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## You Must Be New Here

The Naivety of Jeffrey Epstein Suicide Conspiracy Theories

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Christmas came early for internet conspiracy theorists when it was announced that Jeffrey Epstein, head of a sex trafficking ring that employed numerous underage girls and which catered to some of the richest and most powerful men in America, was found dead in his Manhattan prison cell in an apparent suicide. Although President Donald Trump was a close friend of Mr. Epstein, who may have used Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort to recruit girls for his prostitution ring, most of the conspiracy theorists are pointing to the Clintons, either because they are pro-Trump QAnon believers, or just naive leftists echoing these claims "ironically."

There can be no disagreement that Bill Clinton, who flew numerous times on Epstein's private plane known as the "Lolita Express," is as reprehensible a figure as Donald Trump and any other of Epstein's associates. That being said, if one wants to speculate about a conspiracy to kill off this key witness, one should ask which of the following scenarios is more likely? Is Epstein killed in his cell at the behest of the most powerful man in the country, who controls the military, intelligence services,

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and federal law enforcement? Or is he killed by some hitman hired by the two ultra-rich dolts who couldn't even win one of the easiest elections of all time? Personally, if I were forced to choose a conspiracy theory, the first scenario sounds far more plausible. As it happens, however, I believe that Jeffrey Epstein, a despicable human garbage bag who had every reason to want to end his pathetic life, most likely killed himself in his cell.

Does that seem naive? In fact it is less naive than the idea that Epstein couldn't have possibly killed himself because he was on suicide watch, and it is far less naive than the idea that some powerful people had him killed because his testimony would lead to their downfall. Both of those assumptions rest on two equally fantastical ideas. The first is that the authorities charged with watching over our nation's prisoners are competent and concerned with the safety of those under their supervision. That notion is easily dispelled by listening to anyone describe their experience in the correctional system.

The second and much more important notion is the fairy tale Americans have been taught throughout their schooling and by Hollywood, namely the idea that everyone in the United States is ruled by the same law and no one is above that law. After all, many of us grew up actually reciting the phrase "...with liberty and *justice* for all." According to his national folklore, it makes sense that powerful people would want Epstein dead in order to prevent his testimony and thus avoid facing any consequences for their actions. If this were a Hollywood thriller, the point where the star witness dies mysteriously would be somewhere in the third act, where the heroes are at their lowest point. But in those films, some new information always comes to light at the climactic moment, and the bad man is sent to prison despite his wealth and power. It's compelling and dramatic but it is ultimately *fantasy*. Incidentally, many Americans of color are already keenly aware that the law doesn't work for them, but white Americans tend to be the most obliv-

ious to this fact and the most resistant when you try to tell them.

The reality is that if one opens their eyes to some of the most high-profile cases of malfeasance in this country, there is little precedent for ultra-rich and powerful people to face any serious consequences for their actions, and the bar such people must clear to get away with their heinous deeds seems to get lower every year. From Wall Street bankers who tanked the global economy in 2008 to the men responsible for torturing detainees for the CIA, America doesn't have a great track record for holding powerful people accountable. Or was that not obvious from seeing men like Dick Cheney and George W. Bush walking around free? Even one of the country's greatest political scandals, Watergate, ended with Richard Nixon resigning and immediately being pardoned by his vice president. Had Epstein gone to trial, any of the powerful people he implicated, Donald Trump or Bill Clinton, would have hid behind a wall of extremely aggressive and talented attorneys who would tie up investigators and prosecutors for years. Trump himself recently avoided any charges in the Mueller investigation largely because the Special Counsel decided that a sitting president could not be indicted.

Rule of law, and the idea that no one should be above the law, are wonderful concepts — when they are actually applied. The harsh truth, however, is that this is a rarity and not the norm for most of human history or most of the world. This is because the law is so often written by powerful people, or at least enforced by those who work for them. In a modern liberal democracy, rule of law struggles against the far more powerful capitalist system, which sets a certain class of people above the majority. Liberal political theory presents the state as a neutral arbiter between that class and various other interest groups in society, but this is just another fairy tale designed to convince the ruled that the system is just. Rule of law tends to only succeed where rulers are subjected to the most democratic

accountability, either via fair elections in some countries, or popular revolutions in others.

What this boils down to is that Epstein's testimony, just like Mueller's investigation, were always unlikely to actually bring down anyone powerful. Having never truly recovered from the crisis of 2008, America is increasingly becoming more akin to a post-Soviet republic like Russia or Ukraine, where the ruling class flaunts its corruption openly and the populace is expected to salute the flag and fall in line. Trump and Trumpism are the harbingers of this new era, but sadly the American people have been slow to adequately respond due to the naive beliefs detailed above. They believe the justice system is essentially good, and that it will protect them from the Trumps and Epsteins of this world. But that is not the primary purpose of law in a capitalist society. The primary function of law under capitalism is to protect the property rights of the powerful, while restricting the rights of those under them. This is why policing is so much more violent towards those who steal trivial amounts of money, yet gentle for those who steal millions if not billions.

In summation, it is a waste of time to talk about rule of law and equality under the law within a system based on hierarchy, exploitation, and the domination of the few over the many. For the law to rule, the unequal system must be replaced by a more egalitarian one, and the law must be drafted according to a more democratic procedure. This does not necessarily mean there is no point in pushing for justice under the current system, but there is certainly no value in holding onto the childish idea that some agent of the law, some Special Counsel, is going to swoop down and punish wrongdoers among the ruling class. Often, this only happens when the offender has committed some crime against a portion or even individual of their own class. If you are part of the working class, the law is not there to protect you, and the sooner you realize this simple truth, the more sense life in America makes.