

An odor of decadence

# DiCaprio proposes resort on private island to “change the world”

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6 April 2015

In an article published in its Sunday print edition, the *New York Times* announced that Leonardo DiCaprio has plans to change the world.

That would seem to come as quite a relief. After all, DiCaprio lives in a world in which 85 people control the same amount of wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion, where any one of a number of regional conflicts threatens to explode into world war at a moment's notice, and where the government in his home country carries out a recklessly aggressive and militarist policy abroad while trampling on basic democratic rights at home.

DiCaprio's plan doesn't touch on any of this, however. It hits home only for those whose homes happen to be worth quite a lot of money.

The *Times* article, titled “An Idea Hits the Beach,” lays out DiCaprio's master plan, which unfolds in the warm Caribbean waters off the coast of Belize.

It all begins on DiCaprio's 104-acre island, Blacakdore Caye, a 15-minute private boat ride from the town of San Pedro, on the country's eastern coast. It is on this island, which DiCaprio procured for the bargain price of \$1.75 million in 2005, that the star of *Django Unchained* plans to build a luxury resort that he claims will change the world.

The resort will include 68 luxury villas built on stilts, fanned out across the clear blue shallows of a quaint Caribbean cove. If the cabins are anything like those built by DiCaprio's business partner Jeff Gram at another nearby resort, they'll cost between \$1,695 and \$2,295 per night.

But “for those vacationers who prefer their own houses,” the *Times* writes, “48 will be built on the island, with price tags ranging from \$5 million to \$15 million.”

Those millionaires and billionaires who find the natural path of the sun a hindrance to their leisurely enjoyment of

the world's beauty need not worry. As the *Times* informs us, “some of the houses will boast both a sunrise and a sunset beach!”

What's more, “the 68 guest villas will have access to nearly a mile of secluded beach, grassland and jungle,” and “each building will have several functions, with the platform, for example, not only sheltering guests on top and coral and fish underneath, but also harnessing the breeze that comes off the water to keep the villas cool.”

In DiCaprio's own words: “[T]he main focus is to do something that will change the world.” The actor explained that his private island retreat will become an eco-tourist hotspot.

DiCaprio is not alone in the club of island ownership. Buying an island has become a new standard of wealth amongst Hollywood's elite.

Mel Gibson bought himself an island in the Pacific Ocean for \$15 million in 2005, and the comedian Eddie Murphy paid the same price for one in the Bahamas in 2007. Not to be outdone, the singer Shakira bought her own Bahaman island for \$16.5 million, while magician David Copperfield has a collection of *eleven* islands strewn across the Caribbean.

Roger Waters owns an island, and so does Gene Hackman, Celine Dion, Ricky Martin, Faith Hill, Lenny Kravitz, Nick Cage, Steven Spielberg, Tyler Perry and many more.

Of course, the island-buying craze is not limited to Hollywood stardom. The likes of Bill Gates, Virgin's Richard Branson, Louis Vuitton's Bernard Arnault, and telecom mogul Craig McCaw, to name a few, all have their own islands, some purchased for upwards of \$400 million.

Such extravagant shows of wealth would have made the Capets and Romanovs jealous. The juxtaposition of the

immense sums wasted on the “island market” on the one hand and the desperate needs of billions of people around the world on the other produces an odor of decadence that stinks to high hell.

But beyond the repulsive self-importance that underlies the island-buying craze, DiCaprio’s proposal is an expression of the cultural and intellectual debasement that pervades the Hollywood elite and the American ruling class more broadly.

The United States is a country in which the over 300 million inhabitants come from an immense variety of cultural backgrounds. Their daily personal, social and political struggles find no expression in either the political establishment in Washington or the cultural establishment in Hollywood.

Despite the multiplicity of issues about which artists like DiCaprio could be critical—the endless wars, the police killings, the attacks on democratic rights—one sees instead a liturgy of films (DiCaprio’s *The Wolf of Wall Street* amongst them) that either celebrate the criminals responsible for social inequality or simply ignore reality.

Whatever DiCaprio’s intentions and artistic talents, they are eclipsed by his membership in a social stratum separated from the population by a chasm based on vast wealth and privilege. Such parasitism can breed nothing but intellectual impotence.

That’s not to say that Leo’s island cannot serve *some* purpose. Instead of an eco-resort for the rich, it seems only fair that everybody should be allowed to enjoy the island. No, there’s no need to schedule individual vacations, because there’s another sure-fire way that the whole world could enjoy what the island has to offer.

That’s by calling the island “Alcatraz 2.0” and sending Dick Cheney, George Bush, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Eric Holder, Lloyd Blankfein, Jamie Dimon and the rest of the war criminals and financial hucksters to live there and fight amongst themselves.



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