



The Daily Beast

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Emily Shire



From O.J. to 'Serial': We're All Armchair Jurors Now

It's the 20th anniversary of the start of O.J. Simpson's trial, a media event which led to an explosion of courtroom TV and loud legal experts—even spawning the success of the far less hysterical *Serial*.

Before Casey Anthony was splashed across the cover of *People* magazine; before CNN was dissecting every detail of Jodi Arias' volatile relationship with her ex-boyfriend, the O.J. Simpson trial set a new precedence for transforming the criminal justice system into a Hollywood-style form of entertainment and a bankable builder of celebrities.

Perhaps because the nation had already witnessed the jaw-dropping police chase of Simpson's white Ford Bronco on June 17, 1994, his trial for the double murder of ex-wife Nicole Brown and her friend Ron Goldman was primed to be an enthralling media circus.

“It was the biggest reality TV show,” says Mark Goldman, who was a producer at

Court TV radio during the time of the trial and is now a partner at the Goldman McCormick media relations firm. “O.J. Simpson put Court TV on the map, but it really put reality TV on the map.”

Since then, we have had every permutation of the courtroom trial played out for our entertainment, as well as a burgeoning roster of legal experts and voices, daytime courtroom shows like *Judge Judy* and the evergreen *People's Court*, and fictional courtroom dramas. The Simpson trial helped turn us all justice-crazy. *Serial*, the most popular podcast in history, shows our fascination with true crime and justice is unquenchable, even when it is told at a slower, modulated pace than the theatrics of TV.

The Simpson trial wasn't just—or even mostly—about executing some form of criminal justice on behalf of Brown and Goldman; it became a form of mass entertainment that the nation tuned into like its favorite drama.

Television historians and media experts believe a confluence of factors led to Simpson's trial bringing in Super Bowl-level audiences at its peak. By the way, the Super Bowl comparison is not at all hyperbolic: **over 100 million** tuned in for the Simpson verdict, while just over **83 million** watched the Super Bowl in 1995.

So, why did Simpson steal the nation's attention? His case was neither the first murder trial broadcast in America, nor the only one that had skewed into the arena of entertainment rather than pure news.

“People are 100 percent addicted when white women are murderers. They are absolutely glued to the TV.”

“It's considered a moment, but it's important to realize that quite a few trials before were televised: Ted Bundy was the first fully televised trial. The William Kennedy Smith trial was televised. The Menendez brothers were accused of killing their parents,” said Heidi J.S. Tworek, the head of undergraduate studies at Harvard University's history department.

Certainly, when Simpson was charged with murder, he was far more famous than any of these suspects. “It hit so big because O.J. Simpson was bigger than life. From football to

watching *The Naked Gun*, everyone knew him and everyone liked him. They couldn't believe the alleged crime he did,” said Goldman.

But while Simpson came with fame, another element was at play in making it the

most captivating case: race. “We have to remember it [the trial] comes after the Rodney King riots in 1992 [which followed after Los Angeles officers were acquitted for shooting an unarmed black man]. That brought the racial element into it,” said Tworek.

The ever-controversial, and therefore engrossing, racial element plus Simpson’s celebrity made it all too-perfect for the burgeoning 24-hour news media cycle. The trial hit shortly after CNN had been riding high off of its Gulf War coverage. In the first three weeks of the trials, CNN’s ratings jumped to 5.1, 5.6, and 6.3, crushing its average .7 at the time.

The *New York Times* noted at the time that Court TV’s ratings were as much as double those impressive spikes. Meanwhile, the network stations who couldn’t keep up with 24-hour cable networks dropped during those same weeks. Tom Brokaw wrongly brushed off cable news’ ratings success at the time, claiming the “soap opera quality” coverage wouldn’t hold Americans’ interest in the long-term.

“In most instances, a big story will take away from us for 24 hours or so, and then the country gets back to normal,” he said in February of 1995.

The 24-hour cable news network meant that the murder trial was transformed into a celebrity-making machine. Simpson, his defense team, his prosecutors, the judge, and cable legal analysts all became characters in the most gripping drama on television. Viewers treated Simpson, his attorney Johnny Cochran, and witness Kato Kaelin as stars. “What I realized is, this is entertainment. This is not news,” said Simpson defense attorney Gerald Uelman.

In particular, Simpson’s “Dream Team” became household names with the flamboyant, infinitely quotable Cochran leading the pack. “If it doesn’t fit, you must acquit,” is one of the most famous lines spoken in a U.S. trial.

However, Cochran and company’s flair for drama may not have been incidental. “O.J. Simpson’s lawyers seemed keenly aware of playing to the camera,” said Tworek. “There’s a symbiosis of them [TV stations] filming it, but they know they’re being filmed.”

Cochran would ultimately parlay his Simpson defense into his own TV show with none other than Nancy Grace, a legal analyst who built her own fame off of the trial.

The controversial, sensationalist cable television made a name for herself

because of the Simpson trial—and she wasn't the only one.

“There's no question the O.J. Simpson trial built careers,” said Beth Karas, who had just started working at Court TV when the trial began and is now an independent reporter operating her own website, Karas on Crime. “Greta Van Susteren was a commentator, and that [the trial] launched her. Dan Abrams was at Court TV, and there's no question it gave him a lot of profile. Cynthia McFadden was at ABC, but it also gave her more of a profile.”

No case before and no case since has captivated the national media like the O.J. Simpson trial. For millennials (like myself), it is hard to remember what the media coverage of court trials was like before the O.J. Simpson trial.

Personally, watching the 1995 trial with my parents marks my first memory of a current event, the first time I paid attention to the “real” news (I was five, and their decision to let me watch with them was arguably questionable). It would be several years before I realized Simpson was famous for something other than a grizzly, all-consuming murder trial.

It wasn't just that the Simpson trial engulfed the national attention. If not the first time case, it was one of the most significant ones to transform television viewers into jurors. “It did change the way people watched trials. For the first time, people dissected a trial,” said Karas. That was thanks to Court TV and CNN coverage that could track every mundane detail of the proceedings.

Trial coverage further encouraged viewers to play juror by including segments where legal analysts gave their opinion—i.e. the Nancy Grace and Greta Van Susteren types. “The anchors and hosts were allowed to create debate, and probably in the extreme. We started having more opinions, and that became more acceptable,” said Karas, though adding, “I never felt comfortable doing that as a journalist.”

Over the next twenty years, future trials would never hold the same national appeal as the O.J. Simpson trial. “It was the watershed, but it was also the zenith with our fascination,” said Tworek. Still, even though no case has quite met the stature of the Simpson trial, its long-term influence reverberated through future media coverage.

Transforming television viewers into jurors who were chomping at the bit to declare guilt or innocence drove the media coverage of the most sensationalized trials of the next 20 years: Scott Peterson, Casey Anthony, Jodi Arias.

Young women killing the lovers who jilted them; mothers killing children; husbands killing pregnant wives—the more morally outrageous the alleged crimes were, the more America ate them up. That fascination wasn't new, but the ability to pull apart every little detail on TV and have cable analysts offer melodramatic, firebrand monologues was.

In fact, in the years following the Simpson verdict, sometimes the media made the trials. “Nancy Grace probably singlehandedly made the case of Casey Anthony. Between her arrest and murder, she did so many stories. She built the anticipation before the trials,” said Karas. Grace pejoratively nicknamed Anthony “Tot Mom” and declared “the devil is dancing” when she was found not guilty.

One of the more noticeable differences since Simpson's trial is that more of the case that get the national spotlight are of young, white attractive women, like Anthony and Arias.

“In the past few years, there's been a bit of a flip,” Tworek says of the switch in gender focus. “People are 100 percent addicted when white women are murderers. They are absolutely glued to the TV,” said Goldman.

The reasons for this focus aren't wholly clear, except for the obvious: “People are attracted to prettier people. It's always nice seeing someone pretty on TV,” said Goldman.

However, Karas questioned whether there really was a news trend towards focusing on white women. “Jodi Arias and Casey Anthony are good-looking white women, but I don't know of any of any others. I don't know if I agree [with the belief the media focuses on white women],” she said.

In fact, if the latest murder trial to come close to capturing the national attention—the *Serial* podcast—is any indicator, the pendulum has swung away from white women, and from tabloid-style coverage.

The [trial of Adnan Syed](#) is the most recent murder case to become water cooler fodder. It's different from the cases of Simpson, Anthony, and Arias because the media scrutiny is coming retrospectively.

Syed was convicted of murdering ex-girlfriend Hae Min Lee in 1999 with virtually no media fanfare at the time. Just as importantly, the new media scrutiny came in a slow, measured, and deeply detailed fashion that was completely absent of shouting matches or, ultimately, strong declarations of innocence or guilt by the guiding narrator, Sarah Koenig. In short, it has been

covered in the opposite fashion of the Simpson trial.

The level of attention devoted to Simpson and Syed are hardly analogous, but there's no doubt Syed's trial has captured a highly disproportionate amount of attention for a podcast—in fact, his case drew enough attention that *Serial* became the most downloaded podcast of all time.

Syed has managed to penetrate media and pop cultural spheres far beyond the *Serial* series. Since *Serial* ended its run in early December, there have been tell-all-style interviews with state prosecutors and key witnesses, endless Reddit conspiracy threads, and an array of parodies.

The lines between entertainment and criminal justice have blurred yet again—and the media has been swift to [criticize a series](#) that explicitly or implicitly encourages its audience to play juror.

Adrienne LaFrance at *The Atlantic* [asked](#) if *Serial* listeners “are trawling through a grieving family's pain as a form of entertainment?”

Koenig was slammed for her “white reporter privilege” and “stomping around communities that she clearly does not understand, digging up small, generally inconsequential details about the people inside of them,” as Jay Caspian King [wrote](#) in *The Awl*.

Though these are legitimate concerns, the fact that these questions are even asked today by news outlets reflects a keen and growing awareness of media responsibility that may have been lacking during the Simpson trial.

Despite the criticisms, the media coverage may enhance the clarity of the actual court proceedings for Syed and be doing some good. Asia McClain, a classmate of Syed's who was a character to *Serial* listeners, [submitted an affidavit](#) on his behalf this week, stating she was with him in a local library at the same time the state claimed he murdered Lee.

In her affidavit, she states that she has “c[o]me to understand [her] importance to the case” and “needed to step forward and make [her] story known to the court system.”

While Syed's appeal for post-conviction relief has been in the works for years—and reporters are holding vigil for the Maryland Court of Special Appeals to make its ruling—it is hard not to think McClain would have realized her importance without the renewed media scrutiny. In fact, McClain told [TheBlaze](#)

she didn't even know the state was arguing Syed had committed the murder during the time she recalled being with him until she listened to *Serial*.

The O.J. Simpson trial may have marked the birth of a new style of coverage that transformed trials into entertainment fodder and encouraged viewers to play juror. But, as the success of *Serial* shows, the media and the audience are maturing beyond the shouting, the moral grandstanding, and the quick judgments of the 24-hour news cycle into a slower, moderated approach to our obsession with the drama of a trial.

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WOMAN IN THE HOT SEAT 05.01.15 11:01 AM ET



The Prosecutor Who Could Save Baltimore

Marilyn Mosby, who is black and from a family of cops, has charged several police officers in the case of Freddie Gray's arrest and death.

Editor's Note: This story has been updated.

The **Freddie Gray** case now goes from the Baltimore police to the city's 35-year-old state's attorney who decided Friday to **criminally charge** several police officers involved in Gray's arrest.

Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby is an African-American who was reared in the inner city. Her husband is an African-American Baltimore city councilman who is vocal on behalf of his community.

Nobody can accuse her of being anti-black.

But it would be just as ridiculous to accuse Mosby of being anti-cop.

Her father, mother, and grandfather were police officers and she grew up in what was known in her Boston neighborhood as "the police house." She has said that

she decided to become a prosecutor when she was 14, after her teenage cousin was shot to death in a robbery outside her family's home. The cousin, 17-year-old Diron Spencer, was a college-bound honor student described by all as the perfect kid. He had just come back from working as a lifeguard and was still wearing his swimsuit.

"I've seen my family blood, the same blood that runs through my veins, spilled on my front door," she said when she announced her candidacy for state's attorney last year.

She added that she knows what it is like to live with the threat of crime.

"I've locked my doors. I've clutched my purse."

She was forthright in her support of the police, a risky political position in a city that has long had an [uneasy relationship with law enforcement](#).

Chaos in Baltimore Continues (PHOTOS)



Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

"It is my genuine belief despite what we might all want to think, what we might want to believe, the police officers in this city are doing their jobs," she said. "I repeat, the police officers in [Baltimore](#) city are doing their jobs and taking bad guys off the street."

At the same time, Mosby also offered a comprehensive vision of a criminal justice system that embraces everyone.

“I learned at a very early age that the criminal justice system is not just the police and the judges and the states attorneys,” she said. “It’s much more than that. I believe that we are the justice system. We, the members of the community, are the justice system because we are the victims of crime...We are the accused...We are the cops...We are the witnesses...We are the perpetrators... We are the judges. And as community members, we are the jury.”

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During last year’s campaign against incumbent Baltimore State’s Attorney Gregg Bernstein, Mosby was asked about her opponent’s decision not to bring charges against the cops who were in a chaotic tussle with a Baltimore man named Tyrone Wright that ended with his death. The coroner ruled that Wright died due to “cardiac arrhythmia” resulting from a “cardiac conduction system abnormality” complicated by dehydration and “exertional excitement.” The autopsy showed bruising that could have resulted from baton blows, but no serious injuries that might have come from a beating.

“There is insufficient evidence to indicate that any of the officers’ were unreasonable or that their conduct constituted a reckless disregard for human life to warrant criminal action,” Bernstein had concluded.

Mosby replied that she was not sure that she would have reached a different determination. She was confident that she would not have taken so long to reach it.

“This family waited nine months to know how their loved one was killed,” Mosby said. “I’m going to be much more transparent.”

Mosby went on to win the election by 10 points. She will have been in office for exactly five months on Friday, when the Baltimore police present her with the result of their investigation into Gray’s fatal injuries while in custody.

“We will be turning information over to the state’s attorney and they will take it from that point,” Baltimore Police Commissioner Anthony Batts said Wednesday evening.

Mosby has been conducting an investigation of her own and she will no doubt assemble all the available facts in an effort to make a determination—not

as an African-American, not as the daughter of cops, but as a prosecutor sworn to uphold the law.

Some citizens might assume that she will be influenced by her husband. City Councilman Nick Mosby scolded the national media for paying little attention to the protests before [the riots](#). He made clear that violence is never acceptable, but he also said the rioting needs to be seen as a symptom of something much bigger than Freddie Gray, much bigger than Baltimore. He cited the socioeconomics that produce young men with little education and fewer opportunities.

“Unfortunately, this is their voice; the voice is destruction, the voice is anger,” Nick Mosby said.

But however much Marilyn Mosby may or may not agree with her husband, she has given an early indication that her office will energetically prosecute people who were arrested during Monday night’s riot and any disturbances that may follow. One of her deputies is said to have asked in several instances on Wednesday that the accused be granted no bail at all as the first cases began to reach criminal court.

That does not mean Marilyn Mosby and her office will be any less aggressive if the investigation of Gray’s death establishes probable cause to believe that any of the officers involved broke the law. They can expect no special treatment from this cops’ kid, who can be expected to apply one standard to all.

If the investigation unexpectedly clears all the cops of any wrongdoing, Marilyn Mosby almost certainly will go where the facts lead, even if the outcome threatens to incite far greater fury than flared at the start of this week.

There is also the federal investigation being conducted by the U.S. Justice Department, now headed by another African-American woman, the newly sworn Loretta Lynch.

However it goes, the Mosbys will themselves continue to represent a seed of hope for Baltimore. Nick Mosby grew up in Baltimore and was on the way to becoming his family’s first college graduate when he headed off to Tuskegee University. He there met the then-Marilyn Jones.

In Boston, she had been one of only three African-American girls in the suburban high school to which she had been bused during an effort to reduce de facto segregation in its schools. She had been active in student government as well as editor of the school newspaper.

The memory of her murdered cousin had accompanied her as she then see off for Tuskegee and a life such as he could no longer pursue. She finished college, and then returned to Boston for law school.

She and Nick Mosby were married in 2004 and she joined him in Baltimore. She initially balked at buying a house that had fallen into such disrepair it had a tree growing in the middle of it. The open-air drug market nearby was hardly a bonus.

The Mosbys turned the wrecked house into a happy home where they set to raising their two daughters. He was elected to the City Council. She worked as an assistant state's attorney for a time and then led investigations for an insurance company before she declared herself a candidate for state's attorney.

She pledged that she would be swifter and much more transparent than her predecessor in a case where a grieving family was awaiting an outcome.

The loved ones of Freddie Gray will now see if Marilyn Mosby is as good as her word.

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SWING AND A MISS 05.01.15 5:15 PM ET



John
McWhorter



Progressives Miss the Point of Baltimore

Sorry, folks: There are a lot of reasons Baltimore is in such dire straits, and making excuses for the riots and looting helps no one.

The Baltimore riots could be the beginning of a new black history in urban America. Too bad all so many people can see is “thugs.”

The supposedly sophisticated twitterati take on what has happened after Freddie Gray’s funeral is to essentially rationalize the riots by explaining that the looting we’ve seen on our TV screens was just collateral damage for institutional racism.

Put aside for the moment that many of the businesses and cars destroyed in the attacks were black-owned. Put aside also that Baltimore’s mayor and police chief are black. Nevertheless, there are indeed structural issues that have combined to create this moment—but they don’t fit the narrative being proposed as higher wisdom.

GALLERY: Chaos in Baltimore Deepens (PHOTOS)



Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty

For example, several studies have shown that it's an op-ed page street myth that mass unemployment is inevitable when factory jobs move away from a city as they did in Baltimore (sources [here](#)). No people who had accomplished the Great Migration went to pieces just because a factory moved to the suburbs, or even China.

Three key dynamics since the Civil Rights era 50 years ago created the inner-city misery we are now seeing urgently rise to the foreground today.

First, the Black Power ideology that proliferated in the 1960s and '70s discouraged black communities from maintaining the old-time mantra that adversity meant that blacks have to try twice as hard. The wise insight was that after centuries in the United States, the persistent double standard was demeaning, and while that made basic sense, it changed black America's orientation towards individual initiative. That helps explain, for example, why only in the '60s did it become common for poor blacks to burn their own neighborhoods in protest. Even amidst Jim Crow, black people did not do this.

Second, in the late '60s, partly in response to the riots of the Long Hot Summers, welfare was transformed from a time-limited program intended for widows to an open-ended program that didn't care whether recipients ever got jobs. This had the unintended consequence of discouraging marriage, and made it easier for women to raise kids without the father around. This, a story too little told (read it [here](#)), decisively impacted the black experience nationwide.

Finally, the War on Drugs created a black market alternative to legal work for poor black men underserved by bad schools. Frankly, *The Wire* explained this dynamic better than any academic analysis.

Racism is too simplistic an explanation for all of this, as is an idea that "it's complicated" where what's really meant is "complicated racism." Welfare was opened up by liberals who thought they were doing black people a favor, often at the behest of black protesters. The Rockefeller drug laws that ended up penalizing crack over powdered cocaine [were supported by black Congress members](#).

To wonder
why, oh why,
whites see

History is messy. But we live in the present and what poor black Baltimoreans see is abuse. The War on Drugs assigns cops to black neighborhoods where, inevitably, encounters tend to be surly and often violent. A vicious cycle

blacks as
violent rings a
little hollow at
times like
these.

starts. What a poor black Baltimorean knows in 2015, what we all know in 2015, is that something needs to change.

Now, to be sure, the rioters' actions are inherently inarticulate. Certainly some of them are simply opportunists—it's no accident that most of the looters are young men; pure political

protest is often more diverse. The people marching in Selma included women, older people, etc. And of course the riots and looting could also end up compounding many of white Americans' ugliest stereotypes of black communities and violence. To wonder why, oh why, whites see blacks as violent rings a little hollow at times like these.

But the reflexive liberal rush to moral relativism on the subject misses the mark as well. A certain contingent will not be disabused of the idea that inner-city Baltimore is the product of racism alone, as opposed to a complex cocktail of racism in the past, misapplied benevolence afterwards, and a cyclic process of dissonance now. Their take on all of this is better at assuaging white guilt than telling us where to go from here in a real world.

That is, neither the players nor their fellow-traveling spectators are in a position to see the whole picture. Yet something positive can still come of all this.

Today, regardless of the complexities of how we got here, the main thing that keeps black America feeling alienated in its own land is the police. It's what animated the Black Panthers. It's what drove an entire genre of rap, celebrated by intellectuals as poetic prophecy. It's what a black person brings up if asked why they think racism is important. It's what has driven the arc of black history since last summer.

In that light, there is a genuine conversation about the cops and black people going on these days in America, and that wouldn't be true if there hadn't been riots in Ferguson.

Even if the participants' and observers' take on that episode was distorted—the entire “hands up, don't shoot” narrative was ultimately proven false by the Justice Department—the overall result may have started something positive. To the extent that rioting can make any kind of sense, it would have been more appropriate in the wake of Eric Garner's or John Crawford's or Tamir Rice's murders.

But history is messy. What we have is the present. And in that present, one simple thing is imperative: America must de-escalate the persistent tensions between cops and young black men. The easiest and most sensible way to do that is to interrupt the foolish War on Drugs. The gradual easing of laws against marijuana sale and purchase are a start. The tenor of black America's response to cops murdering black men should be a spur to going further.

If one generation of black men grew up without thinking of the cops as the enemy, black America would be a new place making the best of a bad hand, and we would finally start getting past the current tiresome and troubling situation.

Yet with the camera pulled back further, so to speak, I suspect that something constructive could still come of this mess. This is how things happen—history is always messy.

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FRINGE FACTOR 04.26.15 12:01 AM ET



Gay Slippery Slopes: Where Are They Now?

Civil war. So many abortions. Polygamy. Widespread bestiality. You name it, marriage equality will cause it.

At some point over the past few days, you might have noticed a corner of the Internet [rolling its eyes](#) at a piece published in The Daily Signal, the news site owned by the conservative Heritage Foundation. It was penned by Gene Schaerr, the lawyer who filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court this month [arguing](#) that gay dudes marrying each other in America will lead to 900,000 abortions over the next three decades.

Here's an excerpt of the [piece](#)—which includes charts and numbers!—for you to chew over. It is appropriately titled, “Forcing States to Recognize Gay Marriage Could Increase Number of Abortions”:

A reduction in the opposite-sex marriage rate means an increase in the percentage of women who are unmarried and who, according to all available data, have much higher abortion rates than married women. And based on past experience, institutionalizing same-sex marriage poses an enormous risk of reduced opposite-sex marriage rates.

Whoa, if true.

It's sad to say that certain individuals actually peddle this stuff. But let's say, for the sake of argument, that the anti-gay side is absolutely on the money on this one. If that is the case, then a sharp uptick in abortions is just one of many shocking things that legalizing gay marriage is going to “lead to.”

Here's a list. People have been sounding the alarm for years now.

- The [“criminalization of Christianity.”](#)
- [Polygamy.](#)
- [Pedophilia.](#)
- Another [Civil War.](#)
- [Bestiality.](#)
- More [incest.](#)
- [Fraud.](#)

- Fascism.
- Ruined children.

Welcome to **Obama's America**, kids. Hope you're enjoying your atheist dog-marriage with a side of fascism.

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Alamy

CORRUPTION 05.01.15 2:35 PM ET



James Bloodworth



Lutfur Rahman Turned East London into a Banana Republic

Political correctness and left-wing myopia helped protect Britain's first democratically-elected Muslim mayor from corruption charges for years. Eventually justice caught up with him.

LONDON — In 21st century Britain, those who stand on platforms and denounce political correctness are often treated with contempt. And with good reason: the

enemies of political correctness often seem to be bubbling over with nostalgia for a time when it was considered OK to knock a woman about or eject a black person from the pub or shop. Opposition to political correctness in modern Britain is, most of the time at least, justifiably derided. *Most of the time.*

Step forward Lutfur Rahman, Britain's first democratically elected Muslim mayor and a man who used British liberals' unwavering faith in political correctness to create a dictatorship in the east end of London. A Bangladesh-born solicitor, Rahman ruled Tower Hamlets, a poor London borough, as if it were his own personal fiefdom. Presiding over a council budget of \$1.5 billion and services for 250,000 people, Rahman showered his favoured Bangladeshi Muslim community with money, nurtured a cult of personality and aggressively smeared political opponents as racists and Islamophobes.

Or at least he did until last week. Last Thursday Lutfur Rahman's rotten second tenure as mayor came to an abrupt end when a High Court judge delivered a stinging 200-page report voiding the mayoral contest of 2014 and banning the discredited mayor from ever standing again. The judge in the case, Richard Mawrey QC, said Rahman was guilty of a string of 'corrupt and illegal practices' and had 'driven a coach and horses' through local authority law. Tower Hamlets First, Rahman's political party, was found to have engaged in postal vote fraud, given false statements, committed bribery and used 'undue spiritual influence'—illegally warning voters that it was a 'sin' to vote for rival candidates.

Rahman's conduct during the trial itself was equally egregious, with the judge complaining of what looked like mass-produced witness statements: "witnesses whose command of English turned out in the witness box to be rudimentary nonetheless produced polished English prose in their witness statements containing words that appeared to baffle them in cross-examination.

"The occasional witness claimed to have typed out his witness statement himself, oblivious to the fact that its appearance was absolutely identical to that of other (allegedly unconnected) witnesses. The nadir came when one witness gave a graphic account of how he had attended a polling station to cast his vote and found it a haven of tranquillity, only to be confronted with absolutely incontrovertible evidence that [he] had, in fact, voted by post and could not have voted in person on the day."

Initially a budding Labour politician, Lutfur Rahman was booted out of the party in 2010 after Helal Abbas, another Tower Hamlets Labour politician, warned that fundamentalists from the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE), a group that

wishes to create a sharia state, were using Rahman for the purposes of entry into the Labour party. Yet mere expulsion from Labour could not stop someone as 'ruthlessly ambitious' (the judge's words) as Rahman. Backed by several senior left-wing party figures, including the former London mayor Ken Livingstone, Rahman ran for mayor of Tower Hamlets on an independent ticket in 2010 and won, securing 51 per cent of the vote. After serving a full first term Rahman ran again in 2014 and again he won—or so he thought until Thursday when the result was declared void.

The political machine of Rahman was a motley crew. Local restaurateurs, the IFE and local left-wing activists all backed the mayor. Yet Rahman was no socialist: one of the first executive orders of this supposed man of the people was to dispatch a staff member to go out and buy him the new iPhone 4. His second executive order was deliverance of a Mercedes together with chauffeur. Aside from the fraudulent behaviour documented at the trial, Rahman's electoral success lay in his showering of favoured communities with taxpayers' money. He did this by wresting control of the council's grants system, which allowed him to direct money away from secular causes and into the hands of those who wanted to 'refurbish' religious buildings. [According to Ted Jeory, a local blogger](#) who spent years pursuing Rahman, this was 'a targeted bribe for bloc votes'.

Long before last week's revelations the corruption and dirty politics of Lutfur Rahman's Tower Hamlets had been an open secret. There was even a BBC documentary on the misuse of public funds by his administration. But Rahman had proved almost impossible to bring down because he could always rely on the political correctness of polite liberal society to silence his critics. Whenever a journalist or politician criticised Rahman—or had the temerity to run against him in an election—accusations of racism were sprayed around like mud flung from a spade. For the mayor an accusation of bigotry was not a grave and sinister charge but another tool in the armoury of a bent politician. As the judge put it, Rahman regularly played the 'race card' and critics were silenced 'with accusations of racism and Islamophobia'.

Political correctness may go some way to explaining why neither London's Metropolitan Police nor the Labour party ever brought a prosecution against Rahman. The party certainly had good reason to. During the 2014 campaign for mayor, Labour candidate John Biggs was publicly smeared as a racist by Rahman's campaign team. Meanwhile Abbas, rather more difficult to brand a racist due to his own background, was branded a 'wife beater' in a Bengali newspaper in a completely unfounded allegation. Against this backdrop, the

Labour party's reluctance to bring a prosecution, while not perhaps forgivable, is nevertheless understandable. As the judge put it, the Labour party was probably 'not prepared to risk the accusations of racism and Islamophobia that would have been bound to follow any petition'.

The rise and fall of Lutfur Rahman ought to stand as a cautionary tale for the politically correct

To the surprise of many, during the trial Richard Mawrey dismissed accusations of extremism directed at Rahman. However the Press Complaints Commission had previously ruled that referring to Rahman as 'extremist-backed' was not misleading due to his refusal to deny having links to the IFE. The chief coordinator of Rahman's 2010 mayoral election campaign, Bodrul Islam, had also put his links with the IFE [on the record](#).

Rumours of Rahman's links with extremist politics, whether accurate or not, only appeared to heighten his attractiveness to a certain type of activist. In this respect Rahman was merely the latest footnote in a sorry tale of the pro-Islamist Left—the Hitler/Stalin pact of the twenty-first century. Those who would automatically reject any compromise with the British establishment were once again ready to collaborate with the most reactionary sections of the Muslim community. [George Galloway's](#) Respect party, a significant player in Rahman's Tower Hamlets First, was conceived in 2004 out of an amalgamation of the Leninist Socialist Workers' Party and the Muslim Association of Britain, one of Britain's most radical Islamist groups. As the French writer Pascal Bruckner mockingly put it, on the far-left hatred of the market was 'worth a few compromises regarding fundamental rights'.

The judge's ruling appears to have done little to dampen support for the deposed mayor on the far Left. Last night, a week after the damning verdict, a rally of hundreds of supporters took place in Stepney Green in East London, where Rahman [confirmed](#) that he was "exploring the possibility" of challenging the judgment. The rally was made up largely of Rahman's Bangladeshi supporters—and left-wing activists, including Andrew Murray, the chief of staff at Britain's biggest trade union Unite, Respect party MP George Galloway, who appeared via video link, former London mayor Ken Livingstone and Christine Shawcross from Labour's National Executive Committee. Shawcross, who is expected to be disciplined by the Labour party for continuing to support Rahman, is also

reported to be acting as a trustee of Rahman's legal defence fund. The corrupt former mayor used the rally to launch a fundraising drive to pay his £1 million legal fees and to insist—again—that he was the victim of smears.

Behaviour of this sort is perhaps to be expected from the communist Left. More depressing in the case of Lutfur Rahman has been the loyalty shown to him by mainstream sections of the liberal press. The *Guardian*, "the world's leading liberal voice," was one of Rahman's biggest cheerleaders, running countless op-eds lionising the now-deposed mayor. The campaign against Lutfur Rahman was an "insult to democracy" with "a deep substrate of racism" informing it, ran one of the paper's many pro-Rahman columns. In reality the "deep substrate of racism" was on the part of Rahman's white liberal supporters, who took the mayor's rampant megalomania and corruption as a sign of authentic Islamic behaviour. Look a little closer and the underlying assumption was indistinguishable from the white far-right: vote rigging and invocations of hellfire were no more than you should expect from Muslims and Bangladeshis.

Another thing which seemed to rankle with the Left (and which made defending the disgraced mayor a point of honor) was the fact that, for their own reasons, right-wing newspapers didn't much like Rahman either. One of the journalists who fought hard to bring Rahman down was Andrew Gilligan of the conservative *Daily Telegraph*. The British Left, keener on the verbal diarrhea of Slavoj Zizek than the windowpane prose of George Orwell, had clearly forgotten the latter's injunction that "Some things are true, even though the *Daily Telegraph* says they are true."

This unwillingness of the politically correct to take the controversy surrounding Rahman seriously (a fawning [profile](#) in the *Guardian* referred to the allegations simply as 'mud slung around') meant it was left to four concerned citizens of Tower Hamlets to bring the prosecution against Rahman themselves, risking predictable smears and opprobrium but also bankruptcy and homelessness (had they lost the four would have had to stump up £1 million in costs). Fortunately people power won the day and justice was served.

But the rise and fall of Lutfur Rahman ought to stand as a cautionary tale for the politically correct. Obsessed with the perceived oppression of London's non-whites, and terrified of accusations of racism, the Left found a ready bedfellow in a corrupt mayor who led the Bengali community "into a sense of victimhood," as the judge put it, in order to satisfy his own lust for power. That Britain had its first Muslim mayor was to the good. But for many liberals and leftists that's all

they saw—an exotic category—and not the man, who was busy turning East London into a banana republic.

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