In defense of Yugoslavia: Max Blumenthal on Michael Parenti's bravest work

On April 24, 2026, Max Blumenthal addressed a memorial for the late socialist scholar Michael Parenti at the Universal Unitarian Church in Berkeley, California. Blumenthal emphasized to posthumous attacks on what he called Parenti's most courageous work: his book, To Kill A Nation, exposing the planned breakup of Yugoslavia and NATO's subsequent war on Serbia. Also speaking at the memorial event were former Congressman Dennis Kucinich, comedian Jimmy Dore, scholar Christian Parenti, and Marcie Smith Parenti. Watch the full stream here: https://www.youtube.com /watch?v=7lxpADLjzeA ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at https://thegrayzone.com Support our original journalism at Patreon: https://patreon.com/grayzone Facebook: https://facebook.com/thegrayzone Twitter: https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews Instagram: https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews Minds: https://minds.com/thegrayzone Mastodon: https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone #TheGrayzone

#Max

How's everybody doing? All right. It's an honor, a huge honor, to be here. Didn't know Michael Parenti. I knew Christian Parenti—known him for a long time, since we were at The Nation magazine. What the hell happened to that place? We kind of came back together in the political wilderness, and here we are. And it's, yeah, it feels like everything's coming full circle. I did not personally know Michael Parenti. He made a massive impact on me and my thinking, and on the thinking of everyone around The Grayzone—everyone who follows The Grayzone, the way that we see the world. He really paved the way. Michael Parenti—I only have enough time to clear my throat. I just wrote down some things, so I'll try to get through it. Michael Parenti's 1986 classic *Inventing Reality* was, of course, seminal for those of us who critique corporate media.

Kind of introduced the concept of corporate media, and they never forgave him for it. The New York Times review at the time said the book was, quote, easy to dismiss because Parenti painted in broad Marxist strokes—in contrast to the pointillist precision of the New York Times that sold America on Iraqi WMDs. This was a slashing study of institutions like the New York Times and its ownership, Pinch Sulzberger. In this book, Parenti noted how mainstream journalists mask their own ideological biases behind a false patina of objectivity. They own and control reality and then weaponize it to, in his words, exert a subtle, persistent influence in defining the scope of respectable political discourse, channeling public attention in directions that are essentially supportive of the existing political-economic system.

So the New York Times will tell you that it's simply reporting all the news that's fit to print. But when it labels any counter-hegemonic or socialist leader or political system as authoritarian, any prominent

public figure who questions the official version of events—from the JFK assassination to the Gulf of Tonkin incident to the Syrian chemical attacks to China's treatment of the Uyghurs—when it labels them as conspiracy theorists, when it refers to Hamas and Hezbollah as Islamic extremist or even terrorist organizations, and then refers to the Likud party of Israel as conservative, as though Netanyahu is motivated primarily by anxiety over gay marriage and not the demographic growth of the indigenous Palestinian population.

When it does this, it is in fact advancing a value system. And as Michael Parenti explained, this is the value system of the capitalist class. And you're not allowed to say that. You're not going to find that naughty little five-letter word on the pages of the New York Times or the Washington Post, which is owned by the third-biggest billionaire in the world.

Class, you're not allowed to talk about that. But it says it all. And so after Michael Parenti died on January 24th, the task of composing his obituary for the New York Times fell to someone with a bio expressing a morbid but ultimately humble and seemingly apolitical commitment: "I write about dead people," was the bio that Trip Gabriel provided for himself. But even with the headline of his obituary of Parenti, Gabriel perfectly embodied Parenti's harshest critique of the New York Times and the smug personalities that populated its editorial bureaus. "Michael Parenti, unapologetic Marxist theorist and author, dies at 92," read the headline. He viewed U.S. history through the lens of class struggle. But some accused him of defending brutal regimes in the Soviet Union and Serbia.

No, you accuse him. You're accusing him of that, but then you're using the "some say" tactic we always see in corporate media to mask your own ideological biases, to demonize the dissident. So it was the very tactics that Michael Parenti wrote about and exposed in *Inventing Reality* that were weaponized against him. It was the tactics that have also been used to justify the destruction of Yugoslavia or to justify the destruction of post-Soviet Russia, in which three to five million Russians died from excess deaths as the Harvard boys moved in and economically raped Russia's economy. Did a brutal regime do that? Was a brutal regime responsible for that crime against Russia? Did a brutal regime shell the Russian parliament in 1993 so Yeltsin could rule by decree to take out the hardliners who were actually elected parliamentarians?

No, a brutal regime didn't do that. A Democrat named Boris Yeltsin did that. He was a Democrat. I remember the New Yorker correspondent at the time said, you can't make an omelet unless you break some eggs. He had to do that. A Democrat like Vladimir Zelensky right now, who rules Ukraine outside of his presidential term, banning all opposition parties, banning all independent media, jailing opposition lawmakers. Is he the Democrat? Only the counter-hegemonic governments are brutal regimes. So this is a really tough obituary for Michael Parenti by a guy who just simply writes about dead people. And as the Twitter historian Esha Krishnaswamy pointed out, the New York Times published a more favorable op-ed of Heinrich Himmler's daughter than it did of Michael Parenti.

Gudrun Burwitz, ever-loyal daughter of Himmler, is dead at 88, read the headline. According to Trip Gabriel of the New York Times, Michael Parenti's most unforgivable transgression was to have

defended the socialist targets of the post–Cold War U.S. regime change campaigns, which continue to this day. He wrote, his support for nominally Marxist governments led him toward positions few others on the American left would take. Ooh. In the 1980s, he defended the Soviet Union as it crumbled and its former satellites in Eastern Europe won independence. He took the side of Serbia and its murderous leader, Slobodan Milosevic, during the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s as that country fractured into independent nations. It just fractured.

It just happened to break apart. It didn't feel like being together anymore. And NATO carried out a bombing campaign against Serbia. The two have nothing to do with one another. So because dead people cannot demand corrections or write letters to the editor, I flew 3,000 miles to come here today to set the record straight that that was the most important and most courageous thing that Michael Parenti did — to defend those nations and their people against this brutal regime. While the compatible left intellectuals celebrated the collapse of the socialist bloc and cheered on the grotesque regime change wars that inevitably followed and ignored the human toll and the migration flows, Parenti remained consistent.

He stuck to his guns, and he sharpened his critique of empire over time. His book *To Kill a Nation* is, as I said, probably his bravest work, as he methodically interrogated the planned destruction of Yugoslavia as the last socialist state in Europe and the criminal NATO war that followed against the Serbian rump state, using the many deceptions that justified the whole assault to indict Western media. *To Kill a Nation* is a model for the kind of work that we do at The Grayzone, published at a time before the Internet, before the mass proliferation of independent media.

And it provides a basis for us to understand the inexorable march of Western campaigns to subsequently destroy Iraq, destroy Libya, Syria, and now target Iran and Russia via Ukraine, which Yugoslavia made possible. Before the Western media disseminated U.S.-concocted claims of Gaddafi supplying his men with Viagra to commit mass rape in Benghazi, or Assad gassing retreating rebels in Douma, Syria, in April 2018—both proven hoaxes which justified NATO bombing campaigns against those countries—there were countless atrocity deceptions across the former Yugoslavia, such as the massacre of 43 supposedly innocent men in January 1999 in the Kosovar village of Račak, which a U.S. official explicitly blamed on Yugoslav police.

This became the Clinton administration's pretext for demanding total NATO occupation and authorizing a massive bombing campaign on the Serbs, despite the fact that, as Parenti outlined and exposed in *To Kill a Nation*, those killed in Račak were actually fighters from the CIA-backed conglomeration of bandits, drug traffickers, mafiosi, and jihadists known as the KLA, or Kosovo Liberation Army, and had been killed after attacking Yugoslav police. Another deception... Milosevic is portrayed as murderous by the New York Times for incidents both real, imaginary, and exaggerated. But what about the KLA and the Bosnian and Croatian forces who conducted hideous atrocities against Serbs with Western support, including in and around Srebrenica?

What about the U.S.-controlled NATO forces that bombed Radio Television Serbia, destroyed bridges, decimated power plants, massacred refugee convoys, and deployed depleted uranium, cluster bombs, and napalm against a largely defenseless civilian population? Are they not murderous too? Today, Donald Trump is portrayed by the Democrats and much of our media as a demented madman, for not only bombing bridges and power stations in Iran, but also for his threat to destroy an entire civilization—his threat to bomb Iran back to the Stone Age. So too is his Secretary of War and DOD hire, Pete Hegseth, who's vowed death and destruction raining down from the skies all day long on the people of Iran. And they are sadistic, sociopathic figures to be sure. In an age of cartoon villains, some of them stand out. But who said this?

You know, no real prizes for who can guess, but I bet some of you can. I was suggesting that we blow up all the bridges on the Drina. I was suggesting that we take out his oil supplies. That was Joe Biden on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee referring to NATO assaults on Serbia. Who said this: the aim of the war on Yugoslavia is to demolish, destroy, devastate, degrade, and ultimately eliminate the essential infrastructure of the country? That was Wesley Clark, the NATO commander, as quoted by Michael Parenti. So Donald Trump, if we understand what Michael Parenti was getting at and read his work, we understand that Donald Trump is not just some maniacal, irrational aberration against an otherwise sober-minded leadership which favors negotiation to civilian slaughter and mass destruction.

He is the most honest face of the capitalist and, I would add, militant Zionist class that he serves. And he and those around him know exactly what they're doing. They are the embodiment of what Parenti called rational fascism. And they also know that they enjoy total impunity when they do it. That's why none of the U.S. military or political officials who ordered the killing of thousands of civilians and billions of dollars in property damage in Yugoslavia ever faced any legal accountability for their crimes. As Parenti pointed out, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was set up by Madeleine Albright with U.S. funding, in total violation of the U.N. Charter, with no precedent in international law and no mandate from the World Court. It was essentially a U.S. court in The Hague.

And it was a product of the same so-called U.S.-led rules-based order which has protected the perpetrators of the Gaza genocide. It's a system in which the U.S. makes the rules and everyone must follow their orders. And so a courtroom drama was contrived as a political extension of NATO's war, and it took on the form of the prosecution of Slobodan Milosevic. But here's something else that Trip Gabriel of The New York Times won't tell you. In 2016, ten years after being subjected to an international trial and being denied heart surgery leading to his death in a high-security prison inside The Hague, which prevented him from publicly confronting the NATO powers that had bombarded and destroyed his country, Slobodan Milosevic was exonerated by the International Tribunal, which found that he was not responsible for war crimes committed during the 1992 to 1995 Bosnian War.

They won't tell you that. Michael Parenti got it right. You won't know that from his corporate media obituary—that Michael Parenti got it right again. Michael Parenti was right. Michael Parenti was right because he was consistent, because he stuck to his guns, because he painted in straight lines. He never veered from an anti-imperialist analysis when so many other left intellectuals did. He was right because he did not seek elite respectability. And so you would never find him on some shadowy financier's jet. He would be right down here with the people in Berkeley.

#Max

He spoke for the working class from which he came. He was right. He was righteous. Michael Parenti is a guiding light in the darkness of this blood-stained golden age. Michael Parenti, presente.