic law. Since 2008, at the latest, the US has gone on the defensive against a rising China and other countries. That sublime point of American unipolarity, which I think we might have thought was open-ended, turned out to be short-lived and circumscribed. It now seems impossible to imagine everyone bowing down to the natural nature

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3 See Quinn Slobodian, *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (Zone Books, 2025).

4 See Edward Fishman, *Chokepoints: American Power in the Age of Economic Warfare* (Portfolio, 2025).

of globalisation and depoliticising all matters of trade and financial flows because they've been so aggressively turned back into geoeconomics and great power conflict.

**NV:** That allows me to turn to think about your work on neoliberalism. Obviously, Aotearoa New Zealand went through radical neoliberal transformations in the mid 1980s, but I find the understanding of neoliberalism as a term is quite restricted in the literature on Aotearoa New Zealand. On the left, there seems to be an over-reliance on the David Harvey conceptualisation of neoliberalism, which I find an overly simplified understanding.<sup>5</sup> Could you discuss how you work with the term 'neoliberalism'?

**QS:** The way that I use the term is to track it with a particular intellectual movement that emerged in the 1930s and that called itself 'neoliberalism' for a while. That movement was trying to figure out how to, in their words, renovate liberalism for a time of mass democracy and, eventually, the end of empire. The assumption was that there would be no return to a night-watchman state, or a *laissez-faire* model, but that the state would need to be repurposed and refashioned to protect competition and private property, especially with the more robust challenges it might face going forward, especially given universal suffrage. That debate transformed from decade to decade with the range of challenges that capitalist stability faced, from Keynesians and anti-colonial movements to environmentalists and demands for racial restitution and gender equality. Following the discussions of intellectuals – which were also platformed and amplified through a wide-ranging global network of think-tanks and affiliated academic institutions – you can see how ideas were transformed into policy in different ways and places, depending on context and a terrain of components that neoliberals faced. Looking at it this way, there's no pure doctrine of neoliberalism; it's always mutating based on circumstance. But there is a pretty consistent cohort of thinkers that one could place into the neoliberal camp, and it

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5 See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

doesn't dissolve entirely into an academic curse word, or a vague catchall category synonymous with 'capitalist'.

My approach differs from Harvey's usage of the term, mostly insofar as, being a self-understood materialist of the highest order, he tends to attribute capital itself with an autonomous agent function. Capitalism creates crises through its own actions but then capital also solves those crises through new actions. The relative autonomy of that economic force is relied on as a kind of *deus ex machina* to explain why things happened at different times. But, in particular, Harvey is focused on the 1970s as a time when the share of profits was balanced back from labour to management through aggressive attacks on unions and, eventually, outsourcing, privatisation, and liberalisation, which thus undercut the traditional post-war Fordist compact between labour and capital. It's a coherent and persuasive story on its own terms, but it sometimes relies on a certain functionalist logic that is quite common in sociology and geography. It works for some people, but for me, I tend to appreciate less passive tense explanations for things and focus more on people, faces, names, and institutions.

**NV:** A problem I often find with the Harvey approach, and I think your work functions as an important corrective, is that in giving capital, as you say, this autonomous agency it tends to miss the fact that the capitalist class itself is not particularly unified in many ways, which is especially true in the context of neoliberalism. While there's certainly been a fragmentation of working classes since the 1970s, there's also been a fragmentation of the capitalist classes that overly materialist readings tend to miss.

**QS:** There's a divergence between certain pure ideas of how capitalism works and the often much muckier compromises and halfway realist positions that bosses and investors take. I find it useful to keep the two separate, and talk about neoliberalism in some kind of ideal typical form that is being envisioned and rolled out, and then explore the actions of the private actors in a given state, pursuing their own strategies of accumulation. It gives you plenty to work with; it's an endlessly interesting kaleidoscope.

**NV:** When I interviewed Wendy Brown in the last issue of *Counterfutures*, she made a point around charges of idealism in the study of the intellectual history of neoliberalism. She said: ‘There were some cracked heads with unions and certain forms of resistance, but [neoliberalism] was a very significant revolutionary force that was powered by ideas. There’s no doubt about that. We can still be Marxists and say that it was powered by ideas. It emerged out of a set of material, historical conditions, and it was powered by ideas’.<sup>6</sup> I know your approach differs significantly to Brown’s, but how do you deal with the charge of idealism when it’s thrown at the intellectual history of neoliberalism?

**QS:** I wouldn’t agree with Brown’s phrasing. I don’t understand what the notion of being ‘powered by ideas’ means. To me, that doesn’t scan as a statement because ideas at minimum require media through which to move. They do not act autonomously in the world any more than capital does. I don’t see a need to swing wildly from the autonomy of capital to the autonomy of ideas – far from it. I would say that what we call the history of neoliberalism is the description of moments where a set of ideas align with a set of material interests sufficiently enough that they complement one another and give each other a new form. The WTO is a perfect example. It did not come to exist because of the power of belief of a small number of Hayekians. It came to exist because the material interests of the US, at a moment of perceived hegemony, were organised into a language that resembled the Hayekian principles of international economic lawyers. I think that ideas have their capacity to persuade in a set of conditions where those ideas become useful for enough people in positions of influence, and the ideas themselves tend to transform based on the desire of the people articulating them and their proximity to power.

A case in point is something like the Heritage Foundation, which has been writing something periodically called ‘The Mandate for Leadership’ since 1980, with the first one for the Reagan administration. The most

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6 Wendy Brown, ‘Towards a Counter-Nihilistic Politics’, interview by Neil Vallely, *Counterfutures* 16 (2024), 78.

recent one in 2024 was for Trump, and it was more commonly known as ‘Project 2025’. That is an interesting document, not because it is a piece of neoliberal doctrine, but because it’s a frozen artifact of the middle ground between the Heritage Foundation perceiving what it sees as the desires of the MAGA coalition, and those material interests arrayed behind it, and the project that they could realistically accomplish.

There’s always a project of triangulation happening between people articulating neoliberal doctrine, who are thinking strategically about what will be resonant for listeners, audiences, and players at any given moment, and then the crafting and fashioning of their message accordingly. It’s not a one-way process of transmission whereby a certain orthodoxy is downloaded onto a society or an electorate. It’s much more dialogic than that. It’s more based on tactical alliances that corrupt the alloy of pure market fundamentalism and turn it into something that’s more hybrid.

In *Hayek’s Bastards*, you can see how people who in one decade might have been happy to speak in a language of abstract reciprocity and economic freedom are in the next decade happy to join arms and march shoulder-to-shoulder with people who believe in quite different principles of, for instance, ethno-nationalism or racial purity. They do so not because they’ve changed their mind and think that economic freedom now entails racial purity, but because they’ve read the room, and they see that one cannot always win just with the language of economic freedom, and you have to find allies where they arise.

**NV:** In the introduction to *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, you and Dieter Plehwe write that ‘neoliberalism is less a policy orthodoxy than a consistent approach to policy problems, in which neoliberals are avid interventionists of their own kind, rethinking policies according to context, and showing both the capacity for improvisation and an attitude of flexible response’.<sup>7</sup> Could just elaborate a bit more on what you mean here?

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7 Quinn Slobodian and Dieter Plehwe, ‘Introduction’, in *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, ed. Slobodian, Plehwe, and Philip Mirowski (Verso, 2020), 6.



**QS:** You can use the example of European integration, where at different moments, the same people have had a different attitude towards European integration. In the 1980s, some neoliberal intellectuals believed that European integration was great as long as it was a negative integration that was based on prohibiting state aid, opening up financial markets, and requiring the equal treatment of products from everywhere inside of the Common Market. When new regulations were overlaid on European integration then many of these intellectuals changed their minds, and they decided that what was happening with the EU was no longer neoliberal in the way that it had been before. By the 2000s, some of those same people are even calling for secession from, or the need to break up, the EU. There's no essence to whether European integration, from the Treaty of Rome to the present, is or isn't neoliberal. It's conjuncturally examined and contextually assessed for the way that it is delivering across different domains at any given point, and then the position that the neoliberals should take is determined accordingly. In that way, it's not so dissimilar from socialism. You have some socialists who will read Marx like scripture and assume that the project of socialism is about coming as close to the true meaning of the master as possible. But you have many other people who don't see socialism that way at all and think of socialism as trying to build working-class power at given moments, and there are different strategies one can take to that end. If you take that latter approach to neoliberalism, as neoliberals do themselves, then you get a lot further, and you're also equipping yourself better for making your own political decisions about who the biggest danger is at a given moment, what kinds of alliances look most troubling, and which ones you can safely ignore.

A lot of leftists have spent the last 10 years or so convincing themselves that the worst thing in the world is something called 'progressive neoliberalism', which is a version of capitalism that absorbs challenges from social movements and defangs them, and then co-opts them into forms of tokenism and superficial representation and recognition without ever troubling the real machinery of distribution or concentrations of power. I'm also unhappy with the way that progressive neoliberalism works to defuse

the payload of social movements and blunt the force of protest, but I'm also aware that there's something worse than that out there, and something that doesn't just speak the language of the market. If you go looking for something that looks most like market ideology and then conclude that it's the most neoliberal thing, and also the worst thing, then you might end up misleading yourself, whereas if you follow this more genealogical approach, you can see that neoliberal politics is often morphing and mutating, and turning into things that are not easily recognisable. The kind of things I discuss in *Hayek's Bastards* are peculiar, even bizarre, forms of new politics that nevertheless have clear fingerprints of this long running neoliberal debate, much more than some of the centrism that people call progressive neoliberalism.

**NV:** Who are these bastards? Why do they matter?

**QS:** The impetus for the book was a real dissatisfaction I felt with the way that the twin ruptures of Trump and Brexit were described in 2016. The immediate and dominant interpretation was that this was a rejection of neoliberal globalisation and even a cry of anguish from the left-behinds of capitalism, seeking to slow down competition and restore some level of security and stability to people's everyday lives. That might have been a good description of why people voted for Trump or Brexit, but to me, it was never a good description of the operative ideologues inside of Trump's coalition and the Brexit campaign. One could extend this twin rupture to talk about *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and many other far-right parties.

If you look at what scholars would call the supply-side of those politics, it would be more about people who were trying to deepen capitalist competition by other means. The people who led the Brexit campaign were actually accusing the EU of being socialist, and they wanted to escape regulations in order to go global. The people who advised Trump on tax policy saw his administration as a way to finally get through longstanding demands to deepen and make permanent the forms of regressive taxation that had begun under Reagan. People who are opposing the EU from

places like Germany or Austria are doing so not to restore the welfare state at the national level, but to further shrink the welfare state and make those national economies more austere and more competitive inside of a global marketplace.

The people who were often staffing or offering ideas to these new parties of the far-right backlash were very frequently coming straight out of the orbit and the circles of the neoliberal or libertarian think-tank world, whether they were the ordoliberal economists who started AfD, the former Reagan advisors and think-tankers who wrote tax policy for Trump, or the Thatcherites leading the Brexit campaign. These, for me, were the original bastards to focus on because they were pursuing economic freedom and stabilising capitalism not through securing globalisation, but through attaching themselves to anti-globalist political projects. Conjuncturally, they saw the nation as a better anchor for capitalist order than the kind of multilateral forms of integration that had been dominant in the 1990s.

The book seemed like a worthwhile counter-narrative to bring into public conversation. As I did that, I also noticed that many of the people operating in this fusion between nationalist and neoliberal politics were often doing something that was novel in the context of neoliberal intellectual history – they were becoming very interested in ideas of human nature and the hard sciences. Hayek's *Bastards* thus aims to do two things. One is to point out that the supposed backlash of 2016 and subsequent years was more of a frontlash based on the policy ideas and intellectual entrepreneurs inside of these movements. Two is to draw attention to this new fascination with grounding economic freedom claims within languages of science, particularly sciences of intelligence, race, and the monetary qualities of gold.

**NV:** I was wondering if you could chat a little bit more about the role of gold in this story, which is particularly interesting.

**QS:** The section of the neoliberal movement who believed that you had to restore a full backing of currency to gold was very small, and it was an

obscure position to take inside of the neoliberal movement because, for very practical reasons, it's hard to manage a growing credit-based, high-liquidity, complex economy with the constraint of one-to-one gold to currency. This is why we haven't really had a functioning gold standard globally for a century. And yet, I became really interested in these thinkers because even though they knew that to realise their goal to restore gold would functionally destroy capitalist complexity and advanced industrial capitalism, they were nevertheless convinced that it needed to be done. Their apocalyptic and gloomy predictions about where fiat currency and what they call 'monetary socialism' was heading led them to make this rather dramatic demand, which also entailed them selling gold back to people who were listening to them. This entrepreneurial apocalypticism was very common in what was called the 'gold bug' community, and in the world of investment newsletters in the 1980s and 1990s. For me, it gave a foretaste of the increasingly hysterical right-wing politics of YouTubers and crypto boosters, who similarly are much more willing to predict coming collapse than they are to try and restore order at the level of the totality.

*Globalists* was about the birth of neoliberalism and this attempt to knit back together the world economy, but by the early 21st century, you have a lot of radicalised or bastardised neoliberals who were no longer interested in stabilising or creating an institutional framework for capitalism at a global level. Instead, they were seeking to capitalise on its downfall. That turn away from a vertical integration that would get ever larger and larger towards smaller units to use as the basis for coordination, as in the return to the nation by secessionists and anti-EU people, had a further descent downwards in which some radicalised far-right libertarians believed that there was no hope for a greater stability. They now believe one can only try to get as much of the money as possible before the whole thing goes down.

**NV:** Related to the gold discussion, I wanted to ask you about borders. There have been a lot of think pieces on the return to nationalism, anti-immigration, and hard borders as harbingers of the death of neoliberalism, which I've always found difficult to understand given that border security

across the Global North has increased significantly in the neoliberal decades. Could you talk about the relationship between this return to hardened borders and the intellectual developments that you see play out in *Hayek's Bastards*?

**QS:** The discourse about immigration and borders in neoliberal circles is interesting, and in its earliest form, you had a principled belief that there should be the ability for labour to move across space to find its most effective and efficient site of application. But that was very quickly one of those sites of compromise, where by the 1940s, even a purist like Ludwig von Mises believed it was not reasonable to expect nations to accept large numbers of foreigners because they could be understood as a security threat, or even as a cultural threat. Labour mobility across borders quickly fell from the top of the list of demands for an ideal neoliberal arrangement for the Mont Pelerin Society thinkers. The idea that developed was that you could compensate for the lack of movement of people by increasing the movement of trade and of finance, which would give you the benefits that you might lose at the margins by people not being able to move. If you could invest in a factory overseas, for example, where the low-wage labour existed then maybe the low-wage labour doesn't have to come inside the country.

So, that was the standing position for a while. But then it became more of a topic of debate in the 1990s as immigration in general became a hot-button political issue across the Global North, partially because the numbers of people moving around the world – especially, in the US, from south of the border – increased in quantitative terms. You then get two camps that are basically staked out, as I describe in the book. On the one hand, a group of people who believed that we needed to move away from birthright citizenship, and that we needed to move away from family reunification policy, which is the core way that immigration happens in the United States. Instead, they argued, we should move towards a points system that is based on skills that people can bring into the country, as well as how much money they can bring into the country. Places like Canada

and Japan already had a points system in place, and by comparison, the United States had a uniquely liberal immigration model.

The other side of the argument, though, and this is where the alliance with the far right becomes more visible, is the idea that certain populations had measurable differences between them that were relatively stable over time, and from which you could draw conclusions about which populations were more likely to add value economically compared to others. It isn't just that Global North countries want doctors or nurses, but that they think that people from certain countries have lower IQs, and therefore, as a rule of thumb, they can deprioritise them and instead choose people from higher-IQ countries. This new system became a *de facto* racial selection, grounded in the belief that East Asian and Whites were preferable to Black and some Brown people. This was the new neoliberal discourse on immigration, which stabilised in the 1990s, and the idea of open borders, although it was still represented by some members of the neoliberal intellectual community, became even more of a minority.

I've never personally seen much of a contradiction between neoliberalism and borders, selectivity, and relative exclusion. The question is on what basis people are being selected out. Even if it is on a racial or an ethnic basis, the point that I demonstrate in *Hayek's Bastards* is that too can have an economic rationale behind it. What is often described as a desire for an ethno-state is usually seen as being counter to economic logic, as somehow the prioritisation of some cultural issues over economic issues. But I refer in my book to the idea of the 'ethno-economy', because people were actually working out the ways that races were economic indicators as well, or could be indexed in ways that became economically meaningful.

**NV:** This is all particularly interesting in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. I have a book coming out, co-authored with Francis Collins and Alan Gamlen, on the politics of immigration in Aotearoa New Zealand, which confirms many the points you make above.<sup>8</sup> Aotearoa New Zealand

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8 Francis Collins, Alan Gamlen, and Neil Vallelly, *Edges of Empire: The Politics of Immigration in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1980–2020* (Auckland University Press, 2025).

brought in the points system in 1991, and it was introduced against a background rhetoric of enriching the multicultural fabric of the country and moving away from the old imperial migration regime. But if you look at what happens from 1991 to 1996 – and many of these trends have continued in different ways – the amount of Pacific Islanders coming to New Zealand drastically drops and migration from southeast Asia radically increases. The points system was promoted as a post-racial or race-blind practice, but it actually embedded some of those racial distinctions into the system rather than have them as an overt policy of the state.

You brought up IQ. Could you talk about how IQ functions in *Hayek's Bastards*, and why people like Trump and Musk are always using IQ as an indicator?

**QS:** IQ was for a long time a fringe topic in the US, except for two moments in the post-war period, when it bubbled up and entered public discourse in a significant way. They're both interestingly moments of attempts to push back against social demands for redistribution and equality. In the early 1970s, reacting directly to the civil rights and women's movements, a Harvard psychologist, Richard Herrnstein, wrote an article that subsequently became a book about IQ, which became a big deal.<sup>9</sup> In there, he said that for all the demands that liberals have for better outcomes for people of all different races and classes in the US, there is a hard ceiling on how much equality we can expect because IQ is genetically inherited and it will always shape people's economic success. That conclusion was called into question by a lot of scholars, but it became a lightning rod of discussion because it gave people a language to basically formulate anti-egalitarian claims in a way that was apparently scientific or at least had a mantle of science wrapped around it.

In the 1990s, this phenomenon happened again, where you have a resurgent and persistent attempt to rethink the US education system in a way that could bring about more equal outcomes and access to educational opportunities for more people. *The Bell Curve* was published in 1994, and

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9 Richard J. Herrnstein, *I.Q. in the Meritocracy* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1973)

it was written again by Herrnstein along with, this time, Charles Murray.<sup>10</sup> It was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for a whole year, sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and it once again gave people permission to talk about the abandonment of civil rights and racial equality in the country. It created a sense of fatalism that the part of the population that was going to be at the bottom of the bell curve – namely, the Black population – might be incorrigible, and thus, it helped legitimise waves of mass incarceration in that decade. It catalysed the belief that we should stop trying to create equal representation at the highest levels of society, because that was not possible without putting a finger on the scale and skewing the reality of people's capacity. That 'common sense' response to demands for racial equality is the exact same logic that functions right now with the dismantling of DEI in the US. It builds on the idea that somehow attempts to sensitise people to racial inequality is a socially constructed pushback against the biological realities of race, as it was recently put in the case of the critique of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art Exhibition, which was criticised for dismissing the biological realities of race by the White House. Incidentally, the Naval Maritime Academy just purged its library, and it purged a book criticising *The Bell Curve*, but it left *The Bell Curve* in the library.

This pseudoscience of the supposed overwhelming genetic nature of inheritable race that is resistant to any forms of early intervention have been long called into question, but it is now being treated once again as fact. Interestingly, the most important opponent of Herrnstein and Murray's argument was James Flynn, who was at the University of Otago, with the so-called 'Flynn effect'. This entailed the observation that the results of IQ tests were steadily rising from generation to generation, and it caused Charles Murray to have to do some serious acrobatics and contortions to try to explain why that was the case.

It's not surprising that IQ is having a moment right now because it speaks to the superiority of the Silicon Valley crowd as a self-appointed new aristocracy of the tech era. It also speaks to the reactionary, anti-Black

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10 Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class in American Life* (Free Press, 1994).



politics of the right-wing of the Republican Party, who are now setting about dismantling the whole civil rights apparatus, attempting to undo desegregation. If you can rest your argument on the validity of things like racial differences in IQ, then you also have more intellectual heft of a certain kind for your retrograde politics.

**NV:** Similar things are happening here with the Treaty Principles Bill, which is a bill brought in by the current government, driven by one of the coalition partners in the shape of the ACT Party, which are notionally founded on libertarian ideals. They want to reduce the Treaty of Waitangi to a series of principles that are based on libertarian conceptualisations of human rights, but which are also implicitly grounded in some of the pseudoscientific theories around racial (in)equality that you mention above.

**QS:** This is another reason why I think we should be sceptical of overly critical takes on progressive neoliberalism, especially as a lot of these moves towards rights for Indigenous groups have been not perceived as purely symbolic by people in the neoliberal community. Instead, they've been seen as serious threats. That's why the mobilisation against the constitutional amendment [Indigenous Voice to Parliament] in Australia was led by neoliberal think-tanks, because they were worried about the way that racial justice could undermine the prioritisation of capital rights and economic freedom.

*28 May 2025*