

**SO, THIS IS NATIONHOOD? | CHELLIS GLENDINNING**  
**MEDIA BARBARIANS AT THE GATES | DANNY SCHECHTER**  
**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST MERYL | TREVOR GRUNDY**

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING

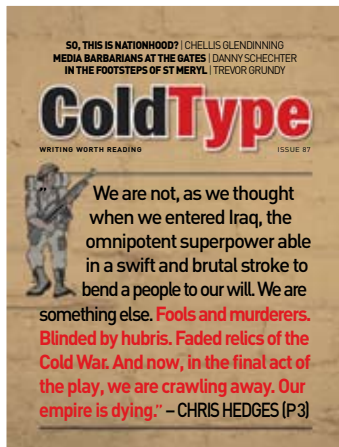
ISSUE 87



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“ We are not, as we thought when we entered Iraq, the omnipotent superpower able in a swift and brutal stroke to bend a people to our will. We are something else. **Fools and murderers. Blinded by hubris. Faded relics of the Cold War. And now, in the final act of the play, we are crawling away. Our empire is dying.**” – CHRIS HEDGES (P 3)

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# ColdType

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# The ugly face of a dying empire

Why are the cheerleaders of slaughter, who have been wrong about Iraq since before the invasion, still urging us toward ruin? asks **Chis Hedges**

The black-clad fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, sweeping a collapsing army and terrified Iraqis before them as they advance toward Baghdad, reflect back to us the ghoulish face of American empire. They are the specters of the hundreds of thousands of people we murdered in our deluded quest to remake the Middle East. They are ghosts from the innumerable roadsides and villages where US soldiers and Marines, jolted by explosions of improvised explosive devices, responded with indiscriminate fire. They are the risen remains of the dismembered Iraqis left behind by blasts of Hellfire and cruise missiles, howitzers, grenade launchers and drone strikes. They are the avengers of the gruesome torture and the sexual debasement that often came with being detained by American troops. They are the final answer to the collective humiliation of an occupied country, the logical outcome of Shock and Awe, the Frankenstein monster stitched together from the body parts we left scattered on the ground. They are what we get for the \$4 trillion we wasted on the Iraq War.

The language of violence engenders violence. The language of hate engenders hate. “I and the public know what all schoolchildren learn,” W.H. Auden wrote. “Those to whom evil is done do evil in return.” It is as old as the Bible.

There is no fight left in us. The war is over. We destroyed Iraq as a unified country. It will never be put back together. We are reduced – in what must be an act of divine justice decreed by the gods, whom we have discovered to our dismay are Islamic – to pleading with Iran for military assistance to shield the corrupt and despised US protectorate led by Nouri al-Maliki. We are not, as we thought when we entered Iraq, the omnipotent superpower able in a swift and brutal stroke to bend a people to our will. We are something else. Fools and murderers. Blinded by hubris. Faded relics of the Cold War. And now, in the final act of the play, we are crawling away. Our empire is dying.

We should have heeded, while we had a chance, the wails of mothers and fathers. We should have listened to the cries of the wounded. We should have wept over the bodies of Iraqi children lined up in neat rows in the morgues. We should have honored grief so we could honor life. But the dance of death is intoxicating. Once it begins you whirl in an ecstatic frenzy. Death’s embrace, which feels at first like sexual lust, tightens and tightens until you suffocate. Now the music has stopped. All we have left are loss and pain.

And where are the voices of sanity? Why are the cheerleaders of slaughter, who have been wrong about Iraq since before the in-

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vasion, still urging us toward ruin? Why are those who destabilized Iraq and the region in the worst strategic blunder in American history still given a hearing? Why do we listen to simpletons and morons?

They bang their fists. They yell. They throw tantrums. They demand that the world conform to their childish vision. It is as if they have learned nothing from the 11 years of useless slaughter. As if they can dominate that which they never had the power to dominate.

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Last month I sat in a restaurant in Boston’s Kenmore Square with military historian Andrew Bacevich. You won’t hear his voice much on the airwaves. He is an apostate. He speaks of the world as it is, not the self-delusional world our empire builders expect it to be. He knows war with a painful intimacy, not only as a Vietnam combat veteran and a retired Army colonel but also as the father of a US Army officer killed in a 2007 suicide bombing in Iraq.

“In the 1990s there was a considerable effort made in the military, but also in the larger community of national security experts scratching their heads and [asking] what are the implications of all this technology,” he said. “They conceived of something called the Revolution in Military Affairs – RMA. If you believed in the Revolution of Military Affairs you knew that nothing could stop the United States military when it engaged in a conflict. Victory was, for all practical purposes, a certainty. People like Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, and I expect Dick Cheney also, bought this hook, line and sinker. You put yourself in their shoes in the wake of 9/11. An attack comes out of Afghanistan, a country frankly nobody cares about, and you conceive of this grand strategy of trying to transform the Islamic world. Where are we going to start? We are going to start by attacking a country [Iraq] – we had it under surveillance and sanctions for the past decade – where there is a bona fide bad guy to make a moral case and where we are

confident we can make short work of this adversary, a further demonstration that the American military cannot be stopped. They utterly and totally miscalculated. Iraq is falling apart. And many of these people, either in government or outside of government, who were proponents of the war are now advocating for a resumption of the American war. Not one of them is willing to acknowledge the extent of that military miscalculation. Once you acknowledge it, then the whole project of militarizing US policy towards the Greater Middle East collapses.”

Bacevich blames the concentration of power into the hands of the executive branch for the debacle. He said that since the Kennedy administration “the incoming president and his team, it does not matter which party, see the permanent government as a problem. If we [the new officials] are going to get done what we want to get done we have to find ways to marginalize the permanent government. This has led to the centralization of authority in the White House and means decisions are made by a very small number of people. The consultation becomes increasingly informal, to the point it is not even documented.”

“I do not think we even know when the decision to go to war with Iraq was actually made,” Bacevich said. “There is no documented meeting where [President George W.] Bush sat down with how many people – six, 10, 25 – and said, ‘Let’s vote.’ The decision kind of emerged and therefore was implemented. Why would you operate that way? You would operate that way if you viewed the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the CIA and the State Department as, in a sense, the enemy.”

“The invasion of Iraq was intended to be a catalyst,” he said. “It was supposed to be the catalyst that would enable us ... to change the region. It turned out to be the catalyst that resulted in destabilization. The big question of the moment is not what can we do or is there anything we can do to salvage Iraq. The question is to what de-

gree have our actions resulted in this larger regional mayhem. And to the extent they have, isn't it time to rethink fundamentally our expectations of what American power, and particularly American military power, can achieve?"

"We need to take a radically different course," Bacevich said. "There is an analogy to be made with Great Britain in the wake of World War I. It was in World War I that Britain and France collaborated to dismantle the Ottoman Empire to create the new Middle East. While on the one hand there was an awareness that Britain was in decline, at the level where policy was made there was not a willingness to consider the implications of that fact. It took World War II to drive it home – that the [British] empire was doomed. I think that is where we are."

Out of this decline, Bacevich said, is emerging a multipolar order. The United States will no longer be able to operate as an unchallenged superpower. But, he said, similar to the condition that existed as the British Empire took its last gasps, "there is very little willingness in Washington or in policy circles to take on board the implications multipolarity would call for in terms of adjusting our policy."

The inability to adjust to our declining power means that the United States will continue to squander its resources, its money and its military.

"By squandering power we forfeit our influence because we look stupid and we bankrupt ourselves," Bacevich said. "We will spend \$4 trillion, not dollars spent in the moment but dollars we will have spent the last time the last Afghanistan veteran gets his last VA check. That money is gone forever. It is concealed because in the Bush administration's confidence that victory would be easily won the government did not bother to mobilize the country or increase our taxes. We weaken ourselves economically. People complain about our crappy infrastructure. Give me \$4 trillion

and I probably could have fixed a couple of bridges. And we must never forget the human cost. Lives lost, lives damaged. And in these two wars [Afghanistan and Iraq] there does seem to be this increase in PTSD that we don't know what to do about. It is a squandering of human capital."

Bacevich said the "military mind-set" has so infected the discourse of the power elite that when there is a foreign policy problem the usual response is to discuss "three different courses of military action. ... Should it be airstrikes with drones? Should it be airstrikes with manned aircraft? Special operations forces? Or some combination of all three? And that's what you get." The press, he said, is an "echo chamber and reinforces the notion that those are the [only] options."

The disintegration of Iraq is irreversible. At best, the Kurds, the Shiites and the Sunnis will carve out antagonistic enclaves. At worst, there will be a protracted civil war. This is what we have bequeathed to Iraq. The spread of our military through the region has inflamed jihadists across the Arab world.

The resulting conflicts will continue until we end our occupation of the Middle East. The callous slaughter we deliver is no different from the callous slaughter we receive. Our jihadists – George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Thomas Friedman and Tommy Franks – who assured us that swift and overwhelming force in Iraq would transform the Middle East into an American outpost of progress, are no less demented than the jihadists approaching Baghdad. These two groups of killers mirror each other. This is what we have spawned. And this is what we deserve.

**CT**

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*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, writes a regular column for Truthdig every Monday. Hedges' most recent book is "Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle."*

**The inability to adjust to our declining power means that the United States will continue to squander its resources, its money and its military**

# An ounce of hope is worth a ton of despair

We cannot reach people by terrifying them; there has to be a positive agenda, writes **George Monbiot**

**Terrify the living daylights out of people and they will protect themselves at the expense of others and of the living world**

If we had set out to alienate and antagonise the people we've been trying to reach, we could scarcely have done it better. This is how I feel, looking back on the past few decades of environmental campaigning, including my own.

This thought is prompted by responses to a column I wrote last month that examined the psychological illiteracy that's driving left-wing politics into oblivion. It argued that the failure by Labour and Democratic strategists to listen to psychologists and cognitive linguists has resulted in a terrible mistake: the belief that they can best secure their survival by narrowing the distance between themselves and their conservative opponents.

Twenty years of research, comprehensively ignored by these parties, reveals that shifts such as privatisation and cutting essential public services strongly promote people's extrinsic values (an attraction to power, prestige, image and status) while suppressing intrinsic values (intimacy, kindness, self-acceptance, independent thought and action). As extrinsic values are powerfully linked to conservative politics, pursuing policies that reinforce them is blatantly self-destructive.

One of the drivers of extrinsic values is a sense of threat. Experimental work suggests that when fears are whipped up, they trigger an instinctive survival response. You

suppress your concern for other people and focus on your own interests. Conservative strategists seem to know this, which is why they emphasise crime, terrorism, deficits and immigration.

"Isn't this what you've spent your life doing?", several people asked. "Emphasising threats?" It took me a while. If threats promote extrinsic values and if (as the research strongly suggests) extrinsic values are linked to a lack of interest in the state of the living planet, I've been engaged in contradiction and futility. For about 30 years.

The threats, of course, are of a different nature: climate breakdown, mass extinction, pollution and the rest. And they are real. But there's no obvious reason why the results should be different. Terrify the living daylights out of people and they will protect themselves at the expense of others and of the living world.

It's an issue taken up in a report by several green groups called Common Cause for Nature. "Provoking feelings of threat, fear or loss may successfully raise the profile of an issue," but "these feelings may leave people feeling helpless and increasingly demotivated, or even inclined to actively avoid the issue." People respond to feelings of insecurity "by attempting to exert control elsewhere, or retreating into materialistic comforts".

Where we have not used threat and terror, we have tried money: an even graver mistake. Nothing could better reinforce extrinsic values than putting a price on nature, or making similar appeals to financial self-interest. And it doesn't work, even on its own terms. A study published in *Nature Climate Change*, for example, tested two notices placed in a filling station. One asked, "Want to protect the environment? Check your car's tyre pressure". The other tried, "Want to save money? Check your car's tyre pressure". The first was quite effective, the second entirely useless.

We've tended to assume that people are more selfish than they really are. Surveys across 60 countries show that most people consistently hold concern for others, tolerance, kindness and thinking for themselves to be more important than wealth, image and power(7). But those whose voices are loudest belong to a small minority with the opposite set of values. And often, idiotically, we have sought to appease them.

This is a form of lying – to ourselves and other people. I don't know anyone who became an environmentalist because she or he was worried about ecological impacts on their bank balance. Almost everyone I know in this field is motivated by something completely different: the love and wonder and enchantment that nature inspires. Yet, perhaps because we fear we will not be taken seriously, we scarcely mention them. We hide our passions behind columns of figures, and if sometimes we come across as insincere there's a reason for it. Sure, we need the numbers and the rigour and the science, but we should stop pretending that these came first.

Without being fully conscious of the failure and frustration that's been driving it, I've been trying, like others, to promote a positive environmentalism, based on promise, not threat. This is what rewilding, the mass restoration of ecosystems, is all about, and why I wrote my book "Feral", which is a manifesto for rewilding – and for wonder

and enchantment and love of the natural world. But I'm beginning to see that this is not just another method: expounding a positive vision should be at the centre of attempts to protect the things we love. An ounce of hope is worth a ton of despair.

Part of this means changing the language. The language we use to describe our relations with nature could scarcely be more alienating. "Reserve" is alienation itself, or at least detachment: think of what it means when you apply that word to people. "Site of special scientific interest", "no take zone", "ecosystem services": these terms are a communications disaster. Even "environment" is a cold and distancing word, which creates no pictures. These days I tend to use natural world or living planet, which invoke vivid images. One of the many tasks for the rewilding campaign some of us will be launching in the next few months is to set up a working group to change the language. There's a parallel here with the Landreader project by the photographer Dominick Tyler, which seeks to rescue beautiful words describing nature from obscurity.

None of this is to suggest that we should not discuss the threats or pretend that the crises faced by this magnificent planet are not happening. Or that we should cease to employ rigorous research and statistics. What it means is that we should embed both the awareness of these threats and their scientific description in a different framework; one that emphasises the joy and awe to be found in the marvels at risk; one that proposes a better world, rather than (if we work really hard for it), just a slightly-less-shitty-one-than-there-would-otherwise-have-been.

Above all, this means not abandoning ourselves to attempts to appease a minority who couldn't give a cuss about the living world, but think only of their wealth and power. Be true to yourself, true to those around you, and you will find the necessary means of reaching others. **CT**

**The language we use to describe our relations with nature could scarcely be more alienating**

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**George Monbiot's** book "Feral" was recently released in paperback format. This article was originally published in the *Guardian* newspaper

# Ramadan, socialism and a beat up car

Ramzy Baroud reflects on life as a child in a refugee camp

**There was little by way of western-styled 'atheism' in our refugee camp. Most of us prayed five times a day, communists and all**

When I was a child, I obsessed with socialism. It was not only because my father was a self-proclaimed socialist who read every book that a good socialist should read, but also because we lived in a refugee camp in Gaza under the harshest of conditions. Tanks roamed the dusty streets and every aspect of our lives was governed by a most intricate Israeli 'civil administration' system – a less distressing phrase than 'military occupation'.

Socialism was then an escape to a utopian world where people were treated fairly; where children were not shot and killed on a daily basis; where cheap laborers were no longer despairing men fighting for meager daily wages at some Israeli factory or farm; and where equality was not an abstract notion. But since Gaza had little in terms of 'means of production', our socialism was tailored to accommodate every lacking aspect of our lives. Freedom, justice and ending the occupation was our 'revolutionary socialism' around which we teenagers in the camp secretly organized and declared strikes on the walls of the camp in red graffiti, and quoted (or misquoted) Marx as we pleased, often out of context.

And when it was time for prayer, we all went to the mosque. We simply didn't see a contradiction, nor did we subscribe to (or care to understand) the inherent conflict between socialist movements and institutionalized re-

ligion in the West. True, we declared solidarity with factory workers in Chicago and followed the news of union victories in Britain, but our socialism was mostly south-oriented. It was the revolutionary struggles of Guatemala, South Africa and Algeria that inspired our various socialist movements in Gaza and the rest of Palestine. Socialism was a call for freedom first, before it was a call for equitable salaries and improved work conditions.

There was little by way of western-styled 'atheism' in our refugee camp. Most of us prayed five times a day, communists and all.

I went to the mosque for prayer as often as I could. I memorized chapters of the Quran at a young age. Starting in the second grade, I joined my peers for classes in Islamic stories taught by a kindly, semi-blind young man named Sheik Azzam. In the stories, those with faith always triumphed in the end. The key to their victories, well, aside from the inevitable divine justice, was their unity and persistence. The characters were often, if not always, poor. The poor always triumphed in Islam, or the way Islam was taught in my refugee camp.

I was a socialist and a Muslim. It was my father, who was sometimes called a 'communist' as a slur by some of the camp's ultra conservatives, who urged me not to miss my prayers, and rewarded me for reading the Quran. He was the same person who shared his treasures of translated Russian and other



literature with me, all promising of a revolution, of a better world where a person was not judged based on his or her color, race, sect, religion or nationality. If there was ever an inherit tension in all of this, I didn't see it. I still don't.

Naturally, a real socialist must have a nemesis. In many parts of the world, the arch-enemy is the multinational corporations and, in the US in particular, the use of military-driven foreign policy as a tool to maintain global hegemony; it is globalization used as a platform to enforce a new kind of imperialism that is no longer an exclusive western attribute. For me in the refugee camp, my nemesis was our neighbor Ghassan. He owned a car, a beat up old Fiat that was actively decomposing back into its original elements. The color was a rainbow of old paint and rusting metal and its seats were almost entirely bare from any evidence that leather chairs were once attached to the unpleasant iron beneath.

Nonetheless, Ghassan represented a 'class' of society that was different than mine. He was a teacher at a United Nations-funded school, who was 'getting paid in dollars', and his likes received what was called a 'pension,' a seemingly novel concept that Gaza cheap laborers in Israel didn't enjoy, needless to say comprehended.

Ghassan also prayed at the same mosque as I did. On the main Friday prayer, he wore a white Jalabiya (robe) of white silk, manufactured abroad. He wore authentic Egyptian cologne, and along with his UNRWA colleagues, walked to the mosque with the unabashed grandeur of a feudalist.

In the month of Ramadan, as poor refugee parents struggled to make at least the first few days of the fasting month somewhat special and festive for their children, Ghassan and his clique prepared feasts, shopped for the best vegetables, and adorned their iftar tables with meat, not once a week, but every single day of the entire month. And here is the part that I resented the most: to show gratefulness for how 'lucky' and 'blessed'

they were, the rich refugees would distribute raw meat in carefully sealed bags to the less fortunate since Ramadan is the month of charity. And of course, the most qualified to give charity was a UN teacher paid in dollars and expecting a so-called pension.

Today I chuckle at the naive notions of that Gaza child. In actuality, Ghassan was slightly less poor than the rest of us. His home was an improved version of the UN's 'temporary shelters' it provided refugees following the Palestinian exile in 1948. He was paid around 400 dollars a month, and his car eventually broke down and was sold to a neighboring mechanic for scrap metal.

Much of this was placed in context later in life when I worked in a rich Arab Gulf country. I spent two Ramadans there. Each year our company provided a 'Ramadan tent', not a metaphorical term, but an actual massive tent under which the finest of delicacies, cooked by the best of chefs, was served by cheap laborers who, although they included fasting Muslims, were not allowed to break their fast until the rest of us did. The fasting men and women thanked God for giving them the strength to fast before they diligently consumed massive amounts of good food until they could hardly move.

Ramadan always takes me back to the refugee camp in Gaza, no matter where I am in the world. And when a TV sheik preaches about what Ramadan is or is not about, I often reflect on what Ramadan has meant to me and my peers in the refugee camp. It was not about feeling the brunt of the poor, for we all were, Ghassan included, poverty-stricken. It was about sharing the hardships of life, a communal struggle against one's own weaknesses and a month-long introspection to uncover the collective strength of a beleaguered community. Ramadan was an exacting platform through which poverty and deprivation were devalued so that when Ramadan was over, we felt grateful for the little we had, before we resumed our struggle for the rights and freedoms we truly deserved. **CT**

**Ramadan was not about feeling the brunt of the poor, for we all were poverty-stricken. It was about sharing the hardships of life, a communal struggle against one's own weaknesses and a month-long introspection to uncover the collective strength of a beleaguered community**

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**Ramzy Baroud** ([www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His is the author of "The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle" (Pluto Press, London). His latest book is "My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story" (Pluto Press, London)

# Some deaths really matter

**David Edwards & David Cromwell** on the disproportionate coverage of Israeli and Palestine killings

**When has the BBC ever expressed this level of concern for the deaths of Palestinian teenagers?**

Israeli deaths matter much more than Palestinian deaths. This has long been a distinguishing feature of Western news media reporting on the Middle East. The recent blanket coverage afforded to the brutal killing of three Israeli teenagers highlights this immutable fact.

Channel 4's Alex Thomson offered a rare glimmer of dissent:

'Curious to watch UK media living down to the Palestinian claim that 1 Israeli life is worth 1000 Palestinian lives.'

Major broadcasters, such as BBC News, devoted headlines and extended reports to the deaths, and included heart-rending interviews with grieving relatives in Israel. The *Guardian* ran live coverage of the funerals for more than nine hours. But when has this ever happened for Palestinian victims of Israeli terror?

A reader challenged the *Guardian* journalist leading the live coverage:

'@Haroon\_Siddique Did I somehow miss @guardian's live-tweeting of Palestinian victims' funerals & eulogies?'

Several nudges elicited the standard display of hand-washing:

'I'm not an editor so don't take decisions on future coverage.'

An extensive list of news stories and video reports appeared on the BBC website describing how Israel is 'united in grief', alongside stories titled, 'Netanyahu: "Wide

and deep chasm" between Israel and enemies', 'Thousands gather for Israeli teenagers' funerals', 'Grief and anger after Israel teenager deaths', and 'On road where teens vanished'.

These all strongly, and rightly, expressed the broadcaster's empathy with the fact that something terrible had happened. But when has the BBC ever expressed this level of concern for the deaths of Palestinian teenagers? The question matters because consistent empathic bias has the effect of humanising Israelis for the public and dehumanising Palestinians. This is an extremely lethal form of media propaganda with real consequences for human suffering.

A *Guardian* editorial noted that the killings 'had shocked [Israel] to the core'. Western leaders had also expressed solidarity - an outpouring of concern that contrasted with the reaction to Palestinian deaths, which 'so often pass with barely a murmur'. But that was all the *Guardian* editors had to say.

The missing, ugly reality is that over the last 13 years, on average, one Palestinian child has been killed by Israel every three days. Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000, 1,523 Palestinian children have been killed by Israel's occupation forces. Over the same time period, 129 Israeli children have been killed. Thus, the ratio of Palestinian children to Israeli children killed is more than ten to one.

You would be forgiven for not having the slightest inkling of this from Western media coverage. Even in the past few days, in reporting the massive Israeli operation to find the teenagers, only the briefest of nods has been given to the ‘five Palestinians, including a number of minors, [who were] killed’ in the process.

Following the tragic discovery of the bodies of the three Israeli teenagers, corporate journalism gave headline attention to President Obama’s condemnation of ‘this senseless act of terror against innocent youth’. Significant coverage was given to the shocked reaction of prime minister David Cameron who said:

‘This was an appalling and inexcusable act of terror perpetrated against young teenagers. Britain will stand with Israel as it seeks to bring to justice those responsible.’

But when have Obama or Cameron ever condemned the killing of Palestinian youths or children by Israelis in this vehement way?

We can easily see the contrast in media treatment of Israeli and Palestinian deaths by observing the lack of coverage, and the silence of Western leaders, about two young Palestinians, Nadim Nuwara, 17, and Muhammad Abu al-Thahir, 16, who were shot dead by Israeli security forces in May. The BBC did not entirely ignore the killings. But the deaths were presented as a murky event in which the truth was strongly disputed:

‘A human rights group has released a video it says shows two teenage Palestinians being shot dead by Israeli security forces at a protest last week.’

The BBC report was quick to present the Israeli viewpoint upfront:

‘But the Israeli military said the video had been edited and did not document the “violent nature” of the incident.

‘It also questioned a claim that live ammunition had been fired at the boys.’

A few days later, the Israeli military ordered the removal of the CCTV cameras that had captured the killings. The security cameras belonged to Fakher Sayed who ran a nearby carpentry shop. And the interest in this from BBC News and the rest of the corporate media? Zero, as far as we can tell.

Every violent death is a tragedy. But the disproportionate coverage given to Israeli and Palestinian deaths is symptomatic of a deep-rooted, pro-Israel bias. Why is it so extreme? Because of the intense pressure brought to bear on the media by the powerful Israeli lobby, and by allied US-UK interests strongly favouring Israel. As one senior anonymous BBC editor once put it:

‘We wait in fear for the phone call from the Israelis.’ **CT**

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*David Edwards and David Cromwell are co-editors of Medialens, the British media watchdog – <http://medialens.org>*

**A few days later, the Israeli military ordered the removal of the CCTV cameras that had captured the killings**



# Murders expose the hypocrisy of the West

**Susan Abulhawa** wonders why Western politicians mourn the deaths of three Israeli teenagers but ignore those of Palestinian children

**In the West, headlines over pictures of the three Israeli settler teens referred to Israel's reign of terror over Palestine as a "manhunt" and "military sweep"**

Since three teens went missing from Gush Etzion, a Jewish-only colony in the West Bank, Israel has besieged the four million Palestinians who already live under its thumb, storming through towns, ransacking homes and civil institutions, conducting night raids on families, stealing property, kidnapping, injuring, and killing. Warplanes were dispatched to bomb Gaza, again and repeatedly, destroying more homes and institutions and carrying out extrajudicial executions. Thus far, over 570 Palestinians have been kidnapped and imprisoned, most notably Samer Issawi, the Palestinian who went on a 266-day hunger strike in protest of a previous arbitrary detention.

At least 10 Palestinians have been killed, including at least three children, a pregnant woman, and a mentally ill man. Hundreds have been injured, thousands terrorized. Universities and social welfare organizations were ransacked, shut down, their computers and equipment destroyed or stolen, and both private and public documents confiscated from civil institutions.

This wanton thuggery is official state policy conducted by its military and does not include the violence to persons and properties perpetuated by paramilitary Israeli settlers, whose persistent attacks against Palestinian civilians have also escalated in the past weeks. And now that three teenagers are

confirmed dead, Israel has vowed to exact revenge. Naftali Bennet, Economy Minister said, "There is no mercy for the murderers of children. This is the time for action, not words."

Although no Palestinian faction has claimed responsibility for the abduction, and most, including Hamas, deny any involvement, Benjamin Netanyahu is adamant that Hamas is responsible. The United Nations requested that Israel provide evidence to support their contention, but no evidence has been forthcoming, casting doubt on Israel's claims, particularly in light of its public ire over the recent unification of Palestinian factions and President Obama's acceptance of the new Palestinian unity.

In the West, headlines over pictures of the three Israeli settler teens referred to Israel's reign of terror over Palestine as a "manhunt" and "military sweep." Portraits of innocent young Israeli lives emerged from news outlets and the voices of their parents are featured in the fullness of their anguish.

The US, EU, UK, UN, Canada and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) condemned the kidnapping and called for their immediate and unconditional release. Upon discovery of the bodies, there has been an outpouring of condemnation and condolences.

President Obama said, "As a father, I cannot imagine the indescribable pain that the

parents of these teenage boys are experiencing. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms this senseless act of terror against innocent youth.”

Although hundreds of Palestinian children are kidnapped, brutalized or killed by Israel, there is rarely, if ever, such a reaction from the world. Just before the disappearance of the Israeli settler teens, the murder of two Palestinian teens was caught on a local surveillance camera. Ample evidence, including the recovered bullets and a CNN camera filming an Israeli sharpshooter pulling the trigger at the precise moment one of the boys was shot indicated that they were killed in cold blood by Israeli soldiers.

There were no condemnations or calls for justice for these teens by world leaders or international institutions, no solidarity with their grieving parents, nor mention of the more than 250 Palestinian children, kidnapped from their beds or on their way to school, who continue to languish in Israeli jails without charge or trial, physically and psychologically tortured.

This is to say nothing of the barbaric siege of Gaza, or the decades of ongoing theft, evictions, assaults on education, confiscation of land, demolition of homes, color coded permit system, arbitrary imprisonment, restriction of movement, checkpoints, extrajudicial executions, torture, and denials at every turn squeezing Palestinians into isolated ghettos.

None of that seems to matter. Nor does it matter that no one knows who murdered the Israeli teens. It seems the entire country is calling for Palestinian blood, reminiscent of American southern lynching rallies that went after black men whenever a white person turned up dead. Nor does it matter that these Israeli teens were settlers living in illegal Jewish-only colonies that were built on land stolen by the state mostly from Palestinian owners from the village of el-Khader. A huge portion of the settlers there are Americans, mostly from New York, including one of the murdered teens, who exercise Jewish

privilege to hold dual citizenship; to have an extra country no matter where they're from, one in their own homeland and one in ours, at the same time that the indigenous Palestinians fester in refugee camps, occupied ghettos, or boundless exile.

Palestinian children are assaulted or murdered every day and barely do their lives register in the Western media.

No mother should have endure the murder of her child. No mother or father. That does not only apply to Jewish parents. The lives of our children are no less precious and their loss are no less shattering and spiritually unhinging.

But there is a terrible disparity in the value of life here in the eyes of the state and the world, where Palestinian life is cheap and disposable, but Jewish life is sacrosanct.

This exceptionalism and supremacy of Jewish life is a fundamental underpinning of the state of Israel. It pervades their every law and protocol, and is matched only by their apparent contempt and disregard for Palestinian life.

Israeli violence, no matter how vulgar, is inevitably couched as a heroic, ironic violence that western media frames as “response,” as if Palestinian resistance itself were not a response to Israeli oppression. When the ICRC was asked to issue a similar call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hundreds of Palestinian children held in Israeli jails (which is also in contravention of international humanitarian law), the ICRC refused, indicating there's a difference between the isolated abduction of Israeli teens and the routine abduction, torture, isolation, and imprisonment of Palestinian children.

When our children throw rocks at heavily armed Israeli tanks and jeeps rolling through our streets, we are contemptible parents who should be bear responsibility for the murder of our children if they are shot by Israeli soldiers or settlers. When we refuse to capitulate completely, we are “not partners for peace,” and deserve to have more land

**There is a terrible disparity in the value of life here in the eyes of the state and the world, where Palestinian life is cheap and disposable, but Jewish life is sacrosanct**

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## DOUBLE STANDARDS / 2

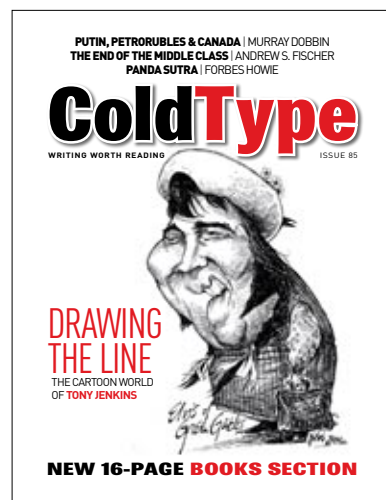
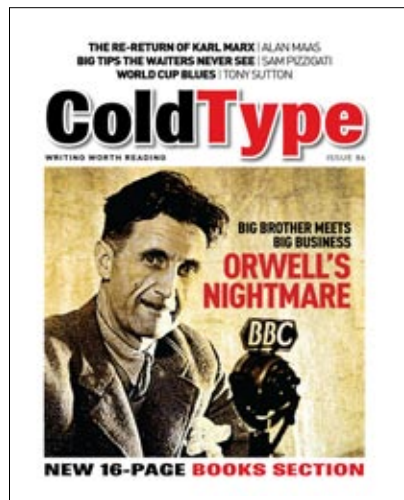
**Our people continue to be robbed of home and heritage, pushed to the margins of humanity, blamed for our own miserable fate**

confiscated from us for the exclusive use of Jews. When we take up arms and fight back, kidnap a soldier, we are terrorists of the extreme kind who have no one to blame but ourselves as Israel subjects the entire Palestinian population to punitive collective punishment. When we engage in peaceful protests, we are rioters who deserve the live fire they send our way. When we debate, write, and boycott, we are anti-Semites who should be silenced, deported, marginalized, or prosecuted.

What should we do, then? Palestine is quite literally being wiped off the map by a state that openly upholds Jewish supremacy and Jewish privilege. Our people continue to be robbed of home and heritage, pushed to the margins of humanity, blamed for our own miserable fate. We are a traumatized, principally unarmed, native society being destroyed and erased by one of the most powerful militaries in the world.

Rachel Frankel, mother of one of the murdered boys, went to the UN to plead for their support, saying “it is wrong to take children, innocent boys or girls, and use them as instruments of any struggle. It is cruel...I wish to ask: Doesn’t every child have the right to come home safely from school?” Do those sentiments apply to Palestinian children, too. But none of that matters either. Does it? It matters that three Israeli Jews were killed. It doesn’t matter who did it or what the circumstances were, the entire Palestinian population will be made to suffer, more than they already are. **CT**

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*Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian-American writer and human rights activist. She is the author of a bestselling novel, “Mornings in Jenin” (2010) and founder of a non-governmental organization, Playgrounds for Palestine. Abulhawa lives in Yardley, Pennsylvania.*



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# A pretext for the next stage in Israel's war

**Jason Farbman** tells how the Israeli government is carrying out collective punishment of Palestinians after the death of three teenage settlers

In the early hours of July 1, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) dropped bombs on dozens of sites across Gaza, hours after three missing Israeli settler teenagers were discovered dead. With all of Israel focused on the boys' funerals, Israeli officials used the event as another opportunity to turn reality on its head.

The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, predictably seized on the boys' disappearance and death as the pretext to raid Palestinian territory, attack Hamas and expand settlements.

While Palestinians have suffered relentless collective punishment since their disappearance on June 12, Israel has portrayed itself as the besieged victim. Israel exists on occupied land and treats Palestinians with racist contempt – but Israeli officials insist that anti-Semitism is the motivation for the kidnappings.

“They were kidnapped and murdered just for being Jewish,” said Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon. “They were kidnapped and murdered in cold blood by those dedicated to hurting Israeli citizens and waging a daily war of attrition against the state of Israel.”

But such naked propaganda can't obscure the fact that occupation, ethnic cleansing and apartheid are at the root of this conflict – and it can't obscure the fact that Palestinians live as an oppressed people in their own

land while US aid ensures that Israel maintains overwhelming military superiority over the Palestinians.

Now, after an initial round of bombings that struck 34 sites in Gaza (without any proof linking these sites to the boys' disappearance), the Israeli establishment is split over the question of whether their next move should be a full-scale invasion.

From the beginning, Israeli officials have announced their intention to “teach Hamas a lesson,” even though no proof has yet been furnished by anyone linking Hamas to the boys' disappearance – and even though a Hamas spokesperson denied the repeated Israeli assertions of Hamas' culpability, stating that the accusations are “stupid and baseless.”

The boys' bodies were discovered in a field near the town of Halhul, just north of Hebron in the West Bank. While the Israeli military placed under siege more than a dozen Palestinian cities, towns and refugee camps, and imposed curfews for two-and-a-half weeks, the bodies turned up just 10 minutes from where they had last been seen [4].

As Israeli troops flooded into Halhul, several reports emerged of Jewish Israelis attacking Arabs. Among these were a taxi driver attacked with tear gas by a 17-year-old boy and a young man hospitalized after being attacked by a group of young Israelis. Elsewhere, a Jewish man in his 20s was ar-

**As Israeli troops flooded into Halhul, several reports emerged of Jewish Israelis attacking Arabs**

**That the UN human rights spokeswoman's comments were aimed at both sides – as if there were any equivalence in the force deployed or position held between Israelis and Palestinians – defies the reality of Israeli occupation**

rested for spray-painting “Kahane was right” on a road sign – a reference to the ultra-nationalist rabbi Meir Kahane who won a sizable following in the 1980s by calling for the forced removal of Arabs from Israel.

### **Israel's Ongoing Collective Punishment of Palestine**

The United Nations human rights spokeswoman immediately called for all sides to not commit acts of collective punishment, which is a violation of international law. “We urge all parties to refrain from punishing individuals for offenses they have not personally committed or by imposing collective penalties,” she said at a press conference in Geneva.

That her comments were aimed at both sides – as if there were any equivalence in the force deployed or position held between Israelis and Palestinians – defies the reality of Israeli occupation. Over the past 13 years, one Palestinian child has been killed on average every three days – every three days – by Israeli occupation forces.

This statistic exposes the hypocrisy of every Israeli politician seeking to fan the flames of anti-Palestinian racism. Netanyahu said the three teenaged settlers had been “abducted and murdered in cold blood by human animals,” and he vowed, “Hamis is responsible and Hamis will pay.” Israeli Economy Minister and right-wing extremist Naftali Bennett exclaimed, “There is no forgiveness for murderers of children...Now is a time for actions, not words.”

In the 18 days between the boys' disappearance and the discovery of their bodies, Israel Defense Forces raided more than 1,000 homes, ransacking many of them. More than 420 Palestinians from the West Bank were arrested, with no charges – 58 of them had been released during the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange. Roughly 80 remain in administrative detention. At least five were killed, including a 15 year-old boy.

Had she been more precise, the UN spokeswoman would have implored Israel

to stop its ongoing collective punishment.

But the Israeli military isn't done yet. The West Bank continues to be besieged, and the roads blockaded by soldiers and settler mobs alike. Dozens of military vehicles continued the extensive operations and home invasions in southern Hebron even after the bodies were found. Dozens more homes were searched and ransacked, causing extensive property damage. Palestinians reported injuries from live ammunition. A 16 year-old boy was killed by the IDF troops raiding Jenin.

Perhaps in this case, Israeli officials will find that there is forgiveness for murderers of children.

Israel claims that two Palestinian men – Marwan Kawasma and Amar Abu Aisha – are responsible for the boys' disappearance and death. Both were previously detained by Israel multiple times and held in administrative detention without due process. Ha'aretz has reported that each of their wives had notified the Palestinian Authority security forces that their husbands were missing. The PA in turn relayed the information to the Shin Bet Caf (General Security Forces) of Israel, which then apprehended the women and interrogated them for several hours.

Kawasma's wife, who is eight months pregnant, was re-apprehended during the late-night raid on Hebron after the bodies were found on June 30. She is currently being held by Israel, though she contends that she has no knowledge of her husband's whereabouts or plans. Other family members of the men are also being detained, including the four brothers of Marwan Kawasma and the father of Abu Aisha. In an attack on Kawasma's home, an explosion destroyed the top floor and injured an infant with shrapnel.

But remember – there is no forgiveness for the murderers of children.

### **A Pretext for Israel's Interests**

Israel's response to these events has been cynical, predictable and swift. Just hours af-



ter the discovery of the boys' bodies on June 30, both Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ya'alon proposed avenging them by establishing a new wave of settlement construction – in their honor.

Netanyahu framed the disappearances as a Hamas kidnapping – a charge still without any evidence, and yet one that most media outlets have reported as fact.

Referencing the Israeli national poet Haim Bialik, he went on to say, “The vengeance of a young boy’s blood even the devil cannot fathom, nor the vengeance of the blood of these young pure boys... Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay.” In setting the narrative this way, Netanyahu has met another important Israeli goal: undermining the recent Hamas-Fatah reconciliation deal.

Deputy Security Minister Danny Danon used rhetoric familiar to anyone acquainted with Israel’s past assaults on Gaza. “This tragic end will be the end of Hamas, too,” he said. “We need to destroy Hamas...demolish the homes of Hamas militants, destroy their ammunition stockpiles and stop all money that is funding Hamas directly or indirectly.” A deputy minister, Tzipi Hotovely, called for a renewed war of annihilation on Hamas and a policy of targeted assassinations directed at their personnel.

This sentiment was reiterated by some of Netanyahu’s most powerful US allies. The top Democrat and Republican on the House Middle East subcommittee sent a joint message to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas: “If it is determined that Hamas is behind this horrific tragedy, [Abbas] must immediately break up the unity agreement between Fatah and Hamas, a US-designated foreign terrorist organization.”

The military invasions, arrests and bombings are no doubt intended to provoke a reaction from Hamas. For its part, Hamas has vowed to defend Palestinians against a ground invasion, promising to “open the gates of hell” on Israel.

The Israeli military has thus far reported 18 rockets fired into Israeli territory from un-

known origins. These rockets have not killed or injured anyone, but Israeli leaders know full well that any violence on Hamas’ part will play into the Israeli narrative of victimhood.

### **The Israeli Establishment Debates Itself**

If Israel doesn’t launch the full ground invasion Netanyahu is threatening, it is because there are divergent opinions about Israel’s next move. Israel’s security cabinet held back-to-back emergency sessions on June 30 and July 1, but as of this writing had not reached a decision regarding further military action.

Liberal Zionists seemed unlikely to support such a military action, on the grounds that it would damage Israel’s reputation internationally. These concerns were captured in an article by veteran war correspondent and foreign policy critic Ron Ben-Yishai titled “Israel must crush Hamas, but do it wisely”:

“[I]f the option of an operation in Gaza is raised, it is likely that most cabinet ministers will refuse. Why? Because Hamas in Gaza wasn’t involved in the kidnap, and an IDF invasion of the Strip would be perceived as collective punishment, which the international community would not understand and even condemn. One of the things that the state of Israel cannot lose is international legitimacy for its actions, and [it] cannot be perceived as a country that punishes an entire population with no justifiable cause.”

Both the US and Egypt – Israel’s two most powerful allies – have signaled that Israel should not go too far and “destabilize the situation.” Both have offered sympathies to Israel. “As a father, I cannot imagine the indescribable pain that the parents of these teenage boys are experiencing,” said Obama in a statement.

But this concern for human life and suffering is, as always, selective. As Ali Abunimah noted, “Obama has never expressed sympathy or condolences for any of the more than 1,400 Palestinian children murdered by

**Deputy Security Minister Danny Danon used rhetoric familiar to anyone acquainted with Israel’s past assaults on Gaza**

**If Israel's atrocities in Gaza become too gruesome to ignore, it would put Egyptian President Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi under pressure to open the Egyptian crossing into Gaza**

Israeli occupation forces and settlers.” Palestinian spoken word poet Remi Kanazi wrote on Twitter with his characteristic bluntness: “As a father, Barack Obama mourns Israeli teens. As a president, Barack Obama blows up Pakistani, Yemeni and Somali teens.”

Importantly, the US and Egypt's official sympathies for Israel did not include support for a ground invasion. “I also urge all parties to refrain from steps that could further destabilize the situation,” Obama said at the end of his statement. Regional instability will only make the US position more precarious, especially as it struggles to contain an increasingly powerful insurgency in Iraq and the transition to yet another ruler in Egypt.

If Israel's atrocities in Gaza become too gruesome to ignore, it would put Egyptian President Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi under pressure to open the Egyptian crossing into Gaza in order to aid civilians in the crosshairs of an Israeli attack.

Should Israel, one of the world's most powerful militaries, invade Gaza, the largest open-air prison in the world, the eyes of the Arab world will be on Sisi. The choice between acting against Israel (and by extension the US) and doing nothing to aid Palestinians under attack is certainly a choice Sisi would rather not make.

**United Israel**

A military strike on captive Palestinians would certainly meet with popular support at a time when Israel has once again come together in nationalistic fervor. And yet, despite all this, there remain differences of strategy at Israel's highest levels.

These choices have not been difficult for Israel in the past. During Operation Cast Lead in late 2008-early 2009, Israel attacked Gaza, targeting its civilian infrastructure and dropping white phosphorous on the captive population. In May 2010, the IDF boarded the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship in international waters carrying humanitarian aid bound for Gaza, and killed 10 civilians. In

both instances, Israel acted swiftly, put its PR machine into motion and never looked back. And there are countless other examples one could provide.

But now, the Israeli ruling class does not feel uniformly confident to act with unchecked brutality on an innocent population, showing a modicum of self-consciousness about what an incursion might bring in the way of unpleasant consequences.

And they're not mistaken to feel that way – as evidenced by recent victories in the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. Just recently, the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to divest \$21 million from three corporations doing business in illegal Israeli settlements. “We as a church cannot profit from the destruction of homes and lives,” said one of the church's officials after a vote that drew attention around the world. In Europe, an increasing number of food distribution companies are refusing to buy Israeli products produced in the occupied Palestinian territories.

As Ali Abunimah wrote at *Electronic Intifada*:

“It remains to be seen which voices Israel's leaders will heed: those demanding blood in Palestinian streets, or Israel's international sponsors who don't wish to be embarrassed and inconvenienced by another of its wild and vengeful killing sprees at a time when the rest of the region is in particularly dire shape”.

While we wait to see the outcome for Gazans in this moment, we are not powerless to affect future outcomes. If BDS victories have given Israel pause in its genocidal march to wipe Palestinians from the map, then we must further commit ourselves to winning new groups to the boycott, divestment and sanctioning of Israeli apartheid, occupation and ethnic cleansing. **CT**

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**Jason Farbman** wrote this commentary which originally appeared on the Socialist Worker web site - <http://socialistworker.org>  
**Daphna Thier** also contributed

# War is our business, and business looks good

**Edward S. Herman** on the real winners of the crisis on the Russian border

It is enlightening to see how pugnacious the US establishment, led by the Peace Laureate, has been in dealing with the Ukraine crisis. The crisis arguably began when the Yanukovich government rejected an EU bailout program in favor of one offered by Russia. The mainstream media (MSM) have virtually suppressed the fact that the EU proposal was not only less generous than the one offered by Russia, but that whereas the Russian plan did not preclude further Ukrainian deals with the EU the EU plan would have required a cut-off of further Russian arrangements. And whereas the Russian deal had no military clauses, that of the EU required that Ukraine affiliate with NATO. Insofar as the MSM dealt with this set of offers they not only suppressed the exclusionary and militarized character of the EU offer, they tended to view the Russian deal as an improper use of economic leverage, “bludgeoning,” but the EU proposal was “constructive and reasonable” (Ed., NYT, Nov. 20, 2014). Double standards seem to be fully internalized within the US establishment.

The protests that ensued in Ukraine were surely based in part on real grievances against a corrupt government, but they were also pushed along by rightwing groups and by US and allied encouragement and support that increasingly had an anti-Russian and pro-accelerated-regime-change flavor. They also increased in level of violence. The sniper killings of police and protesters in Maidan

on February 21, 2014 brought the crisis to a new head. This violence overlapped with and eventually terminated a negotiated settlement of the struggle brokered by EU members that would have ended the violence, created an interim government and required elections by December. The accelerated violence ended this transitional plan, which was replaced by a coup takeover, along with the forced flight of Victor Yanukovich.

There is credible evidence that the sniper shootings of both protesters and police were carried out by a segment of the protesters in a false-flag operation that worked exceedingly well, “government” violence serving as one ground for the ouster of Yanukovich. Most telling was the intercepted phone message between Estonia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Paet and EU Foreign Policy chief Catherine Upton in which Paet regretfully reported compelling evidence that the shots killing both police and protesters came from a segment of the protesters. This account was almost entirely suppressed in the MSM; for example, the *New York Times* never mentioned it once through the following two months. It is also enlightening that the protesters at Maidan were never called “militants” in the MSM, although a major and effective segment was armed and violent – that term was reserved for protesters in Eastern Ukraine, who were commonly designated “pro-Russian” as well as militants (for details see the tabula-

**Double standards seem to be fully internalized within the US establishment**

**This interest in foreign intrusion in Ukraine affairs, with the implication of wrong-doing, does not extend to evidence of US and other NATO power aid and control**

tion in Herman and Peterson, “The Ukraine Crisis and the Propaganda System in Overdrive,” in Stephen Lendman, ed, “Flashpoint in Ukraine”).

There is also every reason to believe that the coup and establishment of a rightwing and anti-Russian government were encouraged and actively supported by US officials. Victoria Nuland’s intercepted “fuck the EU” words express her hostility to a group that, while generally compliant and subservient, departed from neocon plans for a proper government in Kiev headed by somebody like “Yats.” So she would surely have been pleased when the EU-supported February compromise plan was ended by the violence and coup. The US support of the coup government has been enthusiastic and unqualified, and whereas Kerry and company delayed recognition of the elected government of Maduro in Venezuela, and have strongly urged him to dialogue and negotiate with the Venezuelan protesters – in fact, threatening him if he doesn’t – Kerry and company have not done the same in Ukraine where the Kiev government forces have slowly escalated their attacks on the Eastern Ukraine, but not on “protesters,” only on “militants!”

The Kiev government’s military is now using jets and helicopters to bomb targets in the East and heavy artillery and mortars in its ground operations. Its targets have included hospitals and schools, and as of June 8 civilian casualties have been in the hundreds. A dramatic massacre of 40 or more pro-Russian protesters in Odessa on May 2 by a well-organized cadre of neo-Nazi supporters, possibly agents of the Kiev government, was an early high point in this pacification campaign. No investigation of this slaughter has been mounted by the Kiev government or “international community” and it has not interfered in the slightest with Western support of Kiev. In parallel the MSM have treated it in very low key. (The *New York Times* buried this incident in a back page continuation of a story on “Deadly Clashes Erupt in Ukraine,” May 5, which succeeds in covering up the affiliation

of the killers.) Kerry has been silent, though we may imagine his certain frenzy if Maduro’s agents had carried out a similar action in Venezuela. Recall the “Racak massacre,” where the deaths of 40 alleged victims of the Serb military created an international frenzy; but in that case the United States needed a *casus belli*, whereas in the Odessa case there is a pacification war already in process by a US client, so MSM silence is in order.

It is an interesting feature of media coverage of the Ukraine crisis that there is a regular focus on alleged or possible Russian aid, control of and participation in the actions of the protesters/militants/insurgents in Eastern Ukraine. This was evident in the *Times*’s gullible acceptance of a claim that photos of insurgents included a Russian pictured in Russia, later acknowledged to be problematic (Andrew Higgins, Michael Gordon and Andrew Kramer, “Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia,” NYT, April 20, 2014); and in another lead article which was almost entirely speculation (Sabrina Tavernise, “In Ukraine Kremlin Leaves No Fingerprints,” NYT, June 1, 2014.). But this interest in foreign intrusion in Ukraine affairs, with the implication of wrong-doing, does not extend to evidence of US and other NATO power aid and control. Visits by Biden, Cain, Nuland and intelligence and Pentagon figures are sometimes mentioned, but the scope and character of aid and advice, of US “fingerprints,” is not discussed and seems to be of little interest. It is in fact normalized, so that as with the aid plans in which Russian proposals are “bludgeons” but US-EU plans are “constructive and reasonable” the double standard is in good working order here as well.

Isn’t there a danger that Russia will enter this war on behalf of the pro-Russian majority of the eastern part of Ukraine now under assault? Possibly, but not likely, as Putin is well aware that the Obama-neocon-military-industrial complex crowd would welcome this and would use it, at minimum, as a means of further dividing Russia from the EU powers, further militarizing US clients and allies,

and firming up the MIC's command of the US national budget. Certainly there are important forces in this country that would love to see a war with Russia, and it is notable how common are political comments, criticisms and regrets at Obama's weak response to Russian "aggression" (e.g., David Sanger, "Obama Policy Is put to Test: Global Crises Challenge a Strategy of Caution," NYT, March 17, 2014). But so far Putin refuses to bite.

In response to this pressure from the powerful war-loving and war-making US constituencies, Obama has been furiously denouncing Russia and has hastened to exclude it from the G-8, impose sanctions and penalties on the villain state, increase US troops and press military aid on the near-Russia states allegedly terrified at the Russian threat, carry out training exercises and maneuvers with these allies and clients, assure them of the sacredness of our commitment to their security, and press these states and major allies to increase their military budgets. One thing he hasn't done is to restrain his Kiev client in dealing with the insurgents in eastern Ukraine. Another is engaging Putin in an attempt at a settlement. Putin has stressed the importance of a constitutional formation of a Ukraine federation in which a still intact Ukraine would allow significant autonomy to the Eastern provinces. There was a Geneva meeting and joint statement on April 17 in which all sides pledged a de-escalation effort, disarming irregulars, and constitutional reform. But it was weak, without enforcement mechanisms, and had no effect. The most important requirement for de-escalation would be the termination of what is clearly a Kiev pacification program for Eastern Ukraine. That is not happening, because Obama doesn't want it to happen. In fact, he takes the position that it is up to Russia to curb the separatists in East Ukraine, and he has gotten his G-7 puppies to agree to give Russia one month to do this, or face more severe penalties..

This situation calls to mind Gareth Porter's analysis of the "perils of dominance," where he argued that the Vietnam war occurred and

became a very large one because US officials thought that with their overwhelming military superiority North Vietnam and its allies in the south would surrender and accept US terms – most importantly a US controlled South Vietnam – as military escalation took place and a growing toll was imposed on the Vietnamese (see his "Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam"), It didn't work. In the Ukraine context the United States once again has a militarily dominant position. On its own and through its NATO arm it has encircled Russia with satellites established in violation of the 1990 promise of James Baker and Hans-Dietrich Genscher to Mikhail Gorbachev to not move eastward "one inch," and it has placed anti-missile weapons right on Russia's borders. And now it has engineered a coup in Ukraine that empowered a government openly hostile to Russia and threatening both the well-being of Russian-speaking Ukrainians and the control of the major Russian naval base in Crimea. Putin's action in reincorporating Crimea into Russia was an inevitable defensive reaction to a serious threat to Russian national security. But it may have surprised the Obama team, just as the Vietnamese refusal to accept surrender terms may have surprised the Johnson administration. Continuing to push the Vietnamese by escalation didn't work, although it did kill and injure millions and ended the Vietnamese alternative way. Continuing and escalating actions against Russia in 2014 may involve a higher risk for the real aggressor and for the world, but there are real spinoff benefits to Lockheed and other members of the MIC. **CT**

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*Edward S. Herman is Professor Emeritus of Finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and author of numerous books, including Corporate Control, Corporate Power (1981), The Real Terror Network (1982), Manufacturing Consent (1988, with Noam Chomsky), The Myth of The Liberal Media: an Edward Herman Reader (1999) This essay was originally published in Z magazine at <http://zcomm.org/zmag>*

**The most important requirement for de-escalation would be the termination of what is clearly a Kiev pacification program for Eastern Ukraine. That is not happening, because Obama doesn't want it to happen**

# So, this is nationhood?

Chellis Glendinning celebrates another Independence Day

**After scooting up Calle España, I found myself standing in the second row of a mass of excited Bolivians smack in front of the Casa de Libertad**

Independence Day in Sucre, Bolivia, was the most electrifying day in the Andes since Cochabamba doctors – armed with rocks and in full white-coat-stethoscope regalia – hurled themselves into street battle against the police and the police hurled their computers into bonfires and burned down their own stations.

Preparation for the grand event celebrating the *Grito de Libertad* began weeks in advance when workers of this White City set up scaffolding for the annual re-whitening of the Casa de Libertad in Plaza 25 de mayo. The paint businesses on Avenida Jaime Mendoza then realized their *raison d'être* as every home-owning Sucreño within ten blocks joined the effort to repaint their own façades white. But that wasn't all. In the week before, the other business to bolster its bank account from the patriotic frenzy – that of scaffolding assembly/disassembly – went into high gear to construct and deconstruct platforms and tiered seating for the outdoor concerts, fashion shows, and information tents that would whip up anticipation before the arrival of the Big Day.

**25 de mayo 1809.** Said Big Day is the moment in history when independence from their colonizers was declared – right here in Sucre – and the true inheritors of this Andes terrain began their long journey toward post-Inca, post-Spain nation-statehood. The Casa de Libertad, often termed a

sacred place, is the gloriously white colonial building where the country's first congress was held, Sucre was named the capital of Bolivia, the *Declaración de Independencia* was written and signed, and the first Bolivian flag was raised. Its place in history today is as a museum honoring the heroism of past *paisanos*, most notably Juana Azurduy de Padilla, and a backdrop for such cultural events as guitar concerts and rites-of-passage for dignitaries.

The corner of Aniceto Arce and Hernando Siles, where I am staying, is the appointed gathering place for marching bands, neighborhood associations, and worker syndicates who will parade by the Casa de Libertad, and so I had to muscle my way through the heaving crowds of *campesinos* and *trabajadores* to arrive at the plaza. *Vale la pena*, I say, because after scooting up Calle España, I found myself standing in the second row of a mass of excited Bolivians smack in front of the Casa de Libertad; upon the newly-restored balcony above stood President Evo Morales in his tri-color sash and *el Vice* Álvaro García Linera festooned in the gold medallion of Simón Bolívar. The energy in the air was like that of a rocket taking off – that just keeps taking off and taking off and taking off. ¡Ole! The marching drums, trumpets, tubas, and cymbals of military training colleges from La Paz, Santa Cruz, et al. strode proudly by



**The boys in the band: Goosestepping down the main street on Bolivia's big day.**

(Photo: Chellis Glendinning)

in their green uniforms, in their camouflage suits, in their ironed khakis to the thundering beat of military rhythms. Evo waved at comrades he picked out in the crowd below. The men and women of the armed forces made their dramatic display for the Mandatario next. The army! The air force! And yes... the navy. The navy is a special story as Bolivia lost claim to its Pacific Ocean ports between 1879 and 1883 when neighbor Chile pilfered them, as the story is told, at the moment that every Bolivian soldier was plastered on the home-made corn liquor known as *chicha* in celebration of Carnaval. 135 years later, the outrage remains El Numero Uno unresolved issue that every president – dictator, liberal, or socialist – reinserts into national consciousness to win friends, influence people, and bolster emotions for the nation-state.

Still, after all these years since that first *grito*, a country that is actually made up of 30-something historically separate Native groups, only truly launched its expedition toward the political identity of a nation-state during the 1932-35 Guerra del Chaco against Paraguay. The dynamic between decentralization and centralization is as present now as it was when the Inca roved across the altiplano with big-time plans for amalgamation on the tips of their tongues and spears; it manifests itself as debates about the meaning of the 2009 renaming of the country as Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, about the weight of power among the Palace in La Paz, the nine departments, and the village-communities; about the nature of responsible development in a world going to ecological hell in a hand basket.

The government of Evo Morales is all

**Bolivia lost claim to its Pacific Ocean ports between 1879 and 1883 when neighbor Chile pilfered them, as the story is told, at the moment that every Bolivian soldier was plastered on the home-made corn liquor known as *chicha***

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## DISPATCH FROM BOLIVIA

**I'm a marching-band addict: once they start, like a never-satisfied cocaine addict, I can go on for six hours**

about building nationhood. One can sympathize even while raising an eyebrow. To protect one's country in a world of unprincipled power plays via infiltration, electronic surveillance, dirty wars, assassinations, and weapons of mass destruction, to become a serious player in the global economy – these seem to require militaristic/economic potency. Ergo: the rush to industrialization via humongous dams and mines, international airports, super-highways, satellite communications, nuclear power plants, etc. Ergo: the Inca-based state rituals in dramatic locales like the ruins at Tiwanaku. These government-sponsored health, food, and services fairs in the plazas of the country's cities in which the governmental dream of nationhood is disseminated and bused-in-*campesinos* stand in neat lines to get their first taste of yogurt (Bolivians do not stand in neat-or-otherwise lines). Ergo: the state-run media venues. The cult of Evo. The winning-over of the military and police via channeling monies for modern equipment and better salaries. And these marching-band parades ...

The history of Prussian-German goose-stepping in Bolivia goes back to the hiring of the German General Hans Kundt in 1911. Previously the French had been installed to teach the armed forces how to organize and arm itself, fight a decent war, and quell the inevitable citizen or military uprisings. Their looser approach was so popular that when Kundt arrived, some soldiers refused to change from their French uniforms to the German. The Germans goose-stepped. And here we are in 2014—and the army, air force, and navy are flinging their pointed toes above their moustaches as they pass beneath the sash and medallion of their Mandatario and his Second-in-Command.

The coming election, slated for 12 October this year, will be telling. Evo is running despite legal criticism that a third bid is unconstitutional, and just about everyone agrees he will win due to *falta de* a better

candidate. In the last nine years of his rule there have been serious jolts like creeping-toward-top-level corruption within both administrative and judicial systems; Gasolinazo when García Linera threatened an immediate 80% rise in gasoline prices; unresolved legal cases like the 2009 Hotel Las Américas execution-style murders of a cadre of secessionists; the constant eating away at freedom of expression/press via state buying-up of media venues and laws making it easier to close independent media down; plus Chaparina when the police gassed, beat, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to disappear an encampment of peaceful *indigenas* marching to save their eco-reserve and land-based cultures from highway development. Too, some Bolivians blame the Palace for skyrocketing cocaine production and galloping inflation, which in reality are global trends. But just about everyone agrees that *un proceso de cambio* from decades of “Goni” Sánchez de Lozada, García Meza, et al. is necessary.

**25 de mayo 2014.** After four years living in Bolivia, I have discovered that my name is Chellis and I'm a marching-band addict: once they start, like a never-satisfied cocaine addict, I can go on for six hours. It's Independence Day and the bands play on. Booming drum beats! Thunderous tuba riffs! Piercing trumpet calls! Military planes buzz the plaza. Red-green-and-yellow flags flap in the wind. Goose-stepping, sword-wielding officers in colorful War for Independence uniforms. The president is waving, *el vice* smiling with joy. The people cheer when the four-year-olds in camouflage fatigues proudly march by. I'd vote for Evo too. **CT**

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**Chellis Glendinning** is the author of “*Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy*”, “*When Technology Wounds*”, and other books. Her latest is “*HYPER: An Electromagnetic Chapbook*.” She can be reached via her website [www.chellisglendinning.org](http://www.chellisglendinning.org).



# 151 days of blackouts

May Wilkerson reflects on the nights she can't remember

In college and throughout my early twenties, my friends and peers would often regale me with stories of things I had done during drink-induced blackouts. It is not entirely out of the ordinary, in college, to engage in erratic, illogical and sometimes shameful behavior under the influence of alcohol. No one seemed to find it strange that I would forget so much, and so often. I was just another run-of-the-mill college student with a nightly case of amnesia.

“Do you remember getting up on the counter at McDonald’s? And tossing ketchup packets up in the air?”

Nope.

“Do you remember singing ‘Like a Prayer’ onstage at that karaoke bar?”

No.

“Do you remember walking home with a traffic cone on your head?”

No, but that is hilarious!

“Do you remember swinging from my hanging lamp while pretending to be Tarzan?”

I never did that.

“Yes, you did.”

OK. Sorry...

I almost never remembered anything other than occasional snippets filtered through a thick haze. I was a blackout drinker from the first time I ever got drunk at 16, and my blackouts would cut broad

swathes of time right out of my memory, ranging from an hour to an entire night.

After waking up the next day, I would search my immediate surroundings for physical clues. Ketchup packets in the bottom of my bag. Photos of me as a tiny blur onstage, holding a microphone. A ticket stub in my pocket, a stamp on my hand. Mostly I relied on other people’s stories to fill the empty spaces in my memory. No matter how intently I focused, or how long I waited, these black holes remained, dark and unforgiving.

I once approximated that I blacked out an average of three and a half nights a week during my drinking career (twice a week in college and four or five nights a week in the four years after college), before I got sober. If I lost an average of two hours a night, that’s about seven hours a week, 52 weeks a year. Over 10 years of boozing, from age 16 to 26, I must have accrued over 3,600 hours—or 151 days—of forgotten time. That’s five months—enough time to pen a novel or hike the Appalachian Trail. What I did, essentially, was take a very long intermittent nap (or coma), while turning over full control of my body to my most impulsive and animalistic instincts.

Blackout drinking is a common symptom of alcoholism or substance misuse, I have learned. But not everyone who is an

**I once approximated that I blacked out an average of three and a half nights a week during my drinking career (twice a week in college and four or five nights a week in the four years after college), before I got sober**

**The morning after my birthday party, I woke up in all my clothes, and wondered if anyone had showed up to my party the night before. I played over possible scenarios in my head, ranging from benign to horrifying**

alcoholic blacks out, and not every blackout drinker is an alcoholic.

A blackout is also known as alcohol-related amnesia, though it's not so much that you forget what happened the night before. The memory doesn't go missing – it just never gets made in the first place. Alcohol doesn't actually “kill brain cells,” like some people believe, but it stomps all over receptors in your brain – specifically the prefrontal cortex, which controls rational thinking, and the temporal cortex, which houses the hippocampus, where short-term (one minute or less) memories are processed into long-term memories.

The more you drink, the more you risk blacking out, though blood alcohol content is the crucial factor. So three glasses of wine on an empty stomach might black you out, but six glasses over the course of a three-course meal might not. Personally, I would usually opt for the six glasses and skip the meal entirely.

In a blackout, you can still process information. You're not a word-slurring zombie, or passed out in the corner (yet). But you're not making any new memories to hold on to tomorrow, or anytime in the future. So when I got wasted, I could still communicate with other people, move through the world semi-functionally, hail a cab or sing karaoke. I just wouldn't remember it the next day.

This meant my life was often full of surprises. Freshman year I once woke up in my dorm room in bed with a traffic cone. I sensed its presence before I saw what it was, tucked under the covers beside me. I lay there, frozen for an hour or more, waiting for it to wake up and leave. I just assumed it was a person – woman, man, friend or stranger. I was relieved that it wasn't.

My junior year of college I turned 21 and my roommates threw me a birthday party. I went to school in Montreal, where the drinking age is 18, so the alcohol milestone was arbitrary. But I mainly drank for

arbitrary reasons – celebration or loss, excitement or boredom. If I had a headache or heartache, I drank over the pain. If I did well on a paper, I toasted my success. Made it through another Tuesday? Bottoms up!

The morning after my birthday party, I woke up in all my clothes, and wondered if anyone had showed up to my party the night before. I played over possible scenarios in my head, ranging from benign to horrifying.

My roommate knocked on my door and dragged me to his room and pointed to his bed. Just inches above the bedspread dangled a mangled object that had once been a very elaborate, multi-tiered “Chinese” lantern from Ikea. The lamp was severely disfigured, the cord mutilated and stretched out.

“Do you remember this?” he asked, in that tone people always used with me – accusatory, and slightly amused.

I shook my head. I didn't remember anything after downing two bottles of wine – one white, one red – on an empty stomach, before any of the guests showed up. I didn't remember stealing a pair of large shoes from my hallway and stomping around the city, yelling at strangers, falling down in the snow. I didn't remember passing out in an elevator after riding it to the top floor. I didn't remember my guests mobilizing a search party, scouring the streets in party hats. My roommate's girlfriend, Julie, finally found me on the fourth floor of a neighbor's apartment building. She carried me back to the party where she lay me down on my roommate's bed. I didn't remember that either, or my girlfriend pounding the bed by my comatose head, shouting “I thought you had died!” and wailing like a character in a Spanish telenovela.

That's when I woke up, or so I was told. Then I stood up, took hold of my roommate's “Chinese” lantern, which had taken him hours to assemble, yelled “I'm Tar-

zan!” and swung myself off the bed and into a heap on the floor, and promptly fell back asleep.

All of this was recounted to me the next day by roommates and girlfriend and lingering overnight guests. The story, as my exploits often were, was loud and funny and colorful. But the underlying narrative was always the same: You got drunk; you ran away; you made a mess; you kissed somebody; you stole something; you put something on your head; you broke stuff; you made someone cry.

This eventually stopped when I quit drinking at 26. Since the drinking stopped, I find that I break things less often. I have never run away while out with friends: If I want to leave, I usually say goodbye first

and then walk – not sprint – home. I don’t steal, and rarely wear inanimate objects as hats – especially those intended for traffic safety. But whatever it is I do, I remember all of it. My narratives are my own to be retold.

But the past I can’t recover. All I have to remember my 21st birthday is a bizarre collage of moments, recollected and pinned together by other people–this and my roommate’s Ikea lamp. He gave it to me as a birthday gift, misshapen and deformed. But not broken, which struck me as somewhat of a miracle. **CT**

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*May Wilkerson is the senior editor of <http://substance.com> where this article was first published*

**The story, as my exploits often were, was loud and funny and colorful. But the underlying narrative was always the same**

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**BENDIB’S WORLD**

Khalil Bendib, OtherWords.org



# Welcome to Steinbeck Country

**Stacey Warde** has a drink with the locals in a bar in Southern California

**I told him that I'd served in the army at Ft. Lewis, Washington, with the second Ranger battalion just after the Vietnam War**

I met a longtime resident at the local bar recently who challenged me on just about everything from the moment I walked in.

"You live around here?"

Sure, I said. He introduced me to his wife of 40-plus years, a beauty, stately and queenly.

He told me she's from a long line of settlers who moved here in the 19th century. She smiled at me, like a queen.

"I've met you before," I told her. "I never forget a face." And I don't. I forget names but not faces.

"I don't think so," she responded. I grabbed a beer from the bar and sat down beside the couple. The old man gave me a smug up and down. He snorted. The wife sat beaming.

"You met her in here?" he challenged.

Sure, I said. I turned to the wife and told her that I'd seen her in here with another longtime resident that we both knew. The light in her face softened and she remembered coming but not meeting me.

She softened even more when I told her that my family had settled as homesteaders in Laguna Beach around the same time that her family settled here.

"Your family homesteaded?" the old man asked.

Sure, I said. There's a junior high school in Laguna named after my great-grandmother. I come from a family educators, I

told him.

He couldn't believe it. His wife warmed to me. He turned into a jerk.

"What's your family name?"

Thurston, I said. It was my great-grandfather's name. He came by wagon from Utah as a little boy. They were Mormons.

He looked down his nose. "You a Mormon?"

I laughed and he backed off a little.

"You own a house here?"

Well, no, I said.

"What do you do?"

I informed him that I work on a farm and he wanted to know what I did there and did I own a gun?

"You don't own a gun?"

Well, no, I don't feel the need for a gun. When I need a gun I'll get a gun, I told him. I was starting to get irked and so was his wife.

He told me he drove a squad car as a volunteer sheriff's deputy, liked to shoot his guns and was a member of the American Legion.

"Were you ever in the military?" he asked.

Sure, I said. He wanted to know what branch and I told him that I'd served in the army at Ft. Lewis, Washington, with the second Ranger battalion just after the Vietnam War. Jimmy Carter was president then, the only modern US commander-in-chief who

didn't send his troops into war, I told him.

He snorted. "You a liberal?"

I'm what you call a liberal libertarian. I tried not to let him pigeonhole me. He seemed perturbed, unable to finger me.

"You were a Ranger?" he said, almost sneering. He was so incredulous that he asked the question five times throughout the remainder of our conversation.

By now it was clear that he'd filled up on too much drink. His true colors came out and he wanted to know where were the blacks when there's work to do?

And, who's always first in line for hand-outs?

"You work with the blacks while you were in the army?"

Sure, I said. I knew where he was going with his drunken questions. I didn't want to get into another ignorant conversation about racial stereotypes. Sadly, he's not the only longtime resident in this area whose family connections go back generations, and who doesn't seem troubled speaking badly of blacks or Mexicans or liberals.

It's small town California here, I realize, Steinbeck country, where race relations and welcome committees for the poor once were made through goon squads and hired guns.

Apparently, that smallness of mind since Steinbeck's time hasn't gone away. It lin-

gers, and not just among the drunks but among ranchers, land and property owners too, and conservatives who balk at any liberal idea.

A farmer I know here once railed against entitlements for the poor and especially illegal immigrants who were ruining this country. I found out later that he'd received nearly \$150,000 in farm subsidies over the years.

I wonder sometimes how people like that can sleep at night.

"Get this man another beer!" the old man waved at the bartender.

No, that's OK, I said. I'll drink water.

"You're going to turn down a beer?" He looked at me as if I was a girly man.

No, I said, and thanked him for the beer. I learned from civil rights activist and Baptist preacher Will Campbell many years ago that it doesn't do any good to make enemies of your enemy.

I lifted my beer, a Guinness, and took a long pull.

"You were a Ranger?" **CT**

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*Stacey Warde works as a farmhand in the small central coastal California town of Cayucos, gateway to Big Sur and all points John Steinbeck country. His web site is <http://TheRogueVoice.com>*

**By now it was clear that he'd filled up on too much drink. His true colors came out and he wanted to know where were the blacks when there's work to do?**



## **WORDS and PICTURES**

**Read ColdType's photo essays at <http://coldtype.net/photo.html>**

# Towards total paralysis of an unequal society

Paul Buccheit shows how the free market is killing the middle class

**America's wealth grew by almost \$9 trillion in 2013. The richest 1% own 34 percent of the wealth, or about \$3 trillion of the 2013 gain**

The severing of US society into a plutocracy and a peasantry is so far along that statistics almost cease to have meaning. But the facts have to be told, to help explain the sickening sense that we're becoming a nation without a middle class, paralyzed by the inequality deniers and excuse makers who refuse to admit there's something wrong with their free-market capitalist system. The extremes are becoming almost intolerable:

**1. A Broken System of Compensation: The Combined Salaries of 350,000 Pre-School Teachers is Less Than That of Five Hedge Fund Managers**

Pre-school teaching may be our nation's most important job. Numerous studies show that with pre-school, all children achieve more and earn more through adulthood, with the most disadvantaged benefiting the most.

Hedge fund managers, at the other extreme, are likely to bet on mortgages to fail or on food prices to rise.

It's a frightening commentary on our value system that the total income of over a third of a million pre-school teachers is less than the combined income of just five big-money speculators.

**2. Diminishing Support for Society: The 1% Made More from their Investments in**

**2013 than the Entire Cost of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Safety Net**

America's wealth grew by almost \$9 trillion in 2013. The richest 1% own 34 percent of the wealth or about \$3 trillion of the 2013 gain.

That is far more than the budget for Social Security (\$860 billion), Medicare (\$524 billion), Medicaid (\$304 billion), and the entire safety net (\$286 billion for SNAP, WIC [Women, Infants, Children], Child Nutrition, Earned Income Tax Credit, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Housing).

**3. Capital's Long-Term Dominance of Labor: Since 1900, a Dollar of Labor has Grown to \$127, a Dollar of Stocks to \$1,247**

There's a good reason why the super-rich are cleaning up in the stock market. Thomas Piketty explains that, barring war or depression, the return on capital far outpaces economic growth, causing average workers without a stock portfolio to drop further and further behind. A look at stock market growth over 114 years (Page 60) confirms that a dollar of capital is now worth ten times more than a dollar of labor value.

In recent years, the gains from continued worker productivity have gone to the 10% of Americans who own almost 90 percent

of all stocks excluding pensions (which are fast disappearing).

#### **4. The Walmartization of America: A Few Super-Rich at the Top, then Everyone Else**

Just like at Walmart, a few big money-makers are ruling over a great majority of increasingly low-income workers. Low-wage jobs (\$7.69 to \$13.83 per hour) made up 1/5 of the jobs lost to the recession, but accounted for nearly 3/5 of the jobs regained during the recovery. And it's getting worse. Nine out of ten of the fastest-growing occupations are considered low-wage, generally not requiring a college degree.

The descent into Walmart-like employment is disproportionately hurting minorities. In 2013, an astonishing 55.9 percent of employed black recent college graduates were underemployed, working in an occupation that typically does not require a four-year college degree.

At the other end of the Walmartization, families in the top 5% made anywhere from \$300,000 to \$40 million – in just one year.

#### **5. Toward Third-World Status: Our Shrinking Middle Class Gets a Smaller Cut of National Wealth than Anywhere except China and India**

From a global perspective, we're becom-

ing the type of country that we used to dismiss as "third-world." Among developed and fast-rising nations only the middle classes of China and India get a smaller cut of their country's wealth than in the United States. Both of them are rapidly catching up to us.

#### **Antidote**

Thomas Piketty recommends a global wealth tax to help reverse inequality. But a financial transaction tax (also called speculation tax or Robin Hood tax) would be easier to implement, more efficiently regulated, and a source of massive revenues at little cost to financial traders.

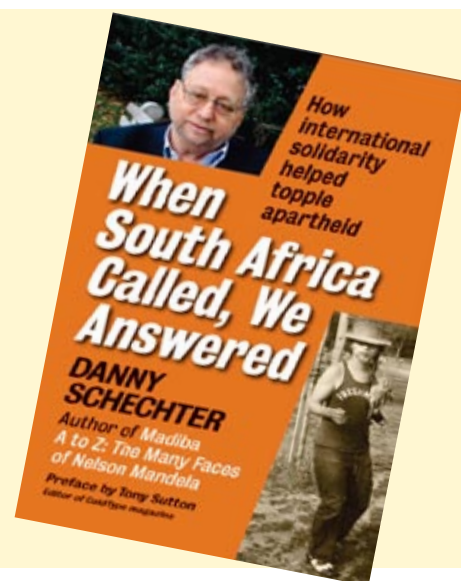
Whatever method we choose, progressive thinkers in the US and around the world will need to unite on a single cause, much as the Tea Party did in its crusade against government. We can't afford to disagree among ourselves as paralysis sets in. **CT**

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*Paul Buchheit is a college teacher, an active member of US Uncut Chicago, founder and developer of social justice and educational websites (UsAgainstGreed.org, PayUpNow.org, RappingHistory.org), and the editor and main author of "American Wars: Illusions and Realities" (Clarity Press). He can be reached at paul@UsAgainstGreed.org*

**The descent into Walmart-like employment is disproportionately hurting minorities**

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# Old Tbilisi: Last days of a decaying beauty



Above and main image: Residents walk through the decaying streets of Old Tbilisi.

Welcome to Old Tbilisi, the historic part of Georgia's capital city. It's beautiful, decaying, ancient and authentic. And it's being deliberately allowed to deteriorate so that it can be developed as another corporate-run tourist trap, full of cheap souvenirs and imported beer. Words and photographs by **Nate Robert**







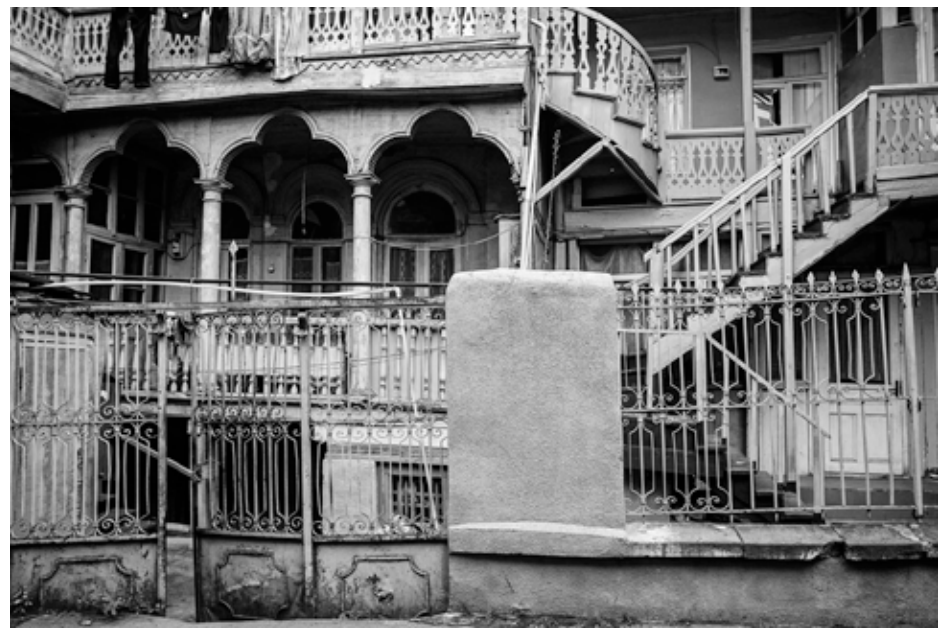


**Above: Mean streets. Many of the old buildings in Tbilisi are deteriorating and unsafe for entry**

**T**ourism is big business. Big enough to change culture itself. Where there is a buck to be made, it will be made as fast and as efficiently as possible. The architects of the capitalist world we live in are unstoppable, and cashed-up tourists are soft targets in this game. And so, Old Tbilisi, the historic quarter at the very heart of the modern capital city of Georgia, is being changed beyond recognition. Transforming from a

beautifully decaying authenticity, Old Tbilisi is becoming a shiny and hollow scintillation, filled with ever more opportunities to load up on cheap souvenirs and imported beer. Is this the birth of yet another tourist trap?

Old Tbilisi is a centrally located neighbourhood, containing an assorted mix of buildings from as early as the 5th century. Today, the bulk of the structures are an eclectic collection from the 1800s. Much like the nation of



Georgia, the area has a long and at times tumultuous history. As a result of earthquakes, invasions, and a geographical location within the cradle of various historical empires, Old Tbilisi is unique – a diverse centuries-old urban layering, holding extreme importance to the nation of Georgia. Worldwide, the priority of preserving the district has been recognised by many independent international bodies. However, over the last decade or so,

the future of the neighbourhood has been in grave danger of survival.

There are complex issues to consider in Old Tbilisi, not the least of which are the slum-like conditions that many residents live. Many of the structures are uninhabitable, and beyond repair. Despite the obvious bewitching appeal of the streets, Old Tbilisi could be holistically described as both enchanting, and dismal. It would appear wrong

**Above: Crumbling facades, intricate architecture, much of it beyond repair.**

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## IN THE FRAME



**Above: Will Old Tbilisi re-emerge with its authenticity intact or will it be another Disneyfied monument to capitalist excess**

to be so nostalgically driven as to state that nothing should change, but it is important to remember that these neighbourhoods are special, unique, and endangered.

Currently, older buildings are being replaced with architectural innovations in steel and glass. Disneyesque facadism is taking over, with Irish bars and 'authentic' Soviet-themed restaurants housed in restored buildings that maintain little of the original

charm. And no doubt, Old Tbilisi will be promoted by the local government as a tourism success story. A new and authentic neighbourhood fabric will be manufactured. Residents will be relocated. Corner stores will be replaced with souvenir shops. International franchises will move in. 'Boutique-Tbilisi hotels' will become an increasingly popular Google search keyword. Developers and entrepreneurs will be happy. The gentrified



grand scheme will be complete, and it will be on to the next target. Viva, capitalism.

I was told I needed to get to Georgia, before it changed. It's something you get told a lot in the travel world. But in the case of Tbilisi's old town, it's good advice. In 2014, only small pockets of the 'original' remain. These unprofitable enclaves will soon cease to exist, as the value of the land is unlocked. But, for now, the twisted back streets filled

with gracious decaying buildings are the number one tourist attraction in Tbilisi.

But, for how long?

**CT**

*Nate Robert is an Australian photojournalist who specialises in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been travelling the world full time, traveling through 54 countries. His web site is <http://yomadic.com>*

**Above: Old Tbilisi. Irresistible to tourists, for now.**

# Iraq: War and remembrance

Conn M. Hallinan looks back into history to find the causes of chaos in the Middle East

**In 1915, the imperial powers' major goal in the Middle East was to smother any expression of Arab nationalism and prevent any unified resistance to the designs of Paris and London**

*"So far as Syria is concerned, it is France and not Turkey that is the enemy" – T. E. Lawrence, February 1915*

It was a curious comment by the oddball, but unarguably brilliant, British agent and scholar, Thomas Edward Lawrence. The time was World War I, and England and France were locked in a death match with the Triple Alliance, of which Turkey was a prominent member. But it was none-the-less true, and no less now than then. In the Middle East, to paraphrase William Faulkner, history is not the past, it's the present.

In his 1915 letter, Lawrence was describing French machinations over Syria, but he could just as well have been commenting on England's designs in the region, what allied leaders in World War I came to call "The Great Loot" – the imperial vivisection of the Middle East.

As Iraq tumbles into a yet another civil war, it is important to remember how all this came about, and why adding yet more warfare to the current crisis will perpetuate exactly what the "Great Loot" set out to do: divide and conquer an entire region of the world.

There is a scorecard here, filled with names, but they are not just George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice – though the latter helped

mightily to fuel the latest explosion – but names most people have never heard of, like Sir Tatton Benvenuto Mark Sykes, 6th Baronet of Sledmore and Francois Georges-Picot. In 1915, these two mid-level diplomats created a secret plan to divvy up the Middle East. Almost a century later that imperial map not only defines the region and most of the players, but continues to spin out tragedy after tragedy, like some grotesque, historical Groundhog Day.

In 1915, the imperial powers' major goal in the Middle East was to smother any expression of Arab nationalism and prevent any unified resistance to the designs of Paris and London. France wanted Greater Syria, Britain control of the land bridges to India. The competition was so intense, that while hundreds of thousands of French and British troops were dying on the Western Front, both countries secret services were blackguarding one another from Samara to Medina, maneuvering for position for when the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was the compromise aimed at ending the interne-cine warfare. France would get Greater Syria (which it would divide to create Lebanon), plus zones of influence in northern Iraq. Britain would get the rest of Iraq, Jordan and establish the Palestine Mandate. All of this, however, had to be kept secret from the locals lest they find out that they were

replacing Turkish overlords with French and British colonialism.

The Arabs thought they were fighting for independence, but London and Paris had other designs. Instead of the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and access to the Mediterranean the Arabs had been promised, they would get the sun-blasted deserts of Arabia, and the rule of monarchs, who were easy to buy or bully.

However, to run such a vast enterprise through the use of direct force was beyond the power of even London and Paris. So both empires transplanted their strategies of using religion, sect, tribe and ethnicity, which had worked so well in Indochina, India, Ireland and Africa, to divide and conquer, adding to it a dash of chaos.

There are new players in the Middle East since Sykes and Picot drew up their agreement. Washington and Israel were latecomers, but eventually replaced both imperial powers as the major military forces in the region.

The enemy of the “Great Loot” was secular nationalism, and the US, France, and Britain have been trying to overthrow or isolate secular regimes in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Libya since they first appeared. The rationale for the hostility is that secular regimes were run by dictators – many were – but questionably no worse than the Wahabi fanatics in Saudi Arabia, or the monsters the Gulf monarchies have nurtured in Syria and northern Iraq.

Why is Syria a dictatorship and Saudi Arabia is not? This past February, the Kingdom passed a law equating dissent, the exposure of corruption, or demands for reform with “terrorism” including “offending the nation’s reputation or its position.”

The list of names on the ledger of those who nurture terrorism in the Middle East is long. Yes, it certainly includes the Bush administration, which smashed up one of the most developed countries in the region, dismantled the Iraqi state, and stoked the division between Sunni and Shiites. But also

the Clinton administration, whose brutal sanctions impoverished Iraq. And further back, during the First Gulf war, George H. Bush pounded southern Iraq with toxic depleted uranium, inflicting a massive cancer epidemic on places like Basra. It was Jimmy Carter and the CIA who backed Saddam Hussein’s rise to power, because the Ba’athist dictator was particularly efficient at torturing and killing trade unionists and members of the Iraqi left.

Not to mention members of the Gulf Cooperation Council – Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco and Jordan – who fund the Islamic insurgency in Syria. Some of those countries may decry the excesses of the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL), but it was they who nursed the pinion that impelled the steel.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also on that list. It is through Turkey’s borders that most fighters and supplies pass into Syria. So is the Obama administration, which farmed the insurgency out to Qatar and Saudi Arabia and is now horrified by the creatures that Wahabist feudal monarchies produced.

### **Paris remembers**

And don’t forget T.E. Lawrence’s French.

Paris has never forgiven the Syrians for tossing them out in 1961, nor for Damascus’s role in the 1975-91 Lebanese civil war that dethroned the French-favored Christian minority who had dominated the country since its formation in 1941.

The French have been enthusiastic supporters of the insurgency in the Syrian civil war and, along with the British, successfully lobbied the European Union to drop its ban on supplying the rebels with military hardware. Paris has also earned favor from Saudi Arabia by trying to derail efforts to find a solution to the conflict over Iran’s nuclear program. France is a member of the P5+1 – France, the US, Russia, Britain, China and Germany – involved in talks with Teheran.

**Why is Syria a dictatorship and Saudi Arabia is not?**

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## A THREAT OF WAR

**But for all the talk about a new Russian threat, NATO is not going to war over Ukraine, anymore than it did over Georgia in 2008**

The Gulf Council praised France's attempted sabotage, and Paris promptly landed a \$6 billion contract to upgrade Saudi Arabia's air defense system. It is negotiating to sell \$8 billion in fighter-bombers to the Emirates and almost \$10 billion worth to Qatar.

Saudi Arabia recently donated \$3 billion in aid to the Lebanese Army on the condition that it is used to buy French weapons and ammunition. It is a somewhat ironic gift, since the major foe of the Lebanese Army has been Saudi-supported Wahabists in the country's northern city of Tripoli.

Apparently French President Francois Hollande met with the foreign ministers of Jordan and Emirates last September to discuss a plan for Pakistan to train a 50,000-man Sunni army to overthrow the Syrian government and defeat al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist groups.

Members of that army may already be on their way to Europe, much as the mujahedeen from Afghanistan did a generation ago. According to western intelligence services, more than 3,000 European Union citizens have gone to fight in Syria, ten times the number who went to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. The gunman who killed four people May 24 at the Jewish Museum in Brussels was a veteran jihadist from the Syrian civil war.

For now, the Gulf monarchies see themselves as pulling the strings, but they have virtually no control over what they have wrought. Those Wahabi fanatics in Syria and northern Iraq may do what Osama bin-Laden did and target the corruption of the monarchies next.

The Gulf countries are rich but fragile. Youth unemployment in Saudi Arabia is be-

tween 30 and 40 percent, and half the country's 28 million are under 25 years of age. In other Gulf nations a tiny strata of super-rich rule over a huge and exploited foreign work force. When the monarchies begin to unravel, the current chaos will look like the Pax Romana.

### **Ally of imperialism**

But chaos has always been an ally of imperialism. If things fall apart and mayhem rules, governments and bankers in Paris, Zurich or New York have not been overly bothered. "The agenda has always been about imposing division and chaos on the Arab world," wrote long-time peace activist Tom Hayden. "In 1992, Bernard Lewis, a major Middle East expert, write that if the central power is sufficiently weakened, there is no real civil society to hold the polity together, no real sense of common identity...the state then disintegrates into a chaos of squabbling, feuding, fighting sects, tribes, regions and parties."

Military intervention by the US and its allies will accelerate the divisions in the Middle East. If the White House is serious about stemming the chaos, it should stop fueling the Syrian civil war, lean on the Gulf Monarchies to end their sectarian jihad against Shiites, pressure the Israelis to settle with the Palestinians, and end the campaign to isolate Iran.

And tell the French to butt out. **CT**

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*Conn M. Hallinan is a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus, and an independent journalist. He oversaw the journalism program at the University of California at Santa Cruz for 23 years. He blogs at <http://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com>*

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# \$5 billion for child abuse

**David Swanson** explains why society would be better served if young criminals were not sent to juvenile prison

**E**very juvenile prison must be immediately closed and all of its prisoners freed.

Oh. Oh. Oh! That sounds too drastic and simplistic and revolutionary.

We talk about being reformist or revolutionary as if it were a personality choice. Yet we also talk about being scientific, about being reality-based. Unlike reactionary climate-denying racist creationists we claim, most of us, to recognize such phenomena as climate change and to act on them (leave aside for the moment whether we're really acting appropriately on that one).

The science has long been crystal clear: juvenile prisons are worse than nothing. They increase rather than reducing crime. In our failure to abolish them, we – and not the children we torture – are the seemingly hopeless recidivists. We spend in the United States \$88,000 on average per year to lock a child up, compared to \$10,652 to educate a child. We have over 66,000 children locked up, 87% of them boys, and our police arrest 2 million juveniles each year.

A recent longitudinal study of 35,000 young offenders found that those who are locked up are over twice as likely to be locked up as adults compared to those who committed similar offenses and came from similar backgrounds but were given an alternative penalty or were just not arrested. In some states over 80% of those locked up as

kids will be convicted of later crimes. Studies have found that, more than family difficulties or gang membership or any other factor, the best predictor of criminality is whether someone has been imprisoned in what amount to factories for crime.

Well, but then, isn't the best predictor the initial commission of a crime that led to the initial incarceration? Actually, no. Eighty to 90% of teenagers in the United States commit illegal acts that could land them behind bars. Most of those put behind bars are put there for minor, nonviolent offenses. A third of all teenagers have even committed a somewhat serious crime, but most are never arrested, much less imprisoned. Almost all grow out of it.

If the minority of young people whose lives are ruined by prison were selected randomly, we might be a bit more likely to do something about it. Anyone who is a parent and finds out what happens in juvenile prisons must be highly unlikely to tolerate their continued existence unless convinced that only other people's children will be locked up. And in fact, it is highly disproportionately kids from poor neighborhoods and with darker skin who get locked up. A non-white child is far more likely to be arrested for the same act than a white child, far more likely to be charged and detained, far more likely to be sentenced to prison, and far more likely to be given a longer sentence.

**If the minority of young people whose lives are ruined by prison were selected randomly, we might be a bit more likely to do something about it**

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## LOCKED UP

**Children need love and companionship, safety and trust, respect and encouragement. They are even worse equipped to survive imprisonment than adults**

In fact, the idea that sub-human monsters, of whatever race, must be made to suffer and must be kept away from the rest of us, is the leading candidate as a major explanation of the continuation of juvenile imprisonment. If the goal were preventing crime, the prisons are worse than nothing. We've tried alternatives within the prison system, and found that reforms help but can only go so far. We've tried alternatives outside of the prison system, and found them far superior in results. We've even seen states shut down lots of juvenile prisons, primarily because of the financial cost, and seen the benefits in cost savings, in the lives of young people, and in reduced crime rates. But other states don't follow suit, and the states making the cuts need only see a rise in revenue to begin rebuilding the torture palaces.

The lessons are of course obtainable from abroad as well. The US locks kids up at a higher rate than any other nation. The next closest is South Africa, which locks up children at one-fifth the rate of the US. While the United States slowly, reluctantly, begins to stop throwing away packaging, it remains intent on throwing away people. For many who accept disproven ways of thinking, setting those 66,000 children free would make us less safe, just as cutting the military or disbanding it would endanger us all. These are powerful myths, but the evidence overwhelmingly disproves them. If our rural communities went back to farming food instead of prisoners, we would all be better off.

Much of what is routinely done to tens of thousands of youths in the United States would be illegal if done to prisoners of war. Torture in these houses of "correction" is the norm, not the exception. Isolation is the central abuse, combined with food deprivation, assault, rape, temperature extremes, deprivation of medical care, deprivation of education, sadistic exercises in humiliation, forced nudity, stress positions, piling on, attacks by dogs, and of course indefinite detention without criminal conviction. These practices have been transferred to international pris-

oners after becoming routine for US prisoners, including juveniles. And, while much of the abuse comes from other prisoners, most of it is committed by guards – or, excuse me, "correctional officers."

This disastrous system seems in dire need of reform, and the idea that it can be reformed is quite tempting. Children's bodies are dug up behind an institution in Florida. A judge in Pennsylvania gets caught taking bribes to send more kids to hell. A sexual assault scandal in Texas gets big enough to make the news. Kids hog-tied and left outside in freezing weather in Arkansas create some waves. But the scandals are everywhere. A review found only eight states where there was not conclusive evidence of system-wide mistreatment. And the scandals have been there for a century and a half. The reforms have been needed and been worked on since day one. They are not what's needed. Children need love and companionship, safety and trust, respect and encouragement. They are even worse equipped to survive imprisonment than adults. Locked up kids commit suicide at a far higher rate than others, nearly rivaling that of war veterans. These facts are continually reconfirmed by new science, but they and the failure of juvenile prisons have been known practically since the invention of juvenile prisons.

Solitary confinement greatly increases suicide rates, and yet is used as a punishment for the offense of being suicidal. This is not a nifty contradiction to be examined in a master's thesis. Rather, it is part of a process that fundamentally destroys our young people, a process which we pretend improves them.

Or do we? Polls suggest that we, the public, in fact understand the madness of government child-abuse currently engaged in to the tune of \$5 billion. The public prefers rehabilitation and treatment and is willing to pay higher taxes for those approaches, even though they actually cost less. We test this, prove it, and then don't act on it – or at least our government doesn't act on it. Oregon tried an experiment in Deschutes County,

giving the county the money it would have taken to lock kids up and requiring the county to pay the bill for any kid that did end up locked up. The county spent the money on prevention, neighborhood programs, community services. In a year, the number of children sent into the fortresses of misery and horror dropped by 72%.

Everything I've just claimed, and much more, is documented in a new book by Nell Bernstein called "Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison". This book includes numerous personal stories, countless examples, endless studies, and all the evidence anyone claiming to base policy on reality would need to become a "radical" when it comes to the malfunctioning of juvenile prisons. Bernstein looks at the worst and the best of the institutions. The best remains far from good enough. The best remains worse than nothing at all. Improving the mass abuse of children is not pragmatic; it's immoral. It's like being in favor of the war on Libya because the war on Iraq was worse; doing so requires averting one's eyes from the state Libya is in.

"Burning Down the House" should be

taught in our schools. Maybe free young people would find the power to speak up on behalf of their imprisoned fellows, if they knew. Maybe parents, if sufficiently intent on discarding both sadism and racism, would act if they heard it from their children.

There is a hurdle to be overcome, however, higher than the false belief that injustice only happens to those who deserve it, or the corruption of our misrepresentative government by profiteers, or the cooption of the corporate media by the government. The hurdle is this: everything that's wrong with prisons for children is also wrong with prisons for adults. If we stop thinking about imprisoned children the way that we must think in order to allow their imprisonment, we'll be in danger of ceasing to think about imprisoned adults the way we must to allow their imprisonment. Are we willing to risk that danger? I certainly hope so. **CT**

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*David Swanson's wants you to declare peace at <http://WorldBeyondWar.org> His new book is *War No More: The Case for Abolition*. He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org>*

**Bernstein looks at the worst and the best of the institutions. The best remains far from good enough. The best remains worse than nothing at all**

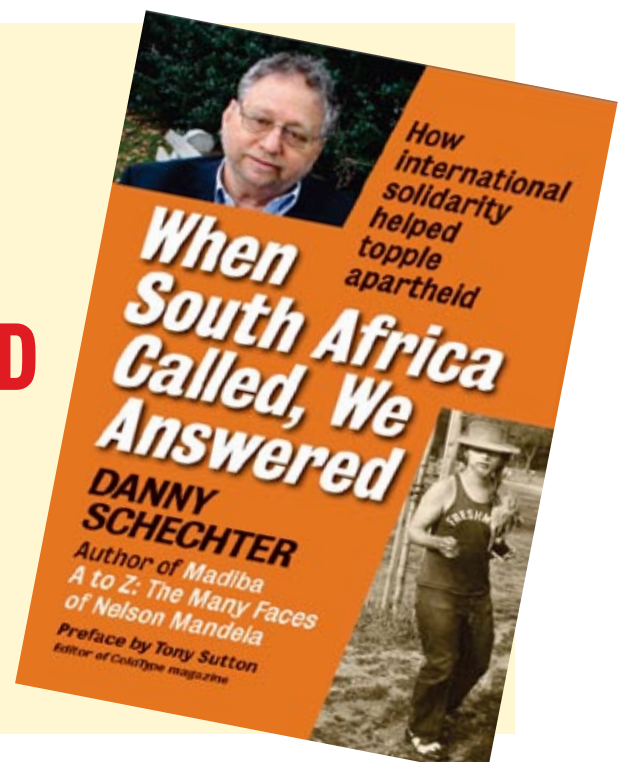
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# In the footsteps of St Meryl

Trevor Grundy visits a tiny island that has been subverted by Hollywood

**A behind-doors battle between those wanting to preserve the island's strong Christian culture and those who wanted to squeeze every dollar and Euro they could out of *Mama Mia* fans was underway**

Author Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) asked us to understand that Greeks have a special place in their hearts for the unusual – especially when the bizarre appears in human form.

In his classic book “The Greek Islands” (Faber and Faber, London 1978) the India-born poet and author of “The Alexandria Quartet” writes: “Greece has retained a bit of the reverence and superstition which used to be attached to the idea of madness, treating it as a privileged state. This reverence probably dates back to ancient times, when the sooth-sayer or sage was not quite the best balanced member of the community – he saw visions, he heard voices. Harmless lunatics in Greece are regarded today as lucky people to have around and there is always plenty of work for such mascots.”

So watch out next time you're in Greece and you come you come across an old hag who looks like she's just swallowed a bottle of ouzo and wants to mug you. You might have bumped into Aphrodite in disguise.

Well, there were quite a few of those “harmless lunatics” around in this saxophone-shaped island in September 2007 when Meryl Streep and a cast of international celebrities jumped fully-clothed out of the head of Hollywood into the sapphire blue Aegean Sea in a joyful scene during the making of one of the most successful films in Hollywood history – *Mama Mia*.

Is there anyone left who doesn't know the story of how teenage bride Sophie (played by Amanda Seyfried) found the 1970 diary of her mother Donna (Meryl Streep) and learned that she might be the daughter of one of the three lovers her mother had that year? And how that middle aged trinity all get invited to the young girl's planned wedding on a fairytale Greek island (Skopelos by another name).

In 2008, travel writers in Britain predicted that this Hollywood blockbuster might signal the death of Skopelos, and that tens of thousands of *Mama Mia* fans would turn the island's religious and cultural life upside down as Hollywood and commercialism had done so many times before, not only in Greece but also throughout Africa and the Far East.

The whistle blew. A behind-doors battle between those wanting to preserve the island's strong Christian culture and those who wanted to squeeze every dollar and Euro they could out of *Mama Mia* fans was underway.

Jane Fryer of the *Daily Mail* sounded the first note of warning after the film's release in 2008, saying – “It's clear that life will never be quite the same again for the 4,969 Skopelites.”

She wrote that hotels had been booked up months in advance, the bars and restaurants were buzzing and every couple of hours an enormous ferry disgorged another batch of Meryl Streep and *Mama Mia* fans on to



Posters advertise the charms of Skopelos – and the joys of Mama Mia.

(Photos: Trevor Grundy)



the quayside in Skopelos town, often in full song. House prices soared. So did everything else. The cash registers sang along with songs from the Swedish pop group Abba.

‘It was a bit disappointing at first,’ said Diana Staveley, 40 when she first set foot on the island six years ago. ‘In the film, they arrived at a pretty bay in a tiny boat, but we came on a giant ferry into the port and there were

people everywhere.’

She wanted what travel agents and before them pilgrimage organisers call the ultimate authentic experience also known as Being There.

Said one experienced traveller, an architect from Athens – ‘For hundreds of years, pilgrims travelled around Europe and the Middle East to walk in the footsteps of St Paul or St Peter, St John the Baptist or the Virgin Mary and touch Holy Relics. Now they want to walk in the steps of ‘Saint’ Meryl. Someone told me that the flip flops of Pierce Brosnan (one of Streep’s film lovers) are nailed to a wall in a travel agency. There are fairy lights around them. Size seven. Tourists stand next to them and do ‘Selfies.’ They touch them as if some special power is going to come out of them . . . like the woman in the Bible who touched the hem of Jesus.’

**House prices soared. So did everything else. The cash registers sang along with songs from the Swedish pop group Abba**

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## STRANGE TRIP

**One couple – anxious to marry where Meryl and one of her lovers married at the end of the film – asked if they could immediately convert and become members of the Greek Orthodox community**

Mama Mia fans arrived not only to touch and sniff at Brosnan's beach shoes but also to get married or renew old wedding vows at the island's most picturesque Greek Orthodox chapel which stands high on a tall rock outcrop on the north-western side of the island, a place called Agios Ioannis Kastri (The chapel of St John the Baptist)

Sadly, most of them found out that you can't just walk into a Greek Orthodox Church and sign on as if it was a marriage bureau in Florida or Las Vegas.

So, some decided to tie the knot in the local town hall, on one of the beaches or on a yacht. Then they plunged into the sea, watched by the shaking heads of locals, some hired as extras in the blockbuster film.

One couple – anxious to marry where Meryl and one of her lovers married at the end of the film – asked if they could immediately convert and become members of the Greek Orthodox community. They were advised by a priest to go away and think about it.

Last month, my wife and I panted our way up the 202 steps which led to Agios Ioannis. It was around 10 am and the sun was still low in a bright blue sky.

When we got to the top we stood and watched a group of Norwegian journalists posing in front of the church which they all called the Mama Mia Church.

Just before the cameras clicked, several burst into song – *Mama Mia/ Here I go again* and later on – *Money, Money, Money ? It's a rich man's world.*

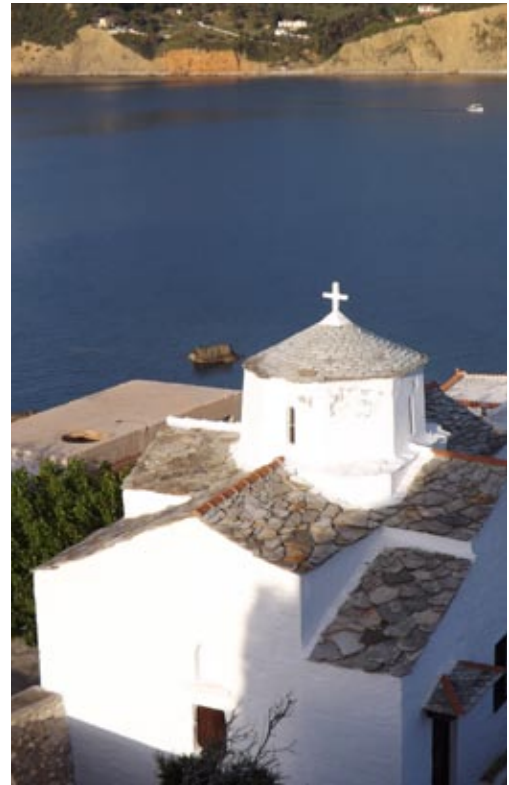
Toes tapped, hips swayed.

A couple from an Oslo magazine posed in the doorway of the tiny chapel and kissed.

The girl said to me: "Did you know that Meryl ran up those steps all in one go – she didn't stop for a single breath and you're panting!"

"But that's what saints do," I wanted to say but didn't.

The young Greek guide from one of the island's leading families, Evangelis Drossou, said to my wife: "It's partly our fault because some of us have advertised this as the Mama



**Skopelos: Churches, culture, architecture, ancient history – and Mama Mia.** (Photo: Trevor Grundy)

Mia Church. But we don't like this at all. It's a Christian church, not a film set. There must be respect for our religion and our way of life."

During a tour of the town, his father, George, who runs a local travel firm, underlined the importance of preserving the island's way of life.

He said the traditionalists had won, that his beloved islanders had not weakened in the face of crass commercialism and had not collectively genuflected before the dangling US dollar and enticing Euro.

"Skopelos is about more than Mamma Mia! We don't want our island to change because of a film. We have culture, architecture, ancient history and pride. A film comes and goes, but we want our island to remain the same," he told me in a loud voice so everyone in the tour group could hear and understand.

He introduced us to weavers, potters, ship-builders, local musicians and artists.

We visited some of the island's 250 or more churches and monasteries.

In June, Rembetika – the music played by and listened to by members of the under-world in Pireaus and Thessaloniki after the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece in 1923 – is heard in local bars and tavernas.

And I'm amazed to say that after a couple of weeks in Skopelos I didn't hear a single Abba song, not even in neighbouring Skiathos.

Because of the dire economic situation, many young Greeks have left the island to live and work in the country's two main cities Athens and Thessaloniki.

But they come home for Easter and Christmas and other great religious and cultural festivals that have made Skopelos one of the most actively Christian islands in Greece.

Certainly house and flat prices have shot up since 2008. But Alberto, a waiter from Albania, told me that when the tourist season ended in the first week of October you could rent a decent house, fully furnished, for little more than Euros 300 a month. "What do you all do in winter," I asked him. "Pray for summer," he said.

Marina and Nikos in Glossa, Skopelos's second town which is no larger than a small English village, are owners of a small taverna in the north-eastern side of the island. Marina said: "Maybe we're lucky we don't have an airport. We're a little cut off. Perhaps that has saved us from the negative side of tourism."

Before I left to return to godless Britain, I sought an interview with a priest. He said he would not be named, yet alone photographed. "It's their rule," I was told by a local jeweller, Evi Asteriadi, who'd arranged the meeting.

Father X told me that tourists were welcome and that the church was grateful they gave jobs to the islanders. But they had to respect local traditions and the local religion – Christianity founded in Skopelos in the 4th Century AD.

He said that Mama Mia fever had now subsided but that if young or old people wanted to marry at the town hall in Skopelos and remember Meryl Streep by singing Abba songs, then that was up to them.

I bit the bullet having that day seen two young Swedish women walking along the beach that morning – hand in hand. And a local historian, Stelios, had told me that before the last day in Lent, islanders celebrated the Vlaki Wedding. The groom is a woman dressed as a man and the bride is a man dressed as a woman. Everyone else wears national costume or carnival dress, many of them cross-dressing, so . . .

I asked him if he foresaw the day when gay men and women could marry in Greek Orthodox churches.

He looked at me as if I'd landed from another planet – as if I was one of Lawrence Durrell's harmless idiots.

"Never," he said.

"Not even a blessing for civil partnerships?"

He looked at his watch, stood up, shook his head and extended his hand in friendship.

"Never," he said, as the haunting music from Zorba the Greek followed him down the road back to his house and a Greek wife and to three young sons who probably think Mama Mia is a hymn to the Virgin Mary. **CT**

*Trevor Grundy is a British journalist and author of the books "Memoir of a Fascist Childhood" and "Farmer at War."*

**Alberto, a waiter from Albania, told me that when the tourist season ended in the first week of October you could rent a decent house, fully furnished, for little more than Euros 300 a month**

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# When the world was watching Mississippi

**Marlene Martin** tells the story of Freedom Summer 50 years ago – a high point of the US civil rights movement

**Why make the call for mostly white students from Ivy League schools to come to Mississippi? The answer was simple: To get the US public to pay attention**

**T**hey came – filled with hope, determination and a truckload of idealism – to be a part of ridding the US of the scourge of racism. “Surely, no challenge looms larger than eradicating racial discrimination in this country,” one wrote on the application form, “I want to do my part. There is a moral wave building among today’s youth, and I intend to catch it!”

In the summer of 1964, 1,000 Northern students – mostly white and from affluent backgrounds – answered the call put out by civil rights organizations for volunteers to take part in a summer-long Freedom Project in Mississippi.

It was a bold strategy that aimed to build on years of organizing by Southern activists and organizations of the civil rights movement.

The Freedom Project would concentrate on three specific areas: registering Blacks to vote; setting up Freedom Schools to teach Black students lessons in math, English and science, but also Black history and grassroots organizing; and launching the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as a direct challenge to the racist state Democratic Party.

The main groups leading Freedom Summer were the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), working

under the umbrella Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference endorsed the project, but didn’t participate. The NAACP declined to endorse, stating, “We’re sitting this one out.”

Why make the call for mostly white students from Ivy League schools to come to Mississippi? The answer was simple: To get the US public to pay attention. According to CORE member Dave Dennis, a leader of COFO:

“We knew that if we had brought a thousand Blacks, the country would have watched them slaughtered without doing anything about it. Bring a thousand whites, and the country is going to react to that... We made sure we had the children – sons and daughters – of some of the very powerful people in this country.”

There was disagreement within SNCC about the Freedom Project – some veterans feared the white volunteers would take over. Ella Baker, a veteran of the movement and SNCC’s adviser from its founding, carried the debate with her argument:

“One of the reasons we’re going into Mississippi is that the rest of the United States has never felt much responsibility for what happens in the Deep South. If we can simply let the concept that the rest of the nation bears responsibility for what





**Standing up for freedom: Young black marcher is threatened by club-wielding policeman.**

The wave of lunch counter sit-ins was now four years in the past, the March on Washington had brought 200,000 people to the nation's capital the year before, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham had almost set off a Black general strike across the South

happens in Mississippi sink in, then we will have accomplished something.”

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The main impetus for Freedom Summer came from SNCC – the radical, youth-led grassroots organization born out of the lunch-counter sit-in movement that began in Greensboro, N.C. in February 1960 and spread across the South. SNCC went on to participate in the Freedom Rides, where Black and white activists traveled on buses into the South in order to desegregate them.

SNCC was known for its fearless and confrontational approach to activism. As the people's historian Howard Zinn, who was living and teaching in the South as SNCC was formed, wrote:

“To be with them, walking a picket line in the rain in Hattiesburg, Mississippi...to see them jabbed by electric prod poles and flung into paddy wagons in Selma, Alabama, or link arms and sing at the close of a church meeting in the Delta – is to feel the presence of greatness.?”

SNCC was equally committed to working alongside impoverished and disenfranchised Black Southerners, rather than acting on their behalf. This was a hallmark of the group, and it shaped the concept of Freedom Summer and ran through every activity.

1964 was a year of growing racial tension. The civil rights movement had first emerged almost a decade before with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which won desegregation of city buses after a year of struggle. The wave of lunch counter sit-ins was now four years in the past, the March on Washington had brought 200,000 people to the nation's capital the year before, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham had almost set off a Black general strike across the South.

Yet the civil rights movement's goal of winning federal civil rights legislation still seemed distant – the Civil Rights Act was stalled after a Senate filibuster by the Dixiecrats.

The Mississippi Summer Project was in-

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## FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

**SNCC veterans were brutally honest about what the volunteers should expect. The Klan had done its own organizing in preparation for the volunteers, holding late-night meetings and buying more guns and ammunition**

tended to use direct action to increase the pressure still more on national politics.

For years, Blacks in Mississippi who tried to register to vote ran up against a wall of white supremacy – they were ignored, lied to, beaten and terrorized. Fannie Lou Hamer, the middle-aged Black woman who came to prominence during Freedom Summer as the voice of the MFDP – had tried to register twice before, and failed. For daring to try, she was beaten and fired from her plantation job where she had worked for 18 years.

“There is no state with a record which approached that of Mississippi in inhumanity, murder, brutality and racial hatred,” said Roy Wilkerson of the NAACP. “It is absolutely the bottom of the list.”

Mississippi had the lowest number of Blacks registered to vote of any other Southern state. In some counties where African Americans were the majority, not a single Black was registered at all. This was the state with the largest Klan membership – 91,000 and growing – and the largest number of lynchings.

SNCC and the other civil rights organizations were determined to focus their efforts here because, as one organizer said, “If we break through here, it breaks the dam on segregation.”

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The work that went into organizing the Mississippi Summer Project was intense.

Every applicant had to be interviewed. They were asked outright if they would have any problem working under Black leadership, and told they weren’t there to overwhelm local leaders. Applicants who made the cut were asked to come up with \$500 in case they needed to be bonded out of jail.

Before heading to Mississippi, the students spent a week in training at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Here, SNCC veterans were brutally honest about what the volunteers should expect. The Klan had done its own organizing in

preparation for the volunteers, holding late-night meetings and buying more guns and ammunition.

As the second one-week orientation was beginning, news arrived that three civil rights workers – CORE members James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner – had disappeared on their way back to COFO headquarters in Meridian, Miss., after investigating the bombing of a Black church in Longdale.

Back in Ohio, SNCC leader and COFO co-director Bob Moses spoke to the volunteers:

“There may be more deaths. I justify myself because I’m taking risks myself. And I’m not asking people to do things I’m not willing to do. And the other thing is, people were being killed already, the Negroes of Mississippi...Herbert Lee killed, Louis Allen killed, five others killed this year.

“In some way, you have to come to grips with that – know what it means...If you are going to do anything about it, other people are going to be killed. No privileged group in history has ever given up anything, without some kind of blood sacrifice.”

The fate of the missing civil rights workers would hang over the summer – their bodies were finally discovered in August. Each had been shot and buried in an earthen dam – the one Black among them, James Chaney, had been singled out for a savage beating before he was killed.

Rita Schwerner, Michael’s wife, told the press that the only reason this tragedy got any media attention at all was because it involved the death of two white people. She was right – during the search for the missing civil rights workers, authorities discovered the remains of eight Black Mississippians, several of them civil rights activists, whose disappearances weren’t known outside of their communities.

But the murders didn’t have the effect the Klan had hoped. Overwhelmingly, the volunteers redoubled their commitment

to the Mississippi Summer Project. The names of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner became internationally known as victims of racist barbarism in the “world’s greatest democracy.”

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Given the hostility and violence, one organizing challenge was to find Mississippi homes for the volunteers to stay in. Black families understood that by agreeing to be hosts for the civil rights workers, they were placing a target on their backs.

Yet many did so proudly. “We were glad to see them,” one woman said. “[H]ere were young people from big cities and places, and we found out they were just like anyone else.” Another said, “They were very kind. They were different from white Southerners. They treated us with respect and dignity.”

Any Black who worked with SNCC and the volunteers knew they would be accused of bringing “outside agitators” into their midst. Robert Miles, a civil rights pioneer himself, had an answer to that objection when he spoke at a church meeting in Batesville:

“White folks are gonna tell you they’re agitators. You know what an agitator is? An agitator is the piece in the center of a washing machine that spins around to get the dirt out. Well, that’s what these people are here for. They’re here to get the dirt out.”

The volunteers were assigned to different areas, alongside experienced activists. Those working on voter registration went to towns and rural areas, going door to door and field to field, talking with people on their porches about how to register and assisting those who were willing to attempt it.

Police and Klan members would follow the civil rights workers around, shotguns held in plain sight. If the volunteers felt the threat of violence, it was much worse for Black residents, who understood that even trying to register could cost them their job, their home and possibly their life.

This made the voter registration work slow and difficult. As Bruce Watson recounted in his history of Freedom Summer, “Canvassing is like conversation, volunteers are learning – something of an art. They know how to converse, but how do you converse with someone too terrified to say, ‘No,’ too tired to say much else?”

By the end of the summer, some 17,000 Blacks had attempted to register – but only 1,600 were allowed to do so by state officials. These numbers were fewer than organizers had hoped for, but still an accomplishment considering the real terrorism people faced when they made a stand in 1964 Mississippi.

Other volunteers were teachers in the Freedom Schools. The goal had been to attract 1,000 students, but organizers were overwhelmed when more than 3,000 showed up.

These schools were to be different from regular schools in every way. They were voluntary – there were no grades, no testing, no pass or fail. Students were taught core subjects like math and English, but they also learned about Black history and organizing. The teaching format – later taken up in the teach-ins of the antiwar movement – was to encourage participation by asking students questions and allowing them to ask questions back. As the SNCC manual for the volunteers explained:

“You will be teaching young people who have lived in Mississippi all their lives. That means that they have been deprived of a decent education from first grade all through high school. It means that they have been denied free expression and free thought. Most of all, it means that they have been denied the right to question. The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to help them begin to question.”

The manual went on to explain that while students would carry the “scars of the system,” they would also have a “knowledge beyond their years. This knowledge is the knowledge of how to survive in a soci-

**Police and Klan members would follow the civil rights workers around, shotguns held in plain sight. If the volunteers felt the threat of violence, it was much worse for Black residents**

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## FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

**The civil rights movement not only inspired other social and political struggles to come – it directly politicized and trained their leaders**

ety that is out to destroy you.”

The day for Freedom School teachers typically started at 7 a.m., with a break for lunch and dinner, then classes for adults in the evening. But the volunteers would recall this as one of the most important things they ever did. One student wrote in a letter to her parents:

“The atmosphere in class is unbelievable. It is what every teacher dreams about – real, honest enthusiasm and desire to learn anything and everything...They drain me of everything that I have to offer, so that I go home at night completely exhausted, but very happy.”

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The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was launched during the Summer Project as a challenge to the racist system. Blacks who weren't allowed to register or vote were encouraged to sign up with the MFDP – some 80,000 people did so.

The party held caucuses, county assemblies and a statewide convention, where 68 people were chosen as delegates to go the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, N.J., where they challenged the all-white delegation for the state's seats at the convention.

The drama of the MFDP's appearance at the convention is a story in its own right. President Lyndon Johnson and the northern wing of the Democrats paid lip service to supporting civil rights, but they weren't prepared to abandon the Dixiecrat wing of the party that dominated in the South.

Ultimately, the MFDP was offered a rotten compromise: two seats, but without voting rights, while the all-white delegation remained intact. Stunned, the MFDP turned down the offer and walked out of the convention.

The national Democratic Party's betrayal of the MFDP was a turning point for many veteran activists who were already becom-

ing more and more radicalized. As SNCC organizer Cleveland Sellers recalled:

“Never again were we lulled into believing that our task was exposing injustices so that the “good” people of America could eliminate them. We left Atlantic City with the knowledge that our movement had turned into something else. After Atlantic City, our struggle was not for civil rights, but for liberation.”

Freedom Summer also transformed the volunteers brought by SNCC to Mississippi to get the country to pay attention. The civil rights movement not only inspired other social and political struggles to come – it directly politicized and trained their leaders.

Mario Savio had traveled to Mississippi as a civil rights volunteer in the summer of 1964. A few months later, he put the lessons he learned to use in the Free Speech Movement that erupted in Berkeley, Calif. – a forerunner of the movements for justice and democracy that would grip college campuses later in the 1960s.

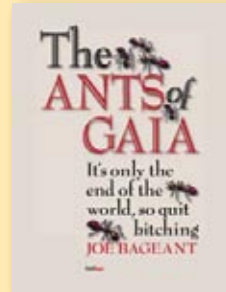
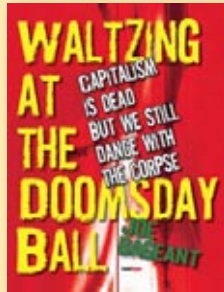
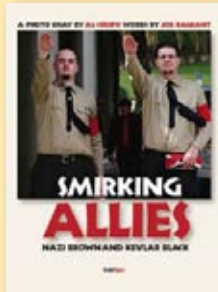
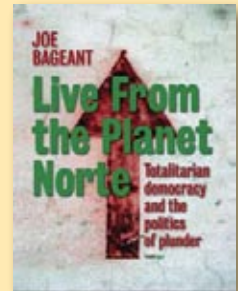
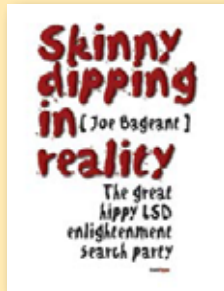
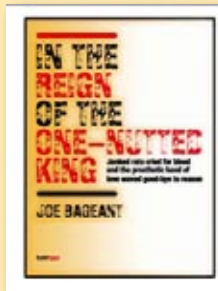
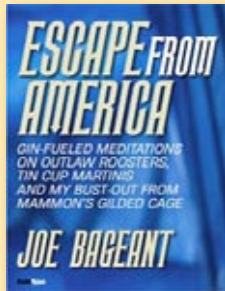
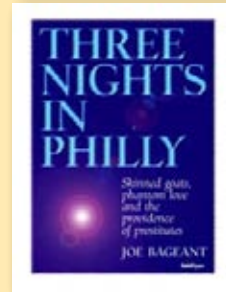
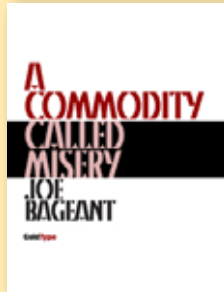
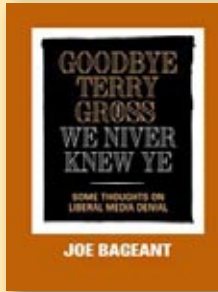
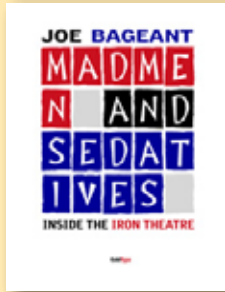
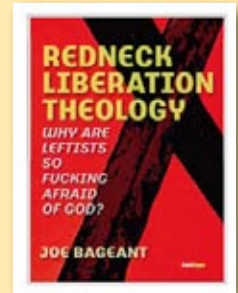
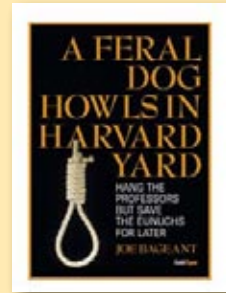
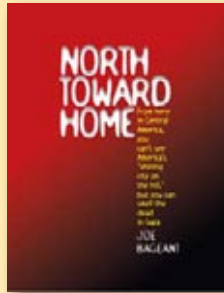
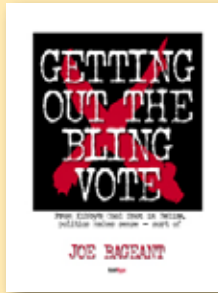
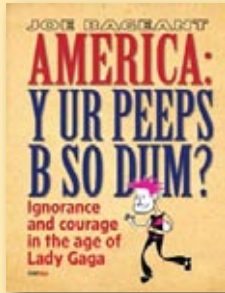
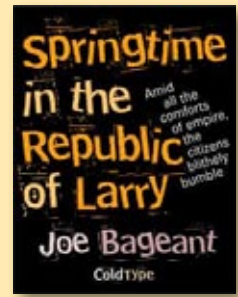
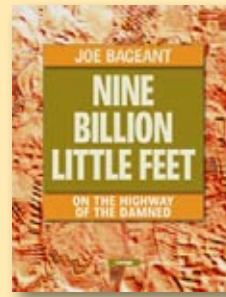
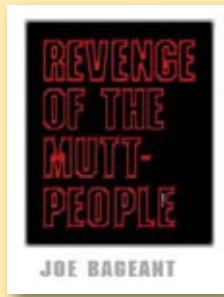
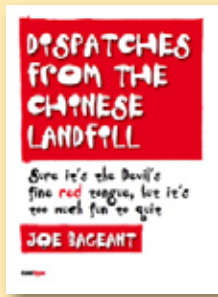
Years later, he explained the impact Freedom Summer had on him, referring to one particular encounter with a Black man trying to register to vote:

“Until then, I was sort of an observer in a certain way...but here was somebody who, because of something I had done, was maybe risking his family and facing that kind of humiliation. [The registrar] made him eat shit before finally giving him that form. He was afraid, but he stood his ground.

That man's courage changed my life. You know, we used to sing about how we'll never turn back, ain't gonna turn around. [Freedom Summer] was the point at which it became real for me. That is, I'd chosen sides for the rest of my life.” **CT**

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*This essay was first published by Socialist Worker at <http://socialistworker.org>*



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# Marikana, resolve and resistance in South Africa

**Richard Pithouse** on the legacy of a day that changed the life and language of South Africa

**It will take many years, perhaps a generation, before the full consequences of all that has happened are evident. But it is already clear that the standing of the ANC, as well as the dynamics animating electoral politics and trade unions will not be the same again**

The massacre of striking gold miners on 16 August 2012, and the events that followed it, including the grinding strike that has just been concluded, have inscribed Marikana into South Africa's history. The name Marikana and the date 16 August have been carved into our history with the same brutality, blood and resolve that have shaped so many of the events that have brought us to where we are.

Around the world both massacres and long and bitter strikes have often been decisive turning points in societies. From Algeria to India and Zimbabwe the first massacre after independence from colonialism has often come to mark the point at which collective innocence about the claims of parties that were once national liberation movements to incarnate the national interest has begun to unravel. In many cases it has also begun a turn from above and, importantly, sometimes also from below, away from democratic modes of politics.

The defeat of the miners' strike that shook Britain thirty years ago broke the power of organised labour and enabled the undoing of the social democratic consensus forged after the Second World War.

At the conclusion of the strike on our platinum mines the bosses announced that there were no winners in the great strike of our generation. Even via the mediation of a



Download Alon Skuy's photo essay of the massacre at Marikana platinum mine in South Africa at <http://coldtype.net/photo.html>

television screen it was clear that at Marikana there was a very different view among the workers and their families.

In striking contrast to Gwede Mantashe's colonial fantasy about white agency animating African struggles many of the workers, and their families, spoke of their pride at having successfully taken on some of the most powerful forces in our society. "We will not", one worker insisted, "be their dogs".

The political imagination at work in the strike was never contained to the mines. As more sophisticated academic work has shown its repertoire of political action stretched back to the Mpondo Revolts in 1960.

Its concerns reached into the eNkanini shack settlement in Marikana as well as the villages in the hills of the Eastern Cape, both forms of space that remain zones of exclu-

sion and subordination in the new order.

It will take many years, perhaps a generation, before the full consequences of all that has happened are evident. But it is already clear that the standing of the ANC, as well as the dynamics animating electoral politics and trade unions will not be the same again.

Given the way in which the rebellion at Marikana ignited the farm workers' strike in the Western Cape, and was seized on to name new land occupations in cities and towns around the country, it is also clear that it made a profound impact on popular political consciousness.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s shack settlements were often given names like 'Joe Slovo', 'Chris Hani' or 'Lusaka'. This placed the land occupation, and its protagonists, in a national drama. Even when times were tough there was a clear, and sometimes millennial, sense that this drama was heading towards some sort of collective redemption. As it has become clear that the nation is not going to be for all, and that capitalism will not enable wealth to trickle down, names like 'Nomzamo', or 'eNkanini', names that speak to a certain striving and resilience, became more common.

After the massacre in 2012 'Marikana', a name that speaks to a new kind of collective imagination, but one that is at a clear distance from elite nationalism, has become common. In Durban the Marikana Land Occupation in Cato Crest has two sections – one named for Nkululeko Gwala and the other for Nqobile Nzuzi, both murdered in the struggle to hold this land.

This marks a political imagination that is saturated with an awareness of death. It carries a strong sense of resolve but it does not carry a sense that there will, in time, necessarily be some sort of collective redemption.

In shack settlements across the city the old call and response slogan 'Amandla!' and then 'Awethu!' is now often rendered as 'Amandla!' and then 'Awethu Ngenkani!'. It is inkani, a stubborn and forceful determination, to which people increasingly look as

the means to take what place they can in the world.

Political discussions that used to centre on how to access the relevant officials, or a lawyer, or to develop a better understanding of policy, now often focus primarily on how to acquire this resolve. Although this is inevitably a collective discussion it is also often deeply personal.

People find their resilience in different ways. For some the spiritual realm is important, for others it is family and for most a sense of community, sometimes inherited, but often forged in struggle. Women are often central to this politics and it is not unusual for women to tell the story of how they acquired their resolve in a manner that centres on surviving traumatic experiences in the family.

In 2014 it is very difficult to believe that in time everyone will have a place in the nation. It is equally difficult to believe that in time everyone will have any kind of job let alone the kind of job that enables the sort of political leverage that can bend the arc of time towards justice.

But "Marikana" is now the name of land occupations around the country, as well as a workers' rebellion, a massacre and an extraordinary strike. And from the platinum belt around Rustenburg to the shacklands of Durban and beyond people are increasingly putting their primary political investment in their own resilience.

New forces are stirring. Elite nationalism is beginning to lose its hold on an increasingly militant citizenry. Many people are looking for new organisations to advance their interests. Relations to the legal system and electoral politics are increasingly instrumental. None of us knows where this will end. But it is clear that there will be no return to business as usual at the end of this strike. The deal that carried us through the last twenty years is up. **CT**

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*Richard Pithouse teaches politics at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.*

**Political discussions that used to centre on how to access the relevant officials, or a lawyer, or to develop a better understanding of policy, now often focus primarily on how to acquire this resolve**

# What California's wildfires should tell us

Ecologist and author **Mike Davis** tells **Alan Maass** about the insanity that allows McMansions to be built in areas prone to fire

**The wildfires in Southern California are some of the most destructive in the state's history – particularly the ones in San Diego County in the last decade, where several thousand homes were destroyed. But the message being sent is to keep building – because we can beat fire**

**W**hen wildfires struck again in drought-plagued Southern California in mid-May, the media were filled with analysis about their causes and reports about the government's massive response. But other disasters – this year's wildfires in West Texas, for instance, which have been many times more destructive – get a fraction of the attention.

Mike Davis, author of "Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster", and "In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire", spoke to Alan Maass about the class dynamics behind the different faces of disaster response – and the mad priorities of a free-market system that does exactly the wrong thing for working people and the environment.

**MAASS: What Should we know about the wildfires that grabbed the media's attention in mid-May?**

**DAVIS:** as disasters become more frequent across the country, it's clear that the ones that affect celebrities and wealthier people take the foreground, and push the others into the margins.

But the situation with the most recent Southern California fires was extraordinary – you had 23 Marine helicopters, dozens of other firefighting aircraft, fire departments

from all over the state, federal fire agencies. The message being sent to the people who live in their McMansions in the midst of the chaparral or the housing developments recently inserted into the back country is: Don't worry, you can count on us.

The wildfires in Southern California are some of the most destructive in the state's history – particularly the ones in San Diego County in the last decade, where several thousand homes were destroyed. But the message being sent is to keep building – because we can beat fire.

This is not only paradoxical, it verges on insanity. If I were to take you for a drive, for instance, to many of the areas that burned down in 2003 and 2007, not only would you see every structure rebuilt, but usually rebuilt larger in scale. And there are hundreds of additional new homes – usually super-sized McMansions, sitting on mountaintops and right in the heart of the thick brush.

But the developers and owners of these homes have convinced themselves that they deserve every bit of fire protection available. They've become intoxicated with the belief that if you clear enough brush around the site, the homes are invincible.

This illustrates two things. First, the extravagant resources that wealthier homeowners in these areas expect to rely on – without paying for them, because in the past, they rejected efforts to consolidate





**Wildfires rage in San Diego County.**

fire departments or raise the budget to hire more firefighters.

And second, that these fire disasters, at least here in Southern California, teach all the wrong lessons. Instead of prompting debates about controlling growth, particularly the developments with these very large-scale homes in vulnerable areas, each fire deepens the conviction that people can be safe, and development can continue.

That conviction ultimately rests on the fact that fire insurance is cross-subsidized – that people who live in these homes in the newly developed areas are effectively subsidized by other people who buy fire insurance for homes in areas that have no wildfire risk.

This is a continuation of a mode of development that will generate bigger and bigger disasters – and what’s being created in its wake is a triage of public resources.

If you live in the city, your fire protection doesn’t depend on Marine Corps helicop-

ters. You can’t expect the federal government to intervene. What happens to your home is a straightforward function of the budget of your local fire department, which is probably in crisis.

But people who live in these new suburbs, and especially those who live in big homes in the country, have a kind of unwritten contract that they’ll get all the fire-fighting resources available. And with the next wildfire, this will likely be more of a crisis. The fires in May were all in the same county, and more or less in the same area. But when you have two or three fires going, how are you going to allocate resources and equipment?

So the root problems here are uncontrolled development and the shifting of the cost of insurance, rebuilding and fire fighting onto other taxpayers – who, of course, can’t expect this level of fire protection.

**MAASS: the media coverage of the**

**The root problems here are uncontrolled development and the shifting of the cost of insurance, rebuilding and fire fighting onto other taxpayers**

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## INTERVIEW

**We see the same kind of contradiction on an even larger scale with the Gulf Coast and the Atlantic Seaboard – with the rebuilding of homes in first-class hurricane zones**

**wildfires did focus on the issue of climate change and its relationship with the record-setting drought in California. How do climate change and water resources play into this?**

**DAVIS:** Well, the drought, which may be on the scale of a 500-year event, does fit exactly into the kind of pattern you would expect from climate change. But there would be a problem even without global warming caused by industrialization and cars.

All the basic treaties – like the Colorado River Compact, which allocated water rights from the Colorado – and all the planning about water resources are based on a fundamental error. The water supply was figured on the basis of records from the early 20th century, which turned out to be one of the wettest periods in California history. We've now known for about 20 years that there were droughts on the current scale and even larger, probably in the 16th century, and definitely in the late Middle Ages.

So whether you come at it from the perspective of climate change, or you look at the long-term environmental record, the problem of a sustained drought shouldn't be surprising. Indeed, some researchers are now talking about this being the "new normal" – where the climate has shifted into a much hotter and drier phase.

That's all the more reason to restrict development in areas that are the most fire-prone – but the exact opposite is happening.

We see the same kind of contradiction on an even larger scale with the Gulf Coast and the Atlantic Seaboard – with the rebuilding of homes in first-class hurricane zones, where one can predict pretty confidently that events like Superstorm Sandy will become more and more frequent. And there, the costs of rebuilding are absolutely staggering.

The more rational response would be to stop this kind of development – even in some places reverse it. I think people on the

left have to pay a lot more attention to these issues: disasters, land use and the kind of staggering costs that are being passed on to working class taxpayers, to defend second homes or luxury homes, located exactly in the path where we can expect extreme events taking place with increasing frequency.

The drought out here is, of course, continuing. Everybody expects it's going to be broken by an El Niño next year – and, of course, with the rainfall from that, you could see massive landslides and flooding in the areas that burned. But after the El Niño, we could well go back to this same kind of drought.

No one has any idea how long these kind of conditions are going to last. Some scientists believe that this period represents a kind of fundamental shift – something similar to what's going on in the Mediterranean region, especially in the Middle East. This is an invisible factor behind what's taken place in Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria, which have suffered years of a devastating drought that has almost destroyed small-scale agriculture in many areas.

**MAASS: How Should activists who are concerned about development and ecology and the kind of issues you're talking organize and mobilize politically?**

**DAVIS:** first of all, with the recognition that the ultimate limit to the effectiveness of any kind reform is the marketplace in land. As long as a society has no control over land values, it can't really control land use, and that's the source of these questions.

This was the point that Henry George was making back in the 19th century. Until the 1890s, George was probably the best known prophet of social reform, not Karl Marx, and even though his theories segued into a kind of monomania, he was absolutely right to understand that speculation in land and the inflation of land values was a brake on production. What he didn't write about at the

time, but became clear in the 20th century, is that these same issues destabilize or undermine any ability to plan rationally.

If you look at Canada, for instance, in a lot of cities, the metropolitan government owns belts of land on the outside of the city, which gives it some degree of control over the form that urban development takes. In the US, the only function that regional planning commissions and the like play is to see which politician is going to get the largest campaign contributions for releasing more land for development.

Essentially, nothing has changed. For all the talk about smart growth and all that, the same kind of unfettered development capitalism has characterized Southern California since the 1920s.

I'm not sure people outside the state of California quite realize the impact of the Brown administration or what the Democrats are doing in Sacramento. Brown has basically adopted the Republican politics of banking tax revenues for a so-called "rainy day fund," rather than restoring the lifeline of human services that were cut in the Schwarzenegger years. What you see in Sacramento is really almost total paralysis of action around the big issues.

Now, Brown is under pressure to give way on questions of water transfers from the north of the state to the south. But this highlights how the whole system of water rights and water distribution in the American West is breaking down, as a result of changes in climate and insane patterns of urbanization.

My campus – the University of California Riverside – is on the edge of the desert, 50 miles or so inland from the coast. I've spent seven years now writing letters to different chancellors asking them to simply kill our huge campus lawns, and I've gotten no response whatsoever.

And if you can't get university campuses to demonstrate the need for better water use, that's obviously a problem. The private marketplace will definitely be worse. To the

east and south of Riverside, in the Coachella Valley, there are 110 golf courses – right in the middle of the desert. Go figure how that makes sense.

As long as everything is driven by the needs of the wealthy, their desire to escape the city and their ability to commandeer public resources so no one else can, nothing will change. On the contrary, as Republicans shrink city and county and state budgets, the conflict is over whose needs get taken care of first – and I think we all know the answer to that.

The real solutions to urban crises have to come through public ownership and the suppression, or at least very strict regulation, of land price inflation and land use.

I think in California, you can see a very clear need for the labor movement to become more involved in issues of housing, urban development and the growing costs on the rest of society for sustaining exurban development, particularly the flight of the rich to their enclaves.

Historically, of course, the labor movement has always been undermined on these issues by the fact that construction unions represent a conservative voice, opposed to any limitations on urban redevelopment or home building on the edge of metropolitan areas. But now that public-sector and white-collar unions have a greater weight, you can see how these issues have become almost as fundamental to their memberships as wages and health care.

People can't afford to rent even the smallest apartment in the coastal area of Los Angeles, so they're forced to move inland 40 or 50 or 60 miles, and then commute to work. That takes a huge toll on their family lives, it increases auto use and congestion, and helps drive the horizontal expansion of the city, which will become more and more expensive and destructive every year. **CT**

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*Alan Maass is the editor of Socialist Worker – <http://socialistworker.org> – where this interview was first published*

**If you can't get university campuses to demonstrate the need for better water use, that's obviously a problem. The private marketplace will definitely be worse**

# Leaving the USS Liberty

Ray McGovern on a day successive US governments would like to forget

**The crew of the USS Liberty has been “left behind,” in a figurative as well as a physical sense**

On June 8, 1967, Israeli leaders learned they could deliberately attack a US Navy ship and try to send it, together with its entire crew, to the bottom of the Mediterranean – with impunity. Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats attacked the USS Liberty, a state-of-the-art intelligence collection platform sailing in international waters off the Sinai, killing 34 of the 294 crew members and wounding more than 170.

On the 47th anniversary of that unprovoked attack let’s be clear about what happened: Israeli messages intercepted on June 8, 1967, leave no doubt that sinking the USS Liberty was the mission assigned to the attacking Israeli warplanes and torpedo boats as the Six-Day War raged in the Middle East. Let me repeat: there is no doubt – none – that the mission of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) was to destroy the USS Liberty and kill its entire crew.

Referring last month to the controversy of the swap of five Taliban prisoners for Sgt. Bode Bergdahl, President Barack Obama claimed, “The US has always had a pretty sacred rule: We don’t leave our men or women in uniform behind.” The only exception, he might have added, is when Israeli forces shoot them up; then mum’s the word.

Mr. President, try explaining that “pretty sacred rule” to the USS Liberty survivors. I

know them well enough to sense the hollow echo that Obama’s claim will leave in their ears – and in the ears of the families of those who did not survive.

The crew of the USS Liberty has been “left behind,” in a figurative as well as a physical sense. There is no way to retrieve the bodies of those washed out to sea through the large hole made by the Israeli torpedo that hit the Liberty amidships, killing 26 of the crew.

There is a way, however, to stop throwing salt in the survivors’ wounds, as every US president since Lyndon Johnson has done in acquiescing to the false narrative that it was all a terrible case of mistaken identity and confusion by Israeli command and control. That salt burns – especially on anniversaries of the tragedy, raising troubling questions about the power of the Israel Lobby and the Israeli government over US politicians.

In apparent fear of the Israel Lobby and not wanting to offend the Israeli government, US officials including the Navy have refused to come clean on what happened 47 years ago. The mainstream US media has been a willing partner in this failure to face the facts and demand accountability.

## No accident

Here, for example, is the text of an intercepted Israeli conversation, just one of many pieces of hard, unambiguous evidence that



**The burned-out shell of USS Liberty after being attacked by Israeli warplanes.**

**The tight U-turn by the US warplanes over the Mediterranean was proof positive that the Israeli government can literally get away with murder**

the Israeli attack was not a mistake:

**Israeli pilot to ground control:** *“This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?”*

**Ground control:** *“Yes, follow orders.” ...*

**Israeli pilot:** *“But, sir, it’s an American ship – I can see the flag!”*

**Ground control:** *“Never mind; hit it!”*

The Israelis would have been able to glory in reporting “mission accomplished, ship sunk, all crew killed” save for the bravery and surefootedness of then-23 year-old Navy seaman Terry Halbardier, whose actions spelled the difference between the murder of 34 of the crew and the intended massacre of all 294.

Halbardier skated across the Liberty’s slippery deck while it was being strafed in order to connect a communications cable and enable the Liberty to send out an SOS. The Israelis intercepted that message and, out of fear of how the US Sixth Fleet would respond, immediately broke off the attack, returned to their bases, and sent an “oops” message to Washington confessing to their unfortunate “mistake.”

As things turned out, the Israelis didn’t need to be so concerned. When President Johnson learned that the USS America and USS Saratoga had launched warplanes to do battle with the forces attacking the Liberty, he told Defense Secretary Robert McNamara

to call Sixth Fleet commander Rear Admiral Lawrence Geiss and tell him to order the warplanes to return immediately to their carriers.

According to J.Q. “Tony” Hart, a chief petty officer who monitored these conversations from a US Navy communications relay station in Morocco, Geiss shot back that one of his ships was under attack. Tellingly, McNamara responded: “President Johnson is not going to go to war or embarrass an American ally over a few sailors.”

### **Getting away with murder**

For the Israelis, the tight U-turn by the US warplanes over the Mediterranean was proof positive that the Israeli government can literally get away with murder, including killing US servicemen, and that Official Washington and its servile media could be counted upon to cover up the deliberate nature of the attack.

John Crewdson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, asked McNamara about this many years later. McNamara’s answer is worth reading carefully; he said he had “absolutely no recollection of what I did that day,” except that “I have a memory that I didn’t know at the time what was going on.”

Crewdson has written the most detailed and accurate account of the Israeli attack

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## FRIENDLY FIRE?

**Will the USS Liberty survivors ever enjoy the opportunity to know and to tell the real story with all its evil cruelties? Or will silence continue to reign?**

on the Liberty; it appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, and also in the *Baltimore Sun*, on Oct. 2, 2007. Read it and you'll understand why Crewdson got no Pulitzer for his investigative reporting on the Liberty. Instead, the *Tribune* laid him off in November 2008 after 24 years.

Several of the Liberty survivors have become my friends. I have listened to their stories, as Crewdson did. When June 8 comes around each year I remember them. And on special occasions, as when Terry Halbardier was finally awarded the Silver Star for his bravery, I write about them.

The mainstream US media has avoided the USS Liberty case like the plague. I just checked the *Washington Post* and – surprise, surprise – it has missed the opportunity for the 46th consecutive year, to mention the Liberty anniversary.

On the few occasions when the mainstream US media outlets are forced to address what happened, they blithely ignore the incredibly rich array of hard evidence and still put out the false narrative of the “mistaken” Israeli attack on the Liberty.

And they attempt to conflate fact with speculation, asking why Israel would deliberately attack a ship of the US Navy. Why Tel Aviv wanted the Liberty and its entire crew on the bottom of the Mediterranean remains a matter of speculation, but there are plausible theories including Israel's determination to keep the details of its war plans secret from everyone, including the US government.

But there is no doubt that destroying the Liberty and its crew was the mission assigned to Israel's warplanes and torpedo boats. One Navy Admiral with a conscience, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (and before that Chief of Naval Operations) Thomas Moorer, has “broken ranks,” so to speak. Moorer helped lead an independent, blue-ribbon commission to investigate what happened to the Liberty.

The following are among the commission's findings made public in October 2003:

- That the attack, by a US ally, was a “de-

liberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill its entire crew”

- That the attack included the machine-gunning of stretcher-bearers and life rafts

- That “the White House deliberately prevented the US Navy from coming to the defense of the [ship] ... never before in naval history has a rescue mission been cancelled when an American ship was under attack”

- That surviving crew members were later threatened with “court-martial, imprisonment, or worse” if they talked to anyone about what had happened to them; and were “abandoned by their own government.”

### Doing justice

Will the USS Liberty survivors ever enjoy the opportunity to know and to tell the real story with all its evil cruelties? Or will silence continue to reign? In a different context, Russian dissident author Alexandr Solzhenitzyn wrote this warning about what silence about evil does to the foundations of justice:

“In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are implanting it, and it will rise up a thousand fold in the future. When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers, we are not simply protecting their trivial old age, we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations.” Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

President Obama, the crew of the USS Liberty has been “left behind” for way too many years. Do the right thing by them. Face down those who warn that you cannot risk Israel's displeasure. And add more substance to your rhetoric about our “pretty sacred rule” that we do not leave anybody wearing the American uniform behind. **CT**

.....  
**Ray McGovern** works with *Tell the Word*, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army infantry and intelligence officer and then as a CIA analyst for the next 27 years.

# Media barbarians at the gates

**Danny Schechter** reminds us that the Western media needs to take a more inclusive look into war crimes – ours as well as theirs

**T**he Barbarians Are At The Gates. So writes Patrick Cockburn, the veteran Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* in London. A fierce critic of the US-British War on Iraq he is now urging the US and Iran to collaborate in stopping the ISIS or ISIL forces that are sweeping through Iraq, a country he loves more than any of the despotic politicians who have run it now or then.

The American media has taken up the cry – not for cooperation with Iran that has heartily denounced the latest round of US intervention in the country it warred with for seven years – but with lurid coverage of the force at first labeled “terrorists,” and now “insurgents or just “militants.” The difference is that ISIS/ISIL seizes and holds territory operating like an army, not hit and run faction.

It is said to be connected to Al Qaeda but we don’t know how or if Qaeda still exists. Separating truth from propaganda has never been more difficult.

Even as ISIS portrays itself more as a corporation than a gang of brigands, all we see or hear about in our media are bloody killings and beheadings as if savagery is uniquely to be found in the Islamic world.

Never mind the reporting of the Mc-Clatchey newspapers explaining that “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria sprang from a largely self-funded, corporation-style proto-

type...The militant group Baghdadi inherited had in place a sophisticated bureaucracy that was almost obsessive about record-keeping. Its middle-managers detailed, for example, the number of wives and children each fighter had, to gauge compensation rates upon death or capture, and listed expenditures in neat Excel spreadsheets that noted payments to an “assassination platoon” and “Al Mustafa Explosives Company.”

Too bad, our corporations don’t disclose, much less quantify, the metrics of the negative social impacts they cause, and what that costs society or the world.

The more lurid the reporting on the butchery now underway, the more we forget the one million plus dead as a result of the 2003 US invasion and occupation or how state violence inevitably inspires a violence of resistance. It is a violence that anti-colonial theorists like Franz Fanon approved of in his “The Wretched of the Earth,” because of he believed it has a positive psychological impact on the oppressed.

Selective reporting on the atrocities of the other side always emboldens a sense of righteousness, even as our counter-violence assumes the form of less visible and far more deadly ‘shock and awful’ airpower, or the use of weapons with nuclear materials like depleted uranium.

Throughout this war, there have been few

**All we see or hear about in our media are bloody killings and beheadings as if savagery is uniquely to be found in the Islamic world**

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## RIGHTEOUS REPORTING

**The point here is not to rationalize ISIS brutality, but to take the luster off US hypocrisy, to make the old point about who is calling the kettle black?**

reports on US war crimes in our controlled media with its history of loyal embeds and patriotic correctness.

No one in the mainstream media here has reminded us of the US torturers of Abu Ghraib prison or the counter terror campaigns we waged against towns like Fallujah and the people we demonized as “bad guys.”

It may also be time revisit our own baggage, by going deeper into our own history, the history before the imperial era and the US invasions of The Philippines, Haiti and Vietnam.

Pick up a copy of the latest edition of the *New York Review of Books* to read about the unspeakable crimes that Americans imposed on each other during the civil war, supposedly the war for freedom against slavery. Civil war expert James M. McPherson tells us about professional historian Michael C.C. Adam’s new book, “Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War” (Johns Hopkins University Press.) It is an American story of gore, not glory in which black soldiers who surrender are slaughtered and POWs on both sides perish in unspeakably horrific prison camps on both sides.

“The guerilla warfare that wracked parts of the South and the border states,” notes McPherson, “was especially vicious, sometimes featuring ‘the burning alive of enemy civilians thrown into flaming buildings as well as random torturing and killing accompanied by grisly trophies including ears, genitals, scalps.’ Rape and plunder was pervasive, justified as the “spoils” of war. (Adams wrote an earlier book with similar evidence in a dissection of the myth of World War II. See his, “The Best War Ever: America and World War II”, 2004.)

The point here is not to rationalize ISIS brutality, but to take the luster off US hypocrisy, to make the old point about who is calling the kettle black? In our faith in American “exceptionalism,” recently re-enunciated by President Obama, most of our media and educators ignore crimes committed but

rarely acknowledged in our name.

Our failure to demand or take part in a truth and reconciliation process in Iraq not only makes us culpable, but assured the spectacle that we are seeing. In fact, according to journalist Dahr Jamail, US policy-makers systematically pursued divide and conquer policies reinforcing a Sunni/Shia divide.

To complain now that Iraq President al Maliki is not representative of all communities there is a disgrace, especially after President Obama and his predecessor hailed our great victory in Iraq. Al Maliki was pushed into prominence by a former US Ambassador. Saddam Hussein and his era suddenly looks far better than the legacy of our war for “Iraqi Freedom.”

Who helped create and fund ISIS? Is Rand Paul correct in suggesting the US played a role? What role was played by our “allies,” the Kuwaitis, Saudis and Qataris? Shouldn’t the media try to find out? Why are ordinary Iraqis telling reporters that they prefer ISIS to the brutal Iraqi Army, even welcoming them in some areas as liberators.

When did “we” know about ISIS attack plans? According the *Telegraph* in London as relayed by VICE news: “...Kurdish sources tipped off US and UK intelligence agencies about ISIS plans five months ago. Apparently, a plan to seize northern Iraqi cities and move on Baghdad had been in the works for months. The *Telegraph* quotes a senior Kurdish intelligence official as saying “We had this information then, and we passed it on to your [British] government and the US government. We used our official liaisons. “We knew exactly what strategy they were going to use, we knew the military planners. It fell on deaf ears.”

Why are ISIS people saying they welcome US air strikes because they will once again demonstrate Washington’s complicity with the hated al-Maliki dictatorship? (Their forces are apparently well dispersed to neutralize the effectiveness of targeted bombing.)



Does anyone remember the media hype around “democratic elections” in Iraq with all those voters with purple inked fingers waving them aloft for the cameras? Were those elections free and fair? Apparently not!

Those fraudulent exercises only postponed the inevitable counter-push that may not prevail but will leave Iraq even more devastated, if not dismembered.

Israel is cheering on the country’s break-up now that Kurdish oil is flowing to Tel Aviv’s pipelines. Oil is once again at the center of this conflict everywhere but in the media.

Not surprisingly, Israeli commentators like Isi Leibler who writes in Israel Hayom (“This is Where We Stand”), “Our Adversaries are inhuman barbarians.”

He argues, “The major problem today is that the international community denies the barbaric nature of Islamic fundamentalism ... the whole region is a scorpions’ den of barbaric activity.”

Bear in mind that the term “barbarian” is commonly used to refer to the “uncivilized.” It is always a reference to “the others,” the never quite humans we demonize and stereotype before seeking to kill.

And now, the Iranians are said to be moving militarily to support Shia groups using drones they built on our designs, and shipping weapons to the border so this conflict

promises to escalate into a regional war.

Significantly, at the same time, the organizers of a film festival in Iran are calling attention to an anniversary: the shooting down of the (civilian) Iran air flight 655 by the United States Navy guided missile cruiser USS Vincennes on July 3, 1988. The US never apologized for the incident and the ship’s commanders won recognition.

To recognize the anniversary The Ammar Popular Film Festival has prepared some posters with a brief summary of the crimes they say US governments have committed against humanity

USA crimes Against American: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=36>

USA crimes against Iranian: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=37>

USA crimes in the world: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=38>

Once you see them, you realize how the past is never past, and that hatred of past crimes, in the absence of power sharing through negotiations and justice for war criminals, easily turns into fuel for future ones. **CT**

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*News Dissector* Danny Schechter blogs at [Newsdissector.net](http://Newsdissector.net) and works on [Mediachannel.org](http://Mediachannel.org). He has directed a film and written two books on media complicity in the Iraq War.

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**The Iranians are said to be moving militarily to support Shia groups using drones they built on our designs, and shipping weapons to the border so this conflict promises to escalate into a regional war**

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# Is Snowden a radical?

**William Blum** watched the NSA whistleblower's TV interview but found no signs of a man seriously at war with the US, its society or its government

**Snowden was not asked any direct questions about foreign policy, but if I had been in his position I could not have replied to several of the questions without bringing it up**

Is Edward Snowden a radical? The dictionary defines a radical as “an advocate of political and social revolution”, the adjective form being “favoring or resulting in extreme or revolutionary changes”. That doesn't sound like Snowden as far as what has been publicly revealed. In common usage, the term “radical” usually connotes someone or something that goes beyond the generally accepted boundaries of socio-political thought and policies; often used by the Left simply to denote more extreme than, or to the left of, a “liberal”.

In his hour-long interview on NBC, May 28, in Moscow, Snowden never expressed, or even implied, any thought – radical or otherwise – about United States foreign policy or the capitalist economic system under which we live, the two standard areas around which many political discussions in the US revolve. In fact, after reading a great deal by and about Snowden this past year, I have no idea what his views actually are about these matters. To be sure, in the context of the NBC interview, capitalism was not at all relevant, but US foreign policy certainly was.

Snowden was not asked any direct questions about foreign policy, but if I had been in his position I could not have replied to several of the questions without bringing it up. More than once the interview touched upon the question of whether the former

NSA contractor's actions had caused “harm to the United States”. Snowden said that he's been asking the entire past year to be presented with evidence of such harm and has so far received nothing. I, on the other hand, as a radical, would have used the opportunity to educate the world-wide audience about how the American empire is the greatest threat to the world's peace, prosperity, and environment; that anything to slow down the monster is to be desired; and that throwing a wrench into NSA's surveillance gears is eminently worthwhile toward this end; thus, “harm” indeed should be the goal, not something to apologize for.

Edward added that the NSA has been unfairly “demonized” and that the agency is composed of “good people”. I don't know what to make of this.

When the war on terrorism was discussed in the interview, and the question of whether Snowden's actions had hurt that effort, he failed to take the opportunity to point out the obvious and absolutely essential fact – that US foreign policy, by its very nature, regularly and routinely creates anti-American terrorists.

When asked what he'd say to President Obama if given a private meeting, Snowden had no response at all to make. I, on the other hand, would say to Mr. Obama: “Mr. President, in your time in office you've waged war against seven countries – Iraq,

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria. This makes me wonder something. With all due respect, sir: What is wrong with you?”

A radical – one genuine and committed – would not let such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity pass by unused. Contrary to what his fierce critics at home may believe, Edward Snowden is not seriously at war with America, its government or its society. Does he have a real understanding, analysis, or criticism of capitalism or US foreign policy? Does he think about what people could be like under a better social system? Is he, I wonder, even anti-imperialist?

And he certainly is not a conspiracy theorist, or at least keeps it well hidden. He was asked about 9-11 and replied:

“The 9/11 commission ... when they looked at all the classified intelligence from all the different intelligence agencies, they found that we had all of the information we needed ... to detect this plot. We actually had records of the phone calls from the United States and out. The CIA knew who these guys were. The problem was not that we weren't collecting information, it wasn't that we didn't have enough dots, it wasn't that we didn't have a haystack, it was that we did not understand the haystack that we had.”

Whereas I might have pointed out that the Bush administration may have ignored the information because they wanted something bad – perhaps of unknown badness – to happen in order to give them the justification for all manner of foreign and domestic oppression they wished to carry out. And did. (This scenario of course excludes the other common supposition, that it was an “inside job”, in which case collecting information on the perpetrators would not have been relevant.)

The entire segment concerning 9/11 was left out of the television broadcast of the interview, although some part of it was shown later during a discussion. This kind of omission is of course the sort of thing that feeds

conspiracy theorists.

All of the above notwithstanding, I must make it clear that I have great admiration for the young Mr. Snowden, for what he did and for how he expresses himself. He may not be a radical, but he is a hero. His moral courage, nerve, composure, and technical genius are magnificent. I'm sure the NBC interview won him great respect and a large number of new supporters. I, in Edward's place, would be even more hated by Americans than he is, even if I furthered the radicalization of more of them than he has. However, I of course would never have been invited onto mainstream American television for a long interview in prime time. (Not counting my solitary 15 minutes of fame in 2006 courtesy of Osama bin Laden; a gigantic fluke happening.)

Apropos Snowden's courage and integrity, it appears that something very important has not been emphasized in media reports: In the interview, he took the Russian government to task for a new law requiring bloggers to register – the same government which holds his very fate in their hands.

### **Who is more exceptional: The United States or Russia?**

I was going to write a commentary about President Obama's speech to the graduating class at the US Military Academy (West Point) on May 28. When he speaks to a military audience the president is usually at his most nationalistic, jingoist, militaristic, and American-exceptionalist – wall-to-wall platitudes. But this talk was simply TOO nationalistic, jingoist, militaristic, and American-exceptionalist. (“I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being.”) To go through it line by line in order to make my usual wise-ass remarks, would have been just too painful.

Instead I offer you part of a commentary from Mr. Jan Oberg, Danish director of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research in Lund, Sweden:

*What is conspicuously lacking in the Presi-*

**In the interview, Snowden took the Russian government to task for a new law requiring bloggers to register – the same government which holds his very fate in their hands**

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## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**The New Cold War is getting to look more and more like the old one, wherein neither side allows the other to get away with any propaganda point**

*dent's West Point speech?*

1. *Any reasonably accurate appraisal of the world and the role of other nations.*

2. *A sense of humility and respect for allies and other countries in this world.*

3. *Every element of a grand strategy for America for its foreign and security policy and some kind of vision of what a better world would look like. This speech with all its tired, self-aggrandising rhetoric is a thin cover-up for the fact that there is no such vision or overall strategy.*

4. *Some little hint of reforms of existing institutions or new thinking about globalisation and global democratic decision-making.*

5. *Ideas and initiatives – stretched-out hands – to help the world move towards conflict-resolution in crisis areas such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, China-Japan and Iran. Not a trace of creativity.*

Ironically, on May 30 the *Wall Street Journal* published a long essay by Leon Aron, a Russia scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington. The essay took Russian president Vladimir Putin to task for claiming that Russia is exceptional. The piece was headed:

“Why Putin Says Russia Is Exceptional”

“Such claims have often heralded aggression abroad and harsh crackdowns at home.”

It states: “To Mr. Putin, in short, Russia was exceptional because it was emphatically not like the modern West – or not, in any event, like his caricature of a corrupt, morally benighted Europe and US. This was a bad omen, presaging the foreign policy gambits against Ukraine that now have the whole world guessing about Mr. Putin’s intentions.”

So the *Wall Street Journal* has no difficulty in ascertaining that a particular world leader sees his country as “exceptional”. And that such a perception can lead that leader or his country to engage in aggression abroad and crackdowns at home. The particular world leader so harshly judged in this manner by the *Wall Street Journal* is

named Vladimir Putin, not Barack Obama. There’s a word for this kind of analysis – It’s called hypocrisy.

“Hypocrisy is anything whatever may deceive the cleverest and most penetrating man, but the least wide-awake of children recognizes it, and is revolted by it, however ingeniously it may be disguised.” – Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoi, (1828-1910) Russian writer

Is hypocrisy a moral failing or a failing of the intellect?

The New Cold War is getting to look more and more like the old one, wherein neither side allows the other to get away with any propaganda point. Just compare any American television network to the Russian station broadcast in the United States – RT (formerly Russia Today). The contrast in coverage of the same news events is remarkable, and the stations attack and make fun of each other by name.

Another, even more important, feature to note is that in Cold War I the United States usually had to consider what the Soviet reaction would be to a planned American intervention in the Third World. This often served as a brake to one extent or another on Washington’s imperial adventures.

Thus it was that only weeks after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the United States bombed and invaded Panama, inflicting thousands of casualties and widespread destruction, for the flimsiest – bordering on the non-existent – of reasons.

The hostile Russian reaction to Washington’s clear involvement in the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in February of this year, followed by Washington’s significant irritation and defensiveness toward the Russian reaction, indicates that this Cold War brake may have a chance of returning. And for this we should be grateful.

After the “communist threat” had disappeared and the foreign policy of the United States continued absolutely unchanged, it meant that the Cold War revisionists

had been vindicated – the conflict had not been about containing an evil called “communism”; it had been about American expansion, imperialism and capitalism. If the collapse of the Soviet Union did not result in any reduction in the American military budget, but rather was followed by large increases, it meant that the Cold War – from Washington’s perspective – had not been motivated by a fear of the Russians, but purely by ideology.

**Lest we forget: Our present leaders can derive inspiration from other great American leaders.**

White House tape recordings, April 25, 1972:

President Nixon: How many did we kill in Laos?

National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger: In the Laotian thing, we killed about ten, fifteen [thousand] ...

Nixon: See, the attack in the North [Vietnam] that we have in mind ... power plants, whatever’s left – POL [petroleum], the docks ... And, I still think we ought to take the

dikes out now. Will that drown people?

Kissinger: About two hundred thousand people.

Nixon: No, no, no ... I’d rather use the nuclear bomb. Have you got that, Henry?

Kissinger: That, I think, would just be too much.

Nixon: The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? ... I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christsakes.

May 2, 1972:

Nixon: America is not defeated. We must not lose in Vietnam. ... The surgical operation theory is all right, but I want that place bombed to smithereens. If we draw the sword, we’re gonna bomb those bastards all over the place. Let it fly, let it fly. **CT**

.....  
*William Blum is the author of “Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II”, “Rogue State: a guide to the World’s Only Super Power,” “West-Bloc Dissident: a Cold War Political Memoir,” and “America’s Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else”*

**The Cold War – from Washington’s perspective – had not been motivated by a fear of the Russians, but purely by ideology**

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## ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ISSUE 87



“ We are not, as we thought when we entered Iraq, the omnipotent superpower able in a swift and brutal stroke to bend a people to our will. We are something else. **Fools and murderers. Blinded by hubris. Faded relics of the Cold War. And now, in the final act of the play, we are crawling away. Our empire is dying.**” – CHRIS HEDGES (P3)

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