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USA

Two Dead Americans—Two Americas

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Last week, the nation's attention focused on two dead Americans, two men who couldn't be more different, two men who seem to embody the nation's divided politics, culture, and morality. One was John Lewis, the African American civil rights leader and legislator who died five years ago. The other was Jeffrey Epstein, the wealthy socialite and convicted pedophile who provided elite businessmen and politicians access to underage girls.

John Lewis

On July 17, tens of thousands joined the "Good Trouble Lives" protest against President Donald Trump held in 1,600 towns and cities across the country. It was John Lewis, who served in the 1960s as president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and who was first elected as a Democrat to the House of Representatives in 1986 and served 17 two-year terms, who said it was necessary to engage in "good trouble, necessary trouble" to bring about change. As a young activist fighting for Black civil rights, he was badly beaten and jailed on several occasions for engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience to the South's unjust racist laws.

Now that we are in high summer, these protests were not as large as the No Kings protest against Trump on June 14—the largest protest on a single day in American history—but they were spirited and significant, with the singing of civil rights songs such as "Ain't Going to Let Nobody Turn Me Around," and speeches calling on Americans to defend the rights of all. In cities like New York, Chicago, and Atlanta, thousands marched, while in small cities only hundreds, but all of the protests were a call to return to the strategy of confrontation used by the mass movements of the 1960s and 70s that fought for civil rights, against the U.S. war on Vietnam, and for women's liberation.

Jeffrey Epstein

At the same time that Lewis' memory was inspiring progressive Americans, Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement was being torn apart by the memory of the financier Epstein who committed suicide six years ago. Epstein and his associate Ghislaine Maxwell procured young women both for himself and his friends. In 2008 Epstein was convicted of procuring a child for prostitution and he was charged again in 2019 of sex trafficking minors. While in jail awaiting trial, authorities said he committed suicide, though some believe he was murdered.

In 2016, Q, the anonymous oracle of the QAnon movement, claimed that Democratic Party leaders, the "deep state" and "global elites" ran a Satanic pedophile ring grooming children for sexual exploitation. Millions believed it. When Epstein appeared on the scene, a man whose friends included Prince. Andrew and former Democratic Party president Bill Clinton, Q's claims seemed to be confirmed. In 2022, Donald Trump, seeking support from the Q cult, posted an image of himself wearing a Q logo pin together with the Q slogan, "The storm is coming." Q's followers believed Trump was fighting an invisible war of good against evil against the pedophiles.

When Trump became president, his supporters in the MAGA movement believed they would finally see the Epstein files, including the Epstein client list. But no, his attorney general Pam Bondi said the Epstein files held nothing of interest and that there was no client list. The MAGA base became enraged. Trump called his angry supporters "stupid" and "foolish" and suggested they were being misled by "lunatic leftists." And still Trump equivocated saying he would only release some of the files. Everyone wonders if Trump, for years a close friend of Epstein who traveled

on his private plane, was on the list.

The country is deeply divided. While one part of the country, inspired by the idealism of John Lewis, is building a resistance, another large part is wrapped up in conspiracy theories about the crimes of the ultra-rich. But that part may be about to crash. We will see.

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