



The Mangione and Penny Cases Illuminate America's Moral Degeneracy

It's a tale of two naked-city stories. As most know, 26-year-old Luigi Mangione assassinated UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on a New York City street in December 4's early morning hours. To the surprise of many, too, millions are applauding Mangione as a hero who struck back at a corrupt system. Why, journalist Taylor Lorenz [has even expressed "joy" at the murder](#), and donations for Mangione's legal defense have topped \$75,000. (This, for a child of privilege with millionaire parents.)

Just five days later, ex-Marine Daniel Penny, also 26, was acquitted of criminally negligent homicide in the death of drugged-up, deranged vagrant Jordan Neely. Penny had helped restrain Neely after the latter menaced people aboard a NYC subway car on May 1, 2023. Neely, whose rap sheet lists 42 arrests, later died.

And while some Americans expressed joy at the acquittal and a majority likely supports it, millions nonetheless want Penny's scalp. What's more, some observers draw a moral equivalence between his and Mangione's actions. And Mangione's case is particularly interesting, as it has revealed, in neon lights, a deep and widespread anger against pseudo-elites in general and the healthcare system in particular.

Education, Not Emotion

Now, virtually all the loudest voices here are animated by passion, which, as Ben Franklin noted, governs — and never wisely. It's easy, too, to lean on emotion and take one side or the other. It's also difficult to be entirely dispassionate in Mangione's case without being accused of either enabling terroristic desires or exhibiting psychopathy-level detachment. But given Mangione's broad support, an intellectual analysis is necessary.

Let us say, for argument's sake, that Mangione's boosters are correct in asserting that healthcare-insurer executives are evil, uniquely destructive people. The question is, though, are actions such as Mangione's the remedy? In evaluating this, we can't dismiss violence out of hand as probably no one reading this is Amish. Virtually all of us believe violent action is justified under certain circumstances. And about the same number would likely agree that there is such thing as a "just war." Given this, a good way to analyze the matter is via [Just War Doctrine](#). (This can apply to individuals waging "war" against the system.)



AP Images
Luigi Mangione (left) and Daniel Penny



The Yardstick

Depending on which version you reference, Just War Doctrine has between four and seven criteria. I'll present the four-element version promulgated by the Catholic Church. They are, as [Learn Religions relates](#):

1. the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
2. all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
3. there must be serious prospects of success;
4. the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.

Now, 4 can probably be immediately discounted as a factor. Since it alludes to weapons of mass destruction, Mangione's actions do satisfy the criterion. Then there's number 1: Do health insurance companies do damage that is "lasting, grave, and certain"? Some will surely say yes, but question: What would happen if all these businesses disappeared tomorrow?

We'd be paying *all* our own healthcare bills — at least until an alternate system could be established. Is this preferable?

Numbers 2 and 3, however, truly tell the tale. Exorbitant healthcare costs are a phenomenon of the last several decades. And with an ability to address them via the ballot box, which will continually happen, is the ammo box warranted? As for success achieved through the violent action, what would constitute it? This hasn't even been defined. It seems fanciful, too, thinking some guerrilla-like movement is going to shoot and kill its way to lower healthcare costs.

Verdict: Mangione's actions don't amount to elements of a just war.

Warped Moral Compasses

There's something, though, far more troubling than the existence of a rare, odd criminal such as Mangione. It's that vast numbers of journalists and other supposed "intellectuals" can't (or won't?) draw basic moral distinctions. They also don't know simple word definitions.

Enter *The Nation* magazine, which, founded in 1865 by abolitionists, now appears to have abolished reason on its pages. In a Friday article, its Caleb Brennan first calls a conservative pundit's analysis of Mangione's and Penny's cases "baby-brained." He then renders one that's bird-brained.

The two men are both "vigilantes who engaged in shocking public acts of violence," Brennan [claims](#). "Their actions are very much open to partisan interpretation." I'm sure. So are Hitler's and Mao's. Partisans will be partisan.

Brennan is joined by the *The ReidOut Blog*'s ('nough said?) Ja'han Jones at MSNBC. He also draws an equivalence between the two men, [complaining](#) of "the valorization of deadly white vigilantes." And both Jones and Brennan clearly don't even have the understanding of vigilantism that can be gleaned from [Death Wish](#).

Being Vigilant About Facts

Brief history: "Vigilante" derives from the Latin *vigilantem*, meaning "[watchful, anxious, careful](#)." The term was applied to any member of voluntary, 19th-century committees that quelled crime and punished criminals. They were formed when the local government was too weak to do the job itself. Critically, though, vigilance committees addressed *actual crimes under the law*. They didn't ambush-



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 14, 2024

attack businessmen who were, by certain people's dark lights, "capitalist exploiters."

By this definition, Mangione is no vigilante; he's more like a terrorist. Of course, he perhaps could be thought a vigilante under *Merriam-Webster's secondary definition*, "*broadly*: a self-appointed doer of justice." But that's *very* broadly. As for Penny, he isn't even that.

Penny did not board the Big Apple subway last May 1 to thwart criminals or administer justice. He only wanted to go somewhere. But an unstable man appeared, and Penny and two other riders believed it necessary to restrain him for their own and others' safety. If this makes him a "vigilante," then anyone engaging in spur-of-the-moment self-defense is a vigilante. And calling that standard baby-brained would be a compliment.

Think It Through

One more matter, and I'll preface this by emphasizing that I'm not advocating *any* violent action. I'm just making a point. To wit: If Mangione's minions *really* believe in his actions as remedy, they'll have much killing to do. They also will, if they think a moment, find many people above health-insurance company CEOs on their hit list. Why, has it occurred to them that many politicians damage our Republic far worse than any or virtually any businessman?

For one thing, many politicians purposely flood our country with illegal aliens. And to support each illegal, or his U.S.-born child, every American taxpayer "[gives](#)" [\\$957 yearly](#). Even more to the point here, American citizens finance healthcare for illegals — to the tune of [\\$17.0 billion a year](#). So exit question:

How much cheaper would *your* health coverage be if you didn't have to subsidize certain pols' great-replacement, voter-importation scheme, huh?

The moral of this story is: Feel less — think more.



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