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## **Trump campaign claims fundraising windfall in wake of guilty verdict**

Financial Times

1 June 2024

Donald Trump's campaign said it had shattered its own fundraising record after his conviction on Thursday, raising \$52.8mn online in the 24 hours since he became the first ex-president to be found a felon.

The large haul will help Trump cut into Joe Biden's massive cash advantage and showed again how the former US commander-in-chief has capitalised on his legal problems to bankroll his re-election bid.

The verdict in New York found Trump guilty on all 34 counts in his 'hush money' case, ushering in an unprecedented era in US presidential politics.

A Morning Consult poll on Saturday found that 54 per cent of those surveyed approved of the jury's decision, while 34 per cent disapproved. At the same time, it found no overall decline in Trump's popularity and noted that few supported sending the former president to jail.

Trump hailed the verdict's impact on his fundraising efforts at a Friday press conference in Trump Tower, his New York home. "The good news is last night ... they raised with small money donors, meaning like \$21, \$42, \$53, \$38, [for each donation], a record \$39mn in about a 10-hour period," he said, adding that he would be appealing against the "scam" verdict.

Within minutes of the guilty verdict on Thursday, the campaign acted to raise money, calling the ex-president a "POLITICAL PRISONER" on its website.

"I was just convicted in a RIGGED political Witch Hunt trial," wrote Trump on the campaign page. "I DID NOTHING WRONG!"

US President Joe Biden criticised his predecessor and his allies for attacking the US justice system. "The American principle that no one is above the law was reaffirmed, Donald Trump was given every opportunity to defend himself," the president said, speaking from the White House on Friday afternoon. "It's reckless, it's dangerous. it's irresponsible for anyone to say this was rigged, just because they don't like the verdict."

Republicans and donors immediately claimed fundraising victories after the verdict, which found Trump guilty of conspiring to buy the silence of porn actor Stormy Daniels days before the 2016 election and to cover his tracks in business records.

Jason Thielman, who runs the official Senate Republican campaign arm, said his group had “its largest online daily fundraising haul” of the 2024 election cycle. He wrote on X, “Outrage over the sham verdict against Trump has spurred average Americans into action!”

Last year, the ex-president used each of his four indictments to boost his fundraising effort, selling T-shirts bearing his mugshot, with contributions spiking each time. But Trump political groups have spent at least \$80mn of donor money on his legal fees — and have roughly that much cash less in their election war chest than groups supporting Biden.

Trump still faces a civil fraud judgment that threatens his businesses in New York, and three criminal cases, including charges from the Department of Justice special counsel that he conspired to overturn the 2020 election.

While the campaign highlighted the small-dollar donations that poured in following Thursday’s verdict, several wealthy donors also announced their support after the case finished.

Venture capitalist Shaun Maguire, a partner in venture capital firm Sequoia, on Thursday said he had donated \$300,000 to Trump’s campaign after the verdict, writing on X, “The timing isn’t a coincidence.”

New York Republican Lee Zeldin, a former US congressman, also claimed on X after the verdict that he had “secured” a \$800,000 donation for Trump.

Google searches for DonaldJTrump.com and WinRed spiked more than 5,000 per cent, “trump campaign website” jumped at least 1,000 per cent and “biden campaign website” jumped more than 350 per cent.

Several megadonors have also swung behind Trump in recent days, with billionaires Stephen Schwarzman, Bill Ackman and Miriam Adelson all making moves to back the former president’s re-election bid.



### ***Napoleon and The Crown* are travesties: there is no 'artistic licence' to distort history**

The Guardian

20 November 2023

We've made a great movie. It's called *January 2021* and it shows how Donald Trump really was cheated out of the White House and Joe Biden really did tamper with the Georgia ballot boxes. In one amazing scene you see it was Mike Pence who encouraged the march on the Capitol to discredit Trump. The pope then tells Trump he won. We got the guys from *The Crown* to make it and it's really moving.

Don't believe it? Come on. It's based on real events. Only bits are fictionalised to add some colour. Besides, since the movie came out, half of Americans think the events it depicts really happened. And we've made millions. Yippee.

Deliberately telling lies about the living or the deceased – whether they died recently or centuries ago – is simply wrong. It is worse than wrong: it is cruel and an offence to history and potentially to democracy. Those defending the practice argue that *The Crown*, *Napoleon* and *Oppenheimer* are good clean fun, true to life, based on real events, hugely popular and, anyway, are OK because the film-makers have artistic licence.

*Napoleon* clearly contains some nonsense designed by its director, Ridley Scott, to depict the emperor as a sort of Adolf Hitler. No one but Hitler is Hitler. But Napoleon is long dead and his life has been minutely recorded and assessed. As for the biopic of J Robert Oppenheimer, "the father of the atomic bomb", is the story it tells true? To believe so was vital to enjoying the film, but no one bothered to tell us if it was.

Spotting falsehoods in *The Crown* has become a national sport. Royal experts Hugo Vickers and Sally Bedell Smith have pointed out many of them; all are gratuitous and pointless. The made-up stories about Prince Philip, the Kennedys, Macmillan, the Queen, Prince Charles and what Diana said about her father seem casually derogatory. Had the films told the actual truth about this odd family it would have been just as dramatic. If you are not intending to tell the truth, why go to such expense to make the actors and sets so "accurate"? The effect is that the audience is often deceived into assuming the narrative is accurate too.

When art is so short of inspiration that it has to steal from history, it should at least respect history's sole essence, which is truth. Distant history – as of Richard III, whose sins were reassessed once more in last Saturday's Channel 4 documentary *The Princes in the Tower: the New*

*Evidence* – can look after itself. I imagine even the royal family can survive these distortions. That is not the point.

This is dangerous territory. Much can be learned from journalists, who are like historians in that both occupations require a commitment to accuracy. Both are reporters on the past and present, and expected to search for the truth. To lie is serious. If errors are made, efforts must be made to correct them. No journalist is proud of being wrong, or boasts “artistic licence”. A film that portrays and dramatises historical events should be no different.

These are sick times for anyone wanting to keep the truth at the heart of public debate. Were Trump to be elected next year, it would be in large part because of the falsities of Fox News, and the lies that spread on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Falsifying events inflames emotions, reinforces hostilities and fuels grievances. At such a time, there is no place for “art” that arrogantly claims the right to ignore the truth.



## **Is Sunak's sinking campaign the worst in British history?**

The Independent  
May 26, 2024

He is soaked in Downing Street on his launch, drowned out by triumphant Blair's anthem, his MPs are fleeing the battlefield and he visits a Titanic museum. When you think things cannot get worse for Rishi Sunak, they do. Is this the worst start to an election campaign in history?

Those with a distant memory can recall Michael Foot's 1983 election campaign for Labour with the manifesto described by the late Gerald Kaufman as "the longest suicide note in history". But what went down in folklore as the worst ever election campaign may have found its match in catastrophic miscalculations and farce.

There are a number of people apparently giving Mr Sunak advice - but whoever was responsible for getting the prime minister to visit Belfast's Titanic Quarter should be sacked already. If the image of an unsinkable ship holed by an iceberg and sinking inexorably to the bottom of a deep blue ocean is not a metaphor for what is happening to the Tories before our eyes, then nothing is.

Of course, the Titanic infamously did not have enough lifeboats for the passengers to escape. This may explain why so many Conservative MPs have declined to board Mr Sunak's election campaign ship and decided not to run again. By Friday night, 78 of them had decided to quit in a shocking indictment of the party. Michael Gove doing his best impression of a rat abandoning the sinking ship told a story in itself. It takes a special kind of contempt for a leader to abandon him without warning when he is fighting for his political life and that of the party.

In the first three days since the election was called, 10 Tory MPs had given up and said they would not run. The fight has ebbed out of the party, if it was ever there at all.

Previous election campaigns have had their hiccups. Both Labour and the Conservative manifesto launches in 2017 tried to outdo one another in calamity. Gordon Brown's sullen performances in the TV debates in 2010 were a low point. John Prescott actually hitting a voter in 2001 was extraordinary. Neil Kinnock's appalling Sheffield rally proved terminal in 1992. But it is hard to think of a single election campaign where almost every move has been so misjudged.

You would have thought that one of these people would have had the gumption to tell Mr Sunak that standing in the rain alone outside Downing Street in the pouring rain would not provide the best of starts. Or perhaps mentioned that football banter about the Euros was not the best idea in Wales where the team failed to qualify. Or even seen the issue with the Titanic museum. Or realised planting a Tory councillor in a high-vis jacket might get found out.

This is before we get to the fact that apparently nobody had warned party headquarters (CCHQ) that there might be an election, meaning that they still had to find almost 200 candidates in the next few days. It says a lot that the party chairman (Richard Holden MP) is supposed to coordinate the campaign but still does not have a seat.

The problem is that at an average poll gap of 21 points behind Labour, there was no room for error for the Tories or Mr Sunak. Instead, we have witnessed a series of gaffes and desperately poor strategy. Not surprisingly the Techne weekly tracker suggests that that gap has grown even more since the election was called.

There are five-and-a-half weeks more of this to go. Some Tory MPs are bravely standing and fighting. For them, and for the good of his party, Mr Sunak and his top team need to turn things around quickly. If not the apocalyptic predictions of fewer than the 156 Tory MPs returned in 1906 (the worst in the party's 346- year history) may actually come true.



## **#MeToo men want to be forgiven, but what of the careers of their casualties?**

The Observer

16 June 2024

Yes, they did something wrong. But the punishment is out of proportion. They have apologised, they have promised to change. Isn't it time we forgave some of the men brought down by #MeToo? It's an important question – one that anyone interested in justice should ask.

In an interview with Piers Morgan last week, Kevin Spacey sobbed at the treatment he had suffered, even as he conceded that his accusers – one or two of them – had been telling the truth. "There has been overreach by the media... but by your own admission, your behaviour was extremely inappropriate," Morgan summarises. "Sometimes it was non-consensual."

"I am not going to behave that way [again]," replies Spacey, "and now we are at a place where: OK, what next? I am trying to seek a path to redemption."

A similar remark appeared elsewhere last week – this time by a feminist writer in the New York Times – after the death of Morgan Spurlock, another man cancelled by #MeToo after he admitted harassing a colleague. "I can't shake the feeling that nearly seven years after MeToo," she writes, "we still haven't found a way for men who want to make amends to do so meaningfully."

It is troubling to see people ostracised, brutally and without due process, and with seemingly no hope of salvation. No fair-minded person wants to live in a world like this. But as we ask whether perfect justice has been served when it comes to #MeToo's powerful men, we should consider if we are missing part of the narrative. We used to ostracise their victims.

We use different language to describe it, so may miss the symmetry. But it's there. Blacklisted, forced out of jobs or even industries, publicly shamed: until quite recently it was the survivors of sexual harassment who were most often "cancelled". As Spacey weeps over jobs he has lost and former colleagues who no longer speak to him, we should remember that the very same fate hung over those he once propositioned – indeed it made the abuse possible in the first place. They feared he might ruin their careers.

The list of unforgiven victims – shunned for many years – is long. Actors Mira Sorvino, Ashley Judd and others were all "blacklisted" from Hollywood after they turned down Harvey Weinstein. Brendan Fraser's career ended for several decades when he was groped by a former president of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, and complained. When a young Jane Seymour rejected the overtures of a Hollywood bigwig, she was told that, if she let it slip, "you'll never work ever again anywhere on the planet".



The pattern repeats at less starry altitudes. A 2017 report on harassment victims from across the arts remarks that it was “striking how many of their stories share the same ending. Either the alleged abuse, the victim’s refusal to stay quiet, or both, slams the door on critical job opportunities and puts a serious – sometimes terminal – dent in her career. In some cases the victim never works in her industry again.”

Like Spacey, and Spurlock, they were banished. Where was their “due process”? Where were their opportunities to “make amends”? (...)

Why, when we fret over this new habit of banishing powerful men, do we fail to notice that a parallel habit is being ushered out: the blackballing of victims? Is it that we are accustomed to injustices piling upon the already unfortunate, but expect high-status people to be treated with perfect fairness? (...)

The plight of men such as Spacey has been lent the dignity of an existential question: is redemption ever possible? But unfair punishment is a human habit – notable here only because it usually falls on other sorts of people. The defining battle of the #MeToo movement so far – Amber Heard v Johnny Depp – suggests we see a binary proposition: should we ostracise the accused, or the accuser? The world is not perfect. Perhaps we must pick our poison.



## **Garrick Club votes to allow women members for the first time**

Financial Times

May 7, 2024

The Garrick Club has voted to allow women to join for the first time, reversing a policy that had stood for almost 200 years before attracting growing scrutiny of London's exclusive private gentlemen's club scene. Members of the Garrick, including actors, lawyers, politicians and senior journalists, on Tuesday voted by 60 per cent to 40 per cent to admit women, after several high-profile members said their participation would become untenable without a reversal.

One member said the vote would "rejuvenate membership". The vote, held at the Grand Connaught Rooms in nearby Holborn rather than the club itself, had been keenly anticipated after details of the members list were published earlier this year.

High-profile figures, including Richard Moore, head of MI6, and Civil Service head Simon Case, stepped down from the club after reports raised questions over their membership while leading organisations that have championed equality.

Other members, including the BBC journalist John Simpson and musician Sting, had pushed for a vote after warning that they too would resign their membership unless the policy was reversed.

Members were warned not to speak to the press on leaving the vote, but a few expressed support for the passing of the motion provided they were not identified. The club was contacted earlier in the day, but said it would not comment on the vote.

Others were sceptical the club had solved an issue that had left members divided, arguing that the vote had only passed because the club had suspended its usual need for a two-thirds majority for any rule changes.

"I don't really give a \*\*\*\* about the outcome, but I worry those that were opposed are still a sizeable minority and will continue to argue that the vote was flawed or a stitch-up," one long-term member told the FT.

The vote had been narrowed to focus on whether a legal opinion received by the club — that by the letter of the law women had never been officially barred — was valid.

"My biggest concern is that there will still be division among existing members," the long-term member added, saying there was some animosity towards members such as actor Stephen Fry and others who had publicly warned they may need to resign if the vote had not passed.

Fry appeared in good spirits as he exited the meeting, hugging other members who congratulated him on "victory". But he declined to speak to the press.

“All these people pretending like they didn’t know the rules of the club when they joined, it’s laughable,” the long-term member added.

Others cautioned that, despite the outcome of the vote, it could still be a number of years until any women were admitted, given the lengthy process for nominations and approvals baked into the club system.

Asked who the first women members might be, one half-joked they could nominate Catherine, Princess of Wales. Another, in high spirits, said he may nominate Stormy Daniels, the former porn actor who is testifying in the trial of Donald Trump in New York on Tuesday “depending on how her testimony goes”.

The same member said that while the issue had revealed divisions in the club led by a “hardcore” opposed to women joining, the meeting had nevertheless been good natured.

Another was less polite. Standing outside a pub opposite the Grand Connaught Rooms he said the media had created the issue, branding the press “a \*\*\*\*ing disgrace” and adding there was no comparable focus on all-women clubs or women-only colleges.

Most members appeared in rather better spirits. “As you might expect, it was all rather gentlemanly,” one member said as he walked through Covent Garden towards the Garrick. “There’s not too much rancour. We’re all going for a drink together now at the club.”



## **Charles issues Cop28 rallying cry telling leaders: 'The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth'**

Evening Standard

1 December 2023

The King issued a rallying cry to world leaders to save the planet from catastrophic climate change on Friday, stating: “The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth”.

Addressing the United Nations COP28 summit in Dubai, he warned heads of government, business chiefs and climate campaigners that the world remains “dreadfully far off track” in key net zero targets. As the planet warms with wildfires and floods already destroying communities, he emphasised: “In 2050 our grandchildren won’t be asking what we said, they will be living with the consequences of what we did or didn’t do.”

The 75-year-old monarch and Commonwealth head had flown to the United Arab Emirates amid the Omid Scobie book furor. The Dutch edition of Scobie’s book *Endgame* named the King and his daughter-in-law, the Princess of Wales, as having made remarks about Prince Archie’s skin colour before he was born. *Endgame* was hastily withdrawn from shop shelves in the Netherlands and copies pulped with the publisher blaming a “translation error”.

At the summit, the King publicly ignored the controversy as he took centre stage, being hailed for his work over the decades highlighting the threats to the globe and nature.

He spelled out a five-point plan to save the planet. They are how public and private organisations can be brought together to combat climate change, how to ensure money is found for developments to secure a sustainable future, how innovation can be accelerated, how long-term approaches can be found, and how an “ambitious new vision” can be forged for the next century.

The King acknowledged some “important” progress had been made but stressed that “transformational action” was needed as the dangers of climate change were “no longer distant risks” and that nature was being taken into “dangerous, uncharted territory”.

He urged delegates to make the summit a “turning point”. The King pointed to repeated cyclones seen in island nations, wildfires across Europe and unprecedented floods in Asia as some of many clear signs of ongoing climate change. “As I have tried to say on many occasions, unless we rapidly repair and restore nature’s unique economy, based on harmony and balance, which is our ultimate sustainer, our own economy and survivability will be imperilled,” he said.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, states agreed to limit the average global temperature rise to 2C above pre-industrial levels and aim to stop it from rising above 1.5C. But the United Nations has warned that the planet is on course for a catastrophic 3C increase by the end of the century under current climate policies, despite efforts.

UN secretary-general António Guterres told delegates: "We are miles from the goals of the Paris Agreement and minutes to midnight for 1.5 degrees C. But it is not too late. We can, you can, prevent planetary crash and burn."

But he warned that the world "cannot save a burning planet with a fire hose of fossil fuels," with many countries accused of dragging their feet in switching to renewable energy. Mr Guterres told how humanity's future was "hanging in the balance" as he urged conference delegates to act now.

COP28 is the first time that countries are conducting a "global stock-take" of progress made since the Paris agreement but hopes of a decisive breakthrough in the battle against global warming were low.

Abridged



## **Elon Musk, America's richest immigrant, is angry about immigration**

Los Angeles Times

June 3, 2024

Elon Musk and his brother Kimbal were speaking to a crowd of business leaders in 2013 about creating their first company when the conversation seemed to go off script. Originally from South Africa, Kimbal said the brothers lacked lawful immigration status when they began the business in the U.S.

Eleven years later, Elon was back at the Milken Institute last month in Beverly Hills, talking once again about immigration. This time, he described the southern border as a scene out of the zombie apocalypse and said the legal immigration process is long and "Kafkaesque."

"I'm a big believer in immigration, but to have unvetted immigration at large scale is a recipe for disaster," Musk said at the conference. "So I'm in favor of greatly expediting legal immigration but having a secure southern border."

Musk, the most financially successful immigrant in the U.S. and the third-richest person in the world, has frequently repeated his view that it is difficult to immigrate to the U.S. legally but "trivial and fast" to enter illegally. What he leaves out: Seeking asylum is a legal right under national and international law, regardless of how a person arrives on U.S. soil.

But as the election year ramps up and Republicans make border security a major theme of their campaigns, Musk's comments about immigration have grown increasingly extreme. The chief executive of SpaceX and Tesla, who purchased the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) in 2022, has sometimes used his giant microphone to elevate racist conspiracies and spread misinformation about immigration law.

While Musk's views are clear, what's murkier is his influence. Some see him as an influential opinion maker with the power to shape policy and sway voters, while others dismiss him as a social media bomb thrower mainly heard within a conservative echo chamber.

Polling shows immigration is a top issue for voters. For the third month in a row, it was named by respondents to an open-ended April Gallup poll as the most important problem facing the U.S.

Last year Musk visited the Eagle Pass, Texas, border, meeting with local politicians and law enforcement to get what he called an "unfiltered" view of the situation.

He also helped spread viral reports falsely claiming the Biden administration had “secretly” flown hundreds of thousands of migrants into the U.S. to reduce border arrivals.

But the migrants in question fly commercial under a program created by the Biden administration, exercising the president’s authority to temporarily admit people for humanitarian reasons. The program allows up to 30,000 vetted people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela lawfully relocate to the U.S. each month and obtain work permits if they have a financial sponsor.

Contrary to Musk’s claim that the administration is looking for Democratic voters, those arriving under the program have no pathway to citizenship. The claim gives fuel to extremist ideologies such as great replacement theory, the racist conspiracy that there’s a plot to reduce the population of white people.

There’s a particular irony in Musk attacking the program that allows limited arrivals for humanitarian reasons while simultaneously saying he favors legal immigration, said Ahilan Arulanantham, a lawyer, professor and co-director of the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at UCLA. The program offers would-be migrants a lawful pathway to reach the U.S. and reduced arrivals at the border from the beneficiary countries.

“That shows a very deep confusion about a fairly basic point about immigration law and the way the policy works,” Arulanantham said. Musk’s lack of criticism of a similar program for Ukrainians illustrates the undercurrent of racism accompanying attacks on the program for Latin American migrants, he added.

Musk amplifying false claims is counterproductive to rational immigration policy, Arulanantham said. “Every voice adds to the pile, and the louder the voice, the marginally greater the addition to the pile. He is a very loud voice.”



## Anti-monarchists decapitate statue of King George V in Melbourne

Daily Mail

11 June 2024

A statue of King George V has been decapitated in Melbourne by vandals who have dedicated the attack to King Charles - just months before he is due to visit Australia with the Queen. Anti-monarchists filmed the beheading and posted it online with the soundtrack of *God Save the Queen* by the Sex Pistols as assaults on royal and colonial-era monuments continue Down Under<sup>1</sup> and in the Commonwealth including Canada.

The attack happened yesterday as Australia enjoyed a public holiday to mark the current King's official birthday, which is always on the second Monday in June. Footage shared on social media showed the vandals cutting the head from George V's statue and covering it in red paint before they sprayed the words: 'The colony will fall' - a phrase used by Antifa and hard-left groups in previous attacks.

The shocking video ends as the group pans to George V's head on the ground and the caption 'Happy Birthday Motherf\*\*\*er' flashes on screen. Police in Victoria are investigating but a group called WACA, which stands for the Whistleblowers, Activists and Communities Alliance, have already taken responsibility as critics again branded Australia the most 'woke country in the world'.

It came amid a spate of attacks on Australian statues of great British figures such as Queen Victoria and Captain Cook over the past year.

A recent poll found Australians believe their country has never been so divided. This division has been blamed on the nation's left-wing Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

But there has been a growing number of attacks by the Left in Australia on statues related to Britain, including royal monuments. It was a longstanding policy of Mr Albanese's to hold a referendum on whether Australia should become a republic, but the resounding loss of the Voice referendum last October has put those plans on ice for the foreseeable future.

The Melbourne statue attacks came three months after 9million Australians returned an overwhelming rejection of a referendum to give greater political rights to indigenous people. All six states voted No in what was branded Australia's 'Brexit moment'.

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<sup>1</sup> "Down Under" = slang for "Australia"



This was despite the 'Yes' campaign being bankrolled by the nation's biggest businesses and backed by most of the country's most famous names including Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett as well as a host of social media stars, influencers and sports heroes.

Anthony Albanese has been accused of bowing to a 'noisy minority' spouting 'woke rubbish' and virtue-signalling on issues such as climate change and gender.

The avowed republican is also accused of stoking anti-British sentiment as well as being instrumental in ensuring that King Charles III does not appear on the new \$5 note after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Anti-royalists hailed this as a step towards a republic Down Under.

Some have questioned whether corporates such as Qantas co-opting of the 'Acknowledgment of Country' to show respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage is doing more harm than good to Indigenous causes. These are also known as 'Welcome to Country' announcements - recognition of Australia's ancient history before the British arrived - and a promise that Australia 'always was and always will be Aboriginal land'.

Albanese's critics have said Australia in the midst of a culture war and has become too quick to 'beat ourselves up' and apologise for the past as well as ignored the benefits that came from being a colony. Former prime minister John Howard, who led the country from 1996 to 2007, said last year: 'I do hold the view that the luckiest thing that happened to this country was being colonised by the British'. (...)

(Adapted)



## The panic over trans sports inclusion

The Washington Post  
June 6, 2024

Before the hate, she changed in peace, transforming out of her body and into herself. She started to look the way she felt. She knew the person in the mirror. Then she would go to the track and experience a different reality. As she ran, her legs would not fire the way they once did. She could not shift gears. She did a standard acceleration drill, progressing from jog to stride to sprint every 50 meters. Her calf muscles begged her to stop. After the workout, she struggled to walk. She did not know this person.

"I could feel how abysmally slow I was," she said. "It started to take a mental toll." So she did what athletes do. She spent more than a year adjusting to the effects of the gender-affirming hormone therapy. She relearned her body, amending a lifetime of instincts. She dared to compete again. In December, at a college invitational, she had the nerve to win again.

Immediately, the success thrust her into the fiercest political battle in American sports. Sadie Schreiner became the latest exception made to seem like a widespread threat: a transgender women's sports standout.

Over the past few years, there has been no better way to fuel division in sports than to target the few Sadies and characterize them as nefarious gender interlopers. Schreiner prepared for it as best she could. For months, she had feared two outcomes. She would either run slow, which she could not bear, or she would become the unbearably fast impostor. She knew she was about to live a dilemma, no middle ground. She became herself, and at the same time, she rediscovered herself. Now Schreiner is forced to defend herself.

The social media outrage arrived on cue: *Biological male. Pathetic. Disgusting. Revolting. Fraud. Cheater. Coward. Bully.*

And then came a more venomous and telling sentiment.  
*Sadie does not deserve respect.*

Such extreme reactions represent more than overflowing passion. The topic of transgender sports inclusion is not isolated to fair play. Conservative politicians have used it as an emotional thruway to a sweeping anti-trans movement that seeks to erode fundamental human decency. The right to play is simply an opening act. The right to exist is the discriminating headliner.

Transgender sports participation has emerged as a flash point mostly for the sake of being a flash point. We are *not* a tomorrow away from some kind of trans takeover. But rather than delving into the complexity and wrestling with how to create fair competition as gender norms shift, we are succumbing to a panic that forces us to choose between the extremes of firm exclusion and full inclusion.

The level of indignation is disproportionate to the minuscule number of known trans athletes at all levels of sport. Science remains inconclusive about the extent to which transgender women have physiological advantages over cisgender women. Some studies support the assumption of an inherent edge. Other research shows areas in which transgender women are at a competitive disadvantage.

The most aggressive people own the messaging, and culture-war politicians have leeches onto the tension. (...)

Gill-Peterson, a Johns Hopkins professor and author who specializes in transgender history, sees how the message is framed with succinct urgency: *Save women's sports*. It does not present the rare dominant trans athlete as a complicated anomaly that warrants deep thought, but rather as an existential threat that must be eliminated to protect the sanctity of our sex-segregated sports structure.

The strategy makes an oversimplified nod to science, but it's an approach that appeals to common sense: She was born a male, period. It also repurposes old anti-gay rhetoric to stir the least tolerant people by emphasizing the most extreme cases.

"If you disagree, you have a woke view of science and reality," Gill-Peterson said. "How do you respond to that? By offering some incredibly dry, complicated academic science? Sports and the depiction of girls as vulnerable creates powerful emotional politics."



### ***American Fiction* director says white audiences are too comfortable with black clichés**

BBC News

3 December 2023

*American Fiction* isn't your average piece of cinema entertainment. Sharp and incisive, it's a satire that aims savage barbs at modern culture. It's the story of an author, Monk, played by Jeffrey Wright, who becomes disillusioned with the way the publishers he wants to work with only seem interested in stereotypical black storytelling.

In frustration, he pens a book overflowing with black clichés. To his dismay, it becomes an instant literary hit.

*American Fiction*'s writer and director Cord Jefferson sees it as satire, but with a serious message. The film is based on the book *Erasure* by Percival Everett. When he first read it, Jefferson found that many of the themes strongly reflected his own experiences. When he was a journalist, he found that people were coming to him and suggesting he write about negative racial incidents.

"When I got into film and TV, I thought I was going to escape that," he remembers. "And then I realised that people would ask me, 'Do you want to write about this slave, do you want to write about this drug dealer, do you want to write about this gang member?' And I realised that these kind of rigid restrictions as to what black life looked like were being placed on me even in the world of fiction, which blew my mind. When I read *Erasure* by Percival Everett, I immediately recognised that the things he was talking about in the book were the things that I had been thinking about for decades of my life."

In *American Fiction*, the author Monk finds himself increasingly frustrated at the way the audiences only want to read stories from black writers that conform to negative stereotypes. It's something Jefferson believes that the film world is equally guilty of.

"What Hollywood is really comfortable with is rehashing past successes. It's not just slavery movies or inner-city poverty movies. We see the way they rehash and reboot, and there are sequels and prequels. That said, when you tell these kinds of binary stories of blackness, when you tell these stories about slavery, and the Civil Rights era, what it allows white audience members to do is to say, this depiction of race does not harm my self image because I'm not burning a cross on anybody's lawn, I don't own slaves, I'm not a racist."

But is that fair on audiences who have embraced and supported films that have shone a light on racial injustice in the past?

"Those kinds of stories continue to put white characters at the centre of the film," says Jefferson. "You can't have most slavery movies without the white slave owners, and the slavers themselves."

I have no idea exactly why, but I think that those are a couple of reasons why those stories might continue to be retold over and over and over again. It's just more comfortable storytelling for people."

"I think it's more [to do] with the studio," says Amon Warmann, a writer with an interest in black film and TV. "That's where these things get greenlit - the people who have the power to say no to certain stories and to say yes to certain stories."

It's a situation that mirrors the experiences of Monk in *American Fiction*, who can't interest publishers in his book about ancient Greek history. And that in turn mirrors Jefferson's experience of trying to get this film made.

Hollywood is, of course, overflowing with stories of missed opportunities and retrospective regret. Undoubtedly, some of those who passed on *American Fiction* are now looking on with envy as it gathers awards momentum.

It won the top prize at the Toronto International Film Festival in September. Over the last 15 years, only one film that has taken that accolade has failed to get a best picture nomination at the Academy Awards.

(Abridged)



## **Just Stop Hols. Climate activists plan action at airports to disrupt breaks**

Sunday Mirror  
April 21, 2024

Just Stop Oil activists are plotting to cause summer misery for thousands of holidaymakers. The environmental group plans to wreak havoc at airports here and across Europe from mid-June. Protesters will halt flights by storming terminal buildings, gluing themselves to runways and clambering onto jets in tourist hotspots like Spain, Greece and Turkey.

It means travellers will likely face agonising delays here - while those lucky enough to take off could be forced to wait hours on the runway on the other side. Last night, MPs and travel experts accused the group of "shooting itself in the foot" by causing misery and risking lives.

Our undercover reporter learned of the plot at a meeting attended by some 50 hardcore activists. Just Stop Oil's so-called poster girl, Phoebe Plummer, was greeted by roars as she announced "disruption on a scale that has never been seen before". She added: "The most exciting part of this plan is that [it's] going to be part of an international effort. Flights operate on such a tight schedule to control air traffic that with action being caused in cities all around the world we're talking about radical, unignorable disruption."

Privately educated Plummer, who grew up in London's posh Chelsea, has been arrested for a string of disturbances that include throwing soup at a Vincent van Gogh painting in the National Gallery. The pink-haired 22-year-old spent time in prison last year and was re-arrested a fortnight ago for breaking her bail conditions by posting a letter through the door of Labour MP Emily Thornberry.

Plummer's shouty speech continued: "It's time to wake up and get real - no summer holiday is more important than food security, housing and the lives of your loved ones. Flying is also a symbol of the gross wealth inequality that's plaguing our society and if we want to create change we need to adopt a more radical demand."

Just Stop Oil will team up with Europe-based eco mob the A22 Network to stage protests at major international airports.

The plot was last night widely blasted as being a selfish own goal. Clive Wratten, of the Business Travel Association, said: "These planned protests are a blunt instrument that will alienate the people who can bring the change Just Stop Oil wants. The activists should work with British businesses to create meaningful solutions to our climate crisis. They should join airlines and their supply industry in bringing forward sustainable fuels and best practices, and we urge protesters to reconsider chaos bringing progress to a standstill."

Gary Johnson, Tory MP for Dartford, branded the strategy "dangerous" and "selfish", adding: "The actions of Just Stop Oil are counterproductive and put people off their cause. Most people want to see the environment protected but militant, highly disruptive protests just anger those who are often just trying to enjoy a family holiday."

Just Stop Oil was founded in 2022 to try to halt all new oil, gas and coal licences in the UK. Its previous protests include halting traffic on busy roads, targeting an Ashes Test match at Lords and storming on stage during a performance of Les Miserables in the West End.

Justifying the group's actions, a Just Stop Oil spokesman said: "In normal circumstances, the sort of activities you've outlined would be unacceptable. However, what is more unacceptable is the last 10 straight months of record-breaking temperatures, governments continue to allow more oil and gas drilling. The situation is an emergency and we have to start acting like it." But Home Secretary James Cleverly criticised Just Stop Oil's "unacceptable guerrilla tactics", adding: "Selfish, disruptive protesters who wreak havoc in people's everyday lives must be stopped. We have given the police more powers to tackle criminals posing as protesters and are backing officers with the tools they need to prevent serious disruption and disorder."

(Adapted)



## **Brexit has completely failed for UK, say clear majority of Britons**

The Guardian

30 December 2023

A clear majority of the British public now believes Brexit has been bad for the UK economy, has driven up prices in shops, and has hampered government attempts to control immigration, according to a poll by Opinium to mark the third anniversary of the UK leaving the EU single market and customs union.

The survey of more than 2,000 UK voters also finds strikingly low numbers of people who believe that Brexit has benefited them or the country. Just one in 10 believe leaving the EU has helped their personal financial situation, against 35% who say it has been bad for their finances, while just 9% say it has been good for the NHS, against 47% who say it has had a negative effect.

Ominously for prime minister Rishi Sunak, who backed Brexit and claimed it would be economically beneficial, only 7% of people think it has helped keep down prices in UK shops, against 63% who think Brexit has been a factor in fuelling inflation and the cost of living crisis.

The poll suggests that seven and a half years on from the referendum the British public now regards Brexit as a failure. Just 22% of voters believe it has been good for the UK in general.

The Vote Leave campaign led by Boris Johnson and Michael Gove had promised that Brexit would boost the economy and trade, as well as bring back £350m a week into the NHS and allow the government to take back control of the UK's borders.

James Crouch, head of policy and public affairs at Opinium, said the perception of Brexit being handled badly and having had negative effects on various aspect of UK life appeared to be spreading: "Public discontent at how Brexit has been handled by the government continues, with perceived failings even in areas previously seen as a potential benefit from leaving the EU. More than half (53%) of leave voters now think that Brexit has been bad for the UK's ability to control immigration, piling even more pressure on an issue the government is vulnerable on. Despite this, Brexit is likely to be a secondary issue at the next election compared to the state of the economy and the NHS, which are the clear priority for voters."

Robert Ford, professor of political science at Manchester University, said that while there was now evidence that negative perceptions of Brexit, particularly on the economy, could have an effect on votes at a general election, Brexit was very unlikely to play such a direct role as it did at the last two general elections.



Ford said: "Voters' attention has shifted decisively elsewhere, with leave and remain voters alike focused on the domestic agenda of rising bills, struggling public services and weak economic growth. The appeal of 'Get Brexit Done' was not just about completing the long Brexit process but also about unblocking the political system and delivering on other long-neglected issues. Brexit got done, but this has not unblocked the political system, and troubles elsewhere have only deepened. Many of the voters who backed the Conservatives to deliver change now look convinced that achieving change requires ejecting the Conservatives. This shift in sentiment may be particularly stark among the 'red wall' voters who rallied most eagerly to Johnson's banner four years ago, but have been most exposed to rising bills and collapsing public services since. The final act of Brexit may yet be the collapse of the Brexit electoral coalition."

One of the key claims of the Brexiters was that leaving the EU's single market and customs union would usher in a new era of global trade for the UK based on trade deals with other parts of the world. Many voters now seem to have concluded that Brexit has in fact been bad for trade. Some 49% think it has been bad for the ability of UK firms to import goods from outside the EU, while 15% think it has helped.