Ted Kaczynski
The System's Neatest Trick

*Technological Slavery* — Kaczynski, Theodore J.

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# The System's Neatest Trick

women who committed adultery had their noses cut off,[7] whereas no such punishment was inflicted on male adulterers; or that among the Crow Indians a warrior who was struck by a stranger had to kill the offender immediately; else he was irretrievably disgraced in the eyes of his tribe;[8] nor does Haviland discuss the habitual use of torture by the Indians of the eastern United States.[9] Of course, facts of that kind represent violence, machismo, and gender-discrimination, hence they are inconsistent with the present-day values of the System and tend to get censored out as politically incorrect.

Yet I don't doubt that Haviland is perfectly sincere in his belief that anthropologists challenge the assumptions of Western society. The capacity for self-deception of our university intellectuals will easily stretch that far.

To conclude, I want to make clear that I'm not suggesting that it is good to cut off noses for adultery, or that any other abuse of women should be tolerated, nor would I want to see anybody scorned or rejected because they are intersexed or because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, etc., etc., etc. But in our society today these matters are, at most, issues of reform. The System's neatest trick consists in having turned powerful rebellious impulses, which otherwise might have taken a revolutionary direction, to the service of these modest reforms.

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[7] This is well known. See, e.g., Angie Debo, *Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1976, page 225; Thomas B. Marquis (interpreter), *Wooden Leg: A Warrior Who Fought Custer*, Bison Books, University of Nebraska Press, 1967, page 97; Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1989, page 6; *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 13, Macropædia, 15th Edition, 1997, article "American Peoples, Native", page 380.

[8] Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, Bison Books edition, page 147.

[9] Use of torture by the Indians of the eastern U.S. is well known. See, e.g., Clark Wissler, *Indians of the United States*, Revised Edition, Anchor Books, Random House, New York, 1989, pages 131, 140, 145, 165, 282; Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, Anchor Books, Random House, New York, 1988, page 135; *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 13, Macropædia, 15th Edition, 1997, article "American Peoples, Native", page 385; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*, Oxford University Press, 1985, page citation not available.



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churches to have the "demon" cast out of her. She was even given napkins into which she was supposed to "cough out the demon."

But it is obviously ridiculous to equate this with the modern Euro-American attitude. It may approximate the Euro-American attitude of 150 years ago, but nowadays almost any American educator, psychologist, or mainstream clergyman would be horrified at that kind of treatment of an intersexed person. The media would never dream of portraying such treatment in a favorable light. Average middle-class Americans today may not be as accepting of the interesexed condition as the Indians were, but few would fail to recognize the cruelty of the way in which Williamson was treated.

Williamson's parents obviously were deviants, religious kooks whose attitudes and beliefs were way out of line with the values of the System. Thus, while putting on a show of criticizing modern Euro-American society, Williamson really is attacking only deviant minorities and cultural laggards who have not yet adapted to the dominant values of present-day America.

Haviland, the author of the book, on page 12 portrays cultural anthropology as iconoclastic, as challenging the assumptions of modern Western society. This is so far contrary to the truth that it would be funny if it weren't so pathetic. The mainstream of modern American anthropology is abjectly subservient to the values and assumptions of the System. When today's anthropologists pretend to challenge the values of their society, typically they challenge only the values of the past-obsolete and outmoded values now held by no one but deviants and laggards who have not kept up with the cultural changes that the System requires of us.

Haviland's use of Williamson's article illustrates this very well, and it represents the general slant of Haviland's book. Haviland plays up ethnographic facts that teach his readers politically correct lessons, but he understates or omits altogether ethnographic facts that are politically incorrect. Thus, while he quotes Williamson's account to emphasize the Indians' acceptance of intersexed persons, he does not mention, for example, that among many of the Indian tribes

All the same, the fact that the System's trick does backfire here and there does not prevent it from being on the whole a remarkably effective device for turning rebellious impulses to the System's advantage.

It has to be conceded that the trick described here is not the only factor determining the direction that rebellious impulses take in our society. Many people today feel weak and powerless (for the very good reason that the System really does make us weak and powerless), and therefore identify obsessively with victims, with the weak and the oppressed. That's part of the reason why victimization issues, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and neocolonialism have become standard activist issues.

## 5. An Example

I have with me an anthropology textbook[5] in which I've noticed several nice examples of the way in which university intellectuals help the System with its trick by disguising conformity as criticism of modern society. The cutest of these examples is found on pages 132–36, where the author quotes, in "adapted" form, an article by one Rhonda Kay Williamson, an intersexed person (that is, a person born with both male and female physical characteristics).

Williamson states that the American Indians not only accepted intersexed persons but especially valued them.[6] She contrasts this attitude with the Euro-American attitude, which she equates with the attitude that her own parents adopted toward her.

Williamson's parents mistreated her cruelly. They held her in contempt for her interesexed condition. They told her she was "cursed and given over to the devil," and they took her to charismatic

[5] William A. Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999.

[6] I assume that this statement is accurate. It certainly reflects the Navaho attitude. See Gladys A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*, Princeton University Press, 1990, page 141. This book was originally copyrighted in 1950, well before American anthropology became heavily politicized, so I see no reason to suppose that its information is slanted.



> The supreme luxury of the society of technical necessity will be to grunt the bonus of useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile.
>
> — *Jacques Ellul*[1]

The System has played a trick on today's would-be revolutionaries and rebels. The trick is so cute that if it had been consciously planned one would have to admire it for its almost mathematical elegance.

## 1. What the System is Not

Let's begin by making clear what the System is not. The System is not George W. Bush and his advisors and appointees, it is not the cops who maltreat protesters, it is not the CEOs of the multinational corporations, and it is not the Frankensteins in their laboratories who criminally tinker with the genes of living things. All of these people are servants of the System, but in themselves they do not constitute the System. In particular, the personal and individual values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of any of these people may be significantly in conflict with the needs of the System.

To illustrate with an example, the System requires respect for property rights, yet CEOs, cops, scientists, and politicians sometimes steal. (In speaking of stealing we don't have to confine ourselves to actually lifting of physical objects. We can include all illegal means of acquiring property, such as cheating on income tax, accepting bribes, and any other form of graft or corruption.) But the fact that CEOs, cops, scientists, and politicians sometimes steal does not mean that stealing is part of the System. On the contrary, when a cop or a politician steals something he is rebelling against the System's requirement of respect for law and property. Yet, even when they are stealing, these people remain servants of the System as long as they publicly maintain their support for law and property.

[1] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, translated by John Wilkinson, published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1964, page 427.

Whatever illegal acts may be committed by politicians, cops, or CEOs as individuals, theft, bribery, and graft are not part of the System but diseases of the System. The less stealing there is, the better the System functions, and that is why the servants and boosters of the System always advocate obedience to the law in public, even if they may sometimes find it convenient to break the law in private.

Take another example. Although the police are the System's enforcers, police brutality is not part of the System. When the cops beat the crap out of a suspect they are not doing the System's work, they are only letting out their own anger and hostility. The System's goal is not brutality or the expression of anger. As far as police work is concerned, the System's goal is to compel obedience to its rules and to do so with the least possible amount of disruption, violence, and bad publicity. Thus, from the System's point of view, the ideal cop is one who never gets angry, never uses any more violence than necessary, and as far as possible relies on manipulation rather than force to keep people under control. Police brutality is only another disease of the System, not part of the System.

For proof, look at the attitude of the media. The mainstream media almost universally condemn police brutality. Of course, the attitude of the mainstream media represents, as a rule, the consensus of opinion among the powerful classes in our society as to what is good for the System.

What has just been said about theft, graft, and police brutality, applies also to issues of discrimination and victimization such and as racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, and sweatshops. All of these are bad for the System. For example, the more that black people feel themselves scorned or excluded, the more likely they are to turn to crime and the less likely they are to educate themselves for careers that will make them useful to the System.

Modern technology, with its rapid long-distance transportation and its disruption of traditional ways of life, has led to the mixing of populations, so that nowadays people of different races, nationalities, cultures, and religions have to live and work side by side. If people hate or reject one another on the basis of race ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, etc., the resulting conflicts interfere with the functioning of the System. Apart from a few old fossilized relics



"violence" I mean physical attacks on human beings.) More generally, integration propaganda has to teach us soft, cuddly values that emphasize nonaggressiveness, interdependence, and cooperation.

On the other hand, in certain contexts the System itself finds it useful or necessary to resort to brutal, aggressive methods to achieve its own objectives. The most obvious example of such methods is warfare. In wartime the System relies on agitation propaganda: In order to win public approval of military action, it plays on people's emotions to make them feel frightened and angry at their real or supposed enemy.

In this situation there is a conflict between integration propaganda and agitation propaganda. Those people in whom the cuddly values and the aversion to violence have been most deeply planted can't easily be persuaded to approve a bloody military operation.

Here the System's trick backfires to some extent. The activists, who have been "rebelling" all along in favor of the values of integration propaganda, continue to do so during wartime. They oppose the war effort not only because it is violent but because it is "racist," "colonialist," "imperialist," etc., all of which are contrary to the soft, cuddly values taught by integration propaganda.

The System's trick also backfires where the treatment of animals is concerned. Inevitably, many people extend to animals the soft values and the aversion to violence that they are taught with respect to humans. They are horrified by the slaughter of animals for meat and by other practices harmful to animals, such as the reduction of chickens to egg-laying machines kept in tiny cages or the use of animals in scientific experiments. Up to a point, the resulting opposition to mistreatment of animals may be useful to the System: Because a vegan diet is more efficient in terms of resource-utilization than a carnivorous one is, veganism, if widely adopted, will help to ease the burden placed on the Earth's limited resources by the growth of the human population. But activists' insistence on ending the use of animals in scientific experiments is squarely in conflict with the System's needs, since for the foreseeable future there is not likely to be any workable substitute for living animals as research subjects.

learn through the media, or through personal contact, of the "social justice" issues for which students rebel, and they imitate the students. Thus a youth culture develops in which there is a stereotyped mode of rebellion that spreads through imitation of peers-just as hairstyles, clothing styles, and other fads spread through imitation.

## 4. The Trick is Not Perfect

Naturally, the System's trick does not work perfectly. Not all of the positions adopted by the "activist" community are consistent with the needs of the System. In this connection, some of the most important difficulties that confront the System are related to the conflict between the two different types of propaganda that the System has to use, integration propaganda and agitation propaganda.[4]

*Integration propaganda* is the principal mechanism of socialization in modern society. It is propaganda that is designed to instill in people the attitudes, beliefs, values, and habits that they need to have in order to be safe and useful tools of the System. It teaches people to permanently repress or sublimate those emotional impulses that are dangerous to the System. Its focus is on long-term attitudes and deep-seated values of broad applicability, rather than on attitudes toward specific, current issues.

*Agitation propaganda* plays on people's emotions so as to bring out certain attitudes or behaviors in specific, current situations. Instead of teaching people to suppress dangerous emotional impulses, it seeks to stimulate certain emotions for well-defined purposes localized in time. The System needs an orderly, docile, cooperative, passive, dependent population. Above all it requires a nonviolent population, since it needs the government to have a monopoly on the use of physical force. For this reason, integration propaganda has to teach us to be horrified, frightened, and appalled by violence, so that we will not be tempted to use it even when we are very angry. (By

[4] The concepts of "integration propaganda" and "agitation propaganda" are discussed by Jacques Ellul in his book *Propaganda*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.



of the past like Jesse Helms, the leaders of the System know this very well, and that is why we are taught in school and through the media to believe that racism, sexism, homophobia, and so forth are social evils to be eliminated.

No doubt some of the leaders of the System, some of the politicians, scientists, and CEOs, privately feel that a woman's place is in the home, or that homosexuality and interracial marriage are repugnant. But even if the majority of them felt that way it would not mean that racism, sexism, and homophobia were part of the System — any more than the existence of stealing among the leaders means that stealing is part of the System. Just as the System must promote respect for law and property for the sake of its own security, the System must also discourage racism and other forms of victimization, for the same reason. That is why the System, notwithstanding any private deviations by individual members of the elite, is basically committed to suppressing discrimination and victimization.

For proof, look again at the attitude of the mainstream media. In spite of occasional timid dissent by a few of the more daring and reactionary commentators, media propaganda overwhelmingly favors racial and gender equality and acceptance of homosexuality and interracial marriage.[2]

[2] Even the most superficial review of the mass media in modern industrialized countries, or even in countries that merely aspire to modernity, will confirm that the System is committed to eliminating discrimination in regard to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc., etc., etc. It would be easy to find thousands of examples that illustrate this, but here we cite only three, from three disparate countries.
United States: "Public Displays of Affection," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 9, 2002, pages 42–43. This article provides a nice example of the way propaganda functions. It takes an ostensibly objective or neutral position on homosexual partnerships, giving some space to the views of those who oppose public acceptance of homosexuality. But anyone reading the article, with its distinctly sympathetic treatment of a homosexual couple, will be left with the impression that acceptance of homosexuality is desirable and, in the long run, inevitable. Particularly important is the photograph of the homosexual couple in question: A physically attractive pair has been selected and has been photographed attractively. No one with the slightest understanding of propaganda can fail to see that the article constitutes propaganda in favor of acceptance of homosexuality. And bear in mind that *U.S. News & World Report* is a right-of-center magazine.
Russia: "Putin denounces intolerance," *The Denver Post*, July 26, 2002, page 16A.

The System needs a population that is meek, nonviolent, domesticated, docile, and obedient. It needs to avoid any conflict or disruption that could interfere with the orderly functioning of the social machine. In addition to suppressing racial, ethnic, religious, and other group hostilities, it also has to suppress or harness for its own advantage all other tendencies that could lead to disruption or disorder, such as machismo, aggressive impulses, and any inclination to violence.

Naturally, traditional racial and ethnic antagonisms die slowly, machismo, aggressiveness, and violent impulses are not easily suppressed, and attitudes toward sex and gender identity are not transformed overnight. Therefore there are many individuals who resist these changes, and the System is faced with the problem of overcoming their resistance.[3]

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"MOSCOW-President Vladimir Putin strongly denounced racial and religious prejudice on Thursday . . . 'If we let this chauvinistic bacteria of either national or religious intolerance develop, we will ruin the country', Putin said in remarks prominently replayed on Russian television on Thursday night." Etc., etc.

Mexico: "Persiste racismo contra indigenas" ("Racism against indigenous people persists"), *El Sol de Mexico*, January 11, 2002, page 1/B. Photo caption: "In spite of efforts to give dignity to the indigenous people of our country, they continue to suffer discrimination . . ." The article reports on the efforts of the bishops of Mexico to combat discrimination, but says that the bishops want to "purify" indigenous customs in order to liberate the women from their traditionally inferior status. *El Sol de Mexico* is reputed to be a right-of-center newspaper.

Anyone who wanted to take the trouble could multiply these examples a thousand times over. The evidence that the System itself is set on eliminating discrimination and victimization is so obvious and so massive that one boggles at the radicals' belief that fighting these evils is a form of rebellion. One can only attribute it to a phenomenon well known to professional propagandists: People tend to block out, to fail to perceive or to remember, information that conflicts with their ideology. See the interesting article, "Propaganda," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 26, Macropædia, 15th Edition, 1997, pages 171–79, specifically page 176.

[3] In this section I've said something about what the System is not, but I haven't said what the System is. A friend of mine has pointed out that this may leave the reader nonplussed, so I'd better explain that for the purposes of this article it isn't necessary to have a precise definition of what the System is. I couldn't think of any way of defining the System in a single, well-rounded sentence and I didn't want to break the continuity of the article with a long, awkward, and unnecessary digression addressing the question of what the System is, so I left that question



dangerous to the System. Perhaps most important, the editor recognizes that the pettiness and meaninglessness of modern housework and the social isolation of the modern housewife can lead to serious frustration for many women; frustration that will cause problems for the System unless women are allowed an outlet through careers in the business and technical world.

Even if this editor is a macho type who personally feels more comfortable with women in a subordinate position, he knows that feminism, at least in a relatively moderate form, is good for the System. He knows that his editorial posture must be favorable toward moderate feminism, otherwise he will face the disapproval of his advertisers and other powerful people. This is why the mainstream media's attitude has been generally supportive of moderate feminism, mixed toward radical feminism, and consistently hostile only toward the most extreme feminist positions.

Through this type of process, rebel movements that are dangerous to the System are subjected to negative propaganda, while rebel movements that are believed to be useful to the System are given cautious encouragement in the media. Unconscious absorption of media propaganda influences would-be rebels to "rebel" in ways that serve the interests of the System.

The university intellectuals also play an important role in carrying out the System's trick. Though they like to fancy themselves independent thinkers, the intellectuals are (allowing for individual exceptions) the most oversocialized, the most conformist, the tamest and most domesticated, the most pampered, dependent, and spineless group in America today. As a result, their impulse to rebel is particularly strong. But, because they are incapable of independent thought, real rebellion is impossible for them. Consequently they are suckers for the System's trick, which allows them to irritate people and enjoy the illusion of rebelling without ever having to challenge the System's basic values.

Because they are the teachers of young people, the university intellectuals are in a position to help the System play its trick on the young, which they do by steering young people's rebellious impulses toward the standard, stereotyped targets: racism, colonialism, women's issues, etc. Young people who are not college students

and other powerful persons will react, and they must consider the effect on the security of the System of what they print or broadcast.

These practical considerations will usually outweigh whatever personal feelings they may have about the issue. The personal feelings of the media leaders, their advertisers, and other powerful persons are varied. They may be liberal or conservative, religious or atheistic. The only universal common ground among the leaders is their commitment to the System, its security, and its power. Therefore, within the limits imposed by what the public is willing to accept, the principal factor determining the attitudes propagated by the media is a rough consensus of opinion among the media leaders and other powerful people as to what is good the System.

Thus, when an editor or other media leader sets out to decide what attitude to take toward a movement or a cause, his first thought is whether the movement includes anything that is good or bad for the System. Maybe he tells himself that his decision is based on moral, philosophical, or religious grounds, but it is an observable fact that in practice the security of the System takes precedence over all other factors in determining the attitude of the media.

For example, if a news-magazine editor looks at the militia movement, he may or may not sympathize personally with some of its grievances and goals, but he also sees that there will be a strong consensus among his advertisers and his peers in the media that the militia movement is potentially dangerous to the System and therefore should be discouraged. Under these circumstances he knows that his magazine had better take a negative attitude toward the militia movement. The negative attitude of the media presumably is part of the reason why the militia movement has died down.

When the same editor looks at radical feminism he sees that some of its more extreme solutions would be dangerous to the System, but he also sees that feminism holds much that is useful to the System. Women's participation in the business and techical world integrates them and their families better into the System. Their talents are of serves to the System in business and technical matters. Feminist emphasis on ending domestic abuse and rape also serves the System's needs, since rape and abuse, like other forms of violence, are



## 2. How the System Exploits the Impulse to Rebel

All of us in modern society are hemmed in by a dense network of rules and regulations. We are at the mercy of large organizations such as corporations, governments, labor unions, universities, churches, and political parties, and consequently we are powerless. As a result of the servitude, the powerlessness, and the other indignities that the System inflicts on us, there is widespread frustration, which leads to an impulse to rebel. And this is where the System plays its neatest trick: Through a brilliant sleight of hand, it turns rebellion to its own advantage.

Many people do not understand the roots of their own frustration, hence their rebellion is directionless. They know that they want to rebel, but they don't know what they want to rebel against. Luckily, the System is able to fill their need by providing them with a list of standard and stereotyped grievances in the name of which to rebel: racism, homophobia, women's issues, poverty, sweatshops . . . the whole laundry-bag of "activist" issues.

Huge numbers of would-be rebels take the bait. In fighting racism, sexism, etc., etc., they are only doing the System's work for it. In spite of this, they imagine that they are rebelling against the System. How is this possible?

First, fifty years ago the System was not yet committed to equality for black people, women and homosexuals, so that action in favor of these causes really was a form of rebellion. Consequently these causes came to be conventionally regarded as rebel causes. They have retained that status today simply as a matter of tradition; that is, because each rebel generation imitates the preceding generations.

Second, there are still significant numbers of people, as I pointed out earlier, who resist the social changes that the System requires, and some of these people even are authority figures such as cops, judges, or politicians. These resisters provide a target for the

unanswered. I don't think my failure to answer it will seriously impair the reader's understanding of the point that I want to make in this article.

would-be rebels, someone for them to rebel against. Commentators like Rush Limbaugh help the process by ranting against the activists: Seeing that they have made someone angry fosters the activists' illusion that they are rebelling.

Third, in order to bring themselves into conflict even with that majority of the System's leaders who fully accept the social changes that the System demands, the would-be rebels insist on solutions that go farther than what the System's leaders consider prudent, and they show exaggerated anger over trivial matters. For example, they demand payment of reparations to black people, and they often become enraged at any criticism of a minority group, no matter how cautious and reasonable.

In this way the activists are able to maintain the illusion that they are rebelling against the System. But the illusion is absurd. Agitation against racism, sexism, homophobia and the like no more constitutes rebellion against the System than does agitation against political graft and corruption. Those who work against political graft and corruption are not rebelling but acting as the System's enforcers: They are helping to keep the politicians obedient to the rules of the System. Those who work against racism, sexism, and homophobia similarly are acting as the Systems' enforcers: They help the System to suppress the deviant racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes that cause problems for the System.

But the activists don't act only as the System's enforcers. They also serve as a kind of lightning rod that protects the System by drawing public resentment away from the System and its institutions. For example, there were several reasons why it was to the System's advantage to get women out of the home and into the workplace. Fifty years ago, if the System, as represented by the government or the media, had begun out of the blue a propa- ganda campaign designed to make it socially acceptable for women to center their lives on careers rather than on the home, the natural human resistance to change would have caused widespread public resentment. What actually happened was that the changes were spearheaded by radical feminists, behind whom the System's institutions trailed at a safe distance. The resentment of the more conservative members of society was directed primarily against the radical feminists rather



than against the System and its institutions, because the changes sponsored by the System seemed slow and moderate in comparison with the more radical solutions advocated by feminists, and even these relatively slow changes were seen as having been forced on the System by pressure from the radicals.

## 3. The System's Neatest Trick

So, in a nutshell, the System's neatest trick is this:

a. For the sake of its own efficiency and security, the System needs to bring about deep and radical social changes to match the changed conditions resulting from technological progress.
b. The frustration of life under the circumstances imposed by the System leads to rebellious impulses.
c. Rebellious impulses are co-opted by the System in the service of the social changes it requires; activists "rebel" against the old and outmoded values that are no longer of use to the System and in favor of the new values that the System needs us to accept.
d. In this way rebellious impulses, which otherwise might have been dangerous to the System, are given an outlet that is not only harmless to the System, but useful to it.
e. Much of the public resentment resulting from the imposition of social changes is drawn away from the System and its institutions and is directed instead at the radicals who spearhead the social changes.

Of course, this trick was not planned in advance by the System's leaders, who are not conscious of having played a trick at all. The way it works is something like this:

In deciding what position to take on any issue, the editors, publishers, and owners of the media must consciously or unconsciously balance several factors. They must consider how their readers or viewers will react to what they print or broadcast about the issue, they must consider how their advertisers, their peers in the media,