
THE SPIES WHO PEED IN MY FRIDGE | David Niddrie
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SEPTEMBER 2019

**Kippers,
pork pies
and
Brexit:
The lies
of Boris
Johnson**

MATT CARR - Page 4



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Issue 189 | September 2019

ISSUES

- 4** Kippers, pork pies and Brexit: The lies of Boris Johnson *Matt Carr*
8 Boris's media backers clear path to a hardline Brexit *Nick Jones*
10 The UK goes full Basil Fawlty and makes a fool of itself *Ian Dunt*
12 The final days of the Caliphate *Ivor Prickett*
18 The spies who peed in my fridge *David Niddrie*
22 Alas, poor Bernard Lewis: A fellow of infinite jest *Hamid Dabashi*
26 The legend of Desperate Dan *David Anderson*
28 The world according to George Galloway *Chris Hedges*
34 Obsessed Americans look to stars for guidance *Michael McCaffrey*
36 Orwell revisited in the age of Trump *Tom Engelhardt*
41 Manufacturing mass fascism hysteria *CJ Hopkins*

INSIGHTS

- 45** If statues could talk *Philip A. Farruggio*
46 Climate and debt have always been linked *Rick Salutin*
47 Mass shootings and the age of alienation *Ted Rall*
49 Hurwitt's Eye *Mark Hurwitt*
50 Will Johnson move UK's embassy to Jerusalem? *Craig Murray*
51 The killer clowns are taking over the world *George Monbiot*
53 Sh*t! We're b*oked! *Tony Sutton*

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Why are journalists so unwilling to expose the brazen lies of populist politicians like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson? asks **Matt Carr**

Kippers, pork pies, Brexit: The lies of Boris Johnson

Art: Anthony Jenkins
4

IF there's one thing that Boris Johnson and Donald Trump have in common, it's their propensity for lying. Where politicians like Blair and Bush lied and massaged facts to realise specific agendas, both these politicians at least recognised that truth existed and that it was important for politicians to make it seem as though it mattered.

Johnson and Trump don't care. They lie about everything, big and small. They lie almost as often as they open their mouths. Both men have prospered not in spite of their propensity for lying, but because of it. Johnson's early career as a journalist was due almost entirely to his willingness to feed his readers with the same kind of lies about the European Union that were later mobilised to support the Leave campaign.

Lies have since been crucial to his political campaigning, from the £350 NHS promises during the Leave campaign to the more recent nonsense



NEW POPULISTS: Donald Trump (above) and Boris Johnson.

about kippers on the Isle of Man, Melton Mowbray pork pies and the brazen denialism in his insistence that No Deal will not damage the country.

TTrump, as everyone knows, lies for as long as he is awake on any given day, and may well lie even when he dreams. Even more than Johnson, he tells the most breathtaking whoppers without a trace of embarrassment or regret. He has contaminated his administration with a pervasive dishonesty that makes Bush or Richard Nixon

appear to be paragons of moral probity, while continually gaslighting and wrongfooting his opponents and critics by accusing the “mainstream media” of “fake news”.

In effect, both men are prototypes of a new kind of populist politician and a new kind of political lying, in which truth and facts are no longer even basic requirements in political life, and being caught lying no longer matters.

Why has this happened? How have they been able to get away with it? Part of the answer is that the journalists and media outlets that are supposed to challenge them don't do it. This is sometimes because journalists aren't able to gain access to the politicians they wish to interrogate. But I would like to offer another explanation: that journalists too often simply refrain from holding even the most barefaced liars to account and don't call them out for lying when they are lying, and not only because of collusion, timidity, or the potential loss of access.

Many years ago the late writer and educationalist Neil Postman argued in his terrific polemic *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that television was undermining politics, culture and intellectual rigour, by turning everything into a form of entertainment.

The result, he argued, was a continual desire for distraction, in which anything that was not instantly ‘amusing’ could be ignored or discounted. In making this argument, Postman compared Orwell’s dystopian predictions in 1984 to Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*:

“Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy”.

For Postman, the latter was closer to his own era because: “As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists

who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny ‘failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions’. In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us”.

Postman’s book was written in 1985, before the Internet and social media offered an even wider range of potential “distractions”, but I have often thought of him these last few years. I thought of him when I came across the following tweet, from ITV’s Paul Brand: “Whatever you

5

Art: Anthony Jenkins
www.jenkinsdraws.com

think of Boris Johnson, his press conferences are 100 times more engaging than Theresa May's. He might not always fully answer the question, but he does at least engage with it".

For Brand, therefore, the fact that Johnson's performative press conferences were more 'engaging' than Theresa May's dire stage-managed rituals was more worthy of comment than the question of whether his willingness to 'engage' with the truth might amount to a willingness to tell the truth.

Brand went on to qualify this observation: "Just to be clear: I would really, really like Boris Johnson to answer our questions (and those of other colleagues who haven't been able to ask them). And we mustn't let his distraction techniques baffle us. My point is that his style couldn't be in starker contrast to May".

The problem is that Johnson's "distraction techniques", for the most part do "baffle us" or at least they seem to baffle many of the journalists who seek to get a grip on Johnson's Harpo Marx shambolic cheekie chappie posh cabbage doll shtick. The very fact that Johnson, unlike any other British politician, is known as "Boris" – a name that his own friends don't even use – is a testament to how successful he has been in "baffling" even those who supposedly interrogate him

I have seen respected journalists grinning and giggling in their conversations with Johnson for no apparent reason except that Johnson was grin-

I don't want Johnson to be 'engaging'. I want to know why he lies so often. I want to know why so many hedge fund managers have supported his rise to power and what they hope to gain from it

ning and giggling too, and that Johnson – presumably – was an amusing guy. So it is no surprise to find Paul Brand enjoying his press conferences, regardless of whether they actually produced truthful answers.

Personally I don't find Johnson amusing at all, and Trump even less so. These are dishonest, dangerous men, and I want to see them rigorously scrutinised on every possible occasion. I don't want Johnson to be "engaging". I want to know why he lies so often. I want to know why so many hedge fund managers have supported his rise to power and what they hope to gain from it. I want to know why Steve Bannon once wrote his speeches. I want to know why he insists that No Deal will not damage the country when even government reports insist that it will be.

There are many more questions that could be put to him, and to Trump. But it is clear that their supporters don't want to ask them, and don't actually care about the lies they tell.

And equally alarmingly,

when confronted with nonsensical observations such as Brand's, it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that too many people aren't bothered about the lying either, as long as politicians like this continue to entertain us.

To some extent the brazenness and the absurdity of the lies they tell have become part of their entertainment value Kippers, pork pies, Trump's crazed and ludicrous rantings – all this nonsense makes us shake our heads and laugh or giggle as the next absurd claim comes and goes, only to be forgotten by the next ridiculous pronouncement.

It's all good knockabout fun – if you like your dystopia marinated in gallows humour. But politics is not supposed to amuse us, and societies that think it should may in more trouble than they think. As Postman once argued: "If politics is like show business, then the idea is not to pursue excellence, clarity or honesty but to appear as if you are, which is another matter altogether".

It is. And the unlikely triumph of liars like Johnson and Trump is another indication of how far we have moved from any conception of excellence, clarity or honesty to embrace the worst that our societies have to offer. **CT**

Matt Carr blogs at www.infernalmachine.co.uk – where this article was first published. His latest book is *The Savage Frontier: The Pyranees in History and the Imagination*.

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7

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Nick Jones tells how the proprietors of the British mainstream media used Johnson to spearhead their campaign to take Britain out of Europe

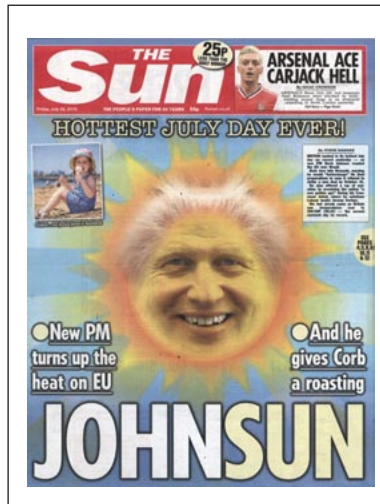
Boris's media backers clear path to a hardline Brexit

THROUGHOUT the political chaos of Theresa May's repeated failure to gain approval for her agreement to leave the European Union, Brexit-supporting newspapers never wavered in their support for Boris Johnson's hard-line approach.

He was the ever-present cheerleader, a backstop for the pro-Brexit press, waiting in the sidelines, ready to lead the final assault on Brussels and deliver the 'freedoms' promised in the EU Referendum.

In the opinion of most Conservative Party members, Johnson is an all-powerful prime minister, safe in the knowledge that he and his closest aides had every chance of being able to command the news agenda and manipulate friendly media outlets.

Leaving the EU became a crusade for the dominant British press proprietors decades ago, and their achievement in helping to deliver the 2016 vote to leave was hailed by the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*



The *Sun* and *Daily Mail* welcome Boris, their saviour of Brexit.

and *Daily Express* as the ultimate victory for their brand of campaigning journalism. Their determination to own and deliver Brexit has been resolute.

Johnson's two-to-one victory in the Tory leadership election and his confirmation as prime minister was greeted with special editions and front-page headlines that echoed the tabloid celebrations for the Referendum result.

They have seized on every opportunity to promote and pro-

tect "Boris, the Brexit Saviour".

"Johnsun" was the one-word on the *Sun*'s front page (26.7.2019) below an image of Johnson's face superimposed on the sun on what was the "hottest July day ever".

The *Daily Mail*'s banner front-page headline the day before, "All Guns Blazing" (25.7.2019), picked up on "Boris's bloodbath" cabinet reshuffle.

Editorial executives, sympathetic journalists and on-message commentators had



Daily Telegraph abuses poll results (above), while the *Daily Mail* gives Royal treatment to Boris's girlfriend.

always kept faith with the original architect of the Brussels-bashing coverage that became the tabloids' stock-in-trade.

In a media blitz backing an August bonanza of spending pledges, the pro-Brexit press adopted ploys as ruthless as their tactics in 2016, when they first stoked fears over immigration and then neutralised the Remainers' fightback as Project Fear.

No trick in the media playbook has been off limits in support of the fresh objective of convincing the public that a no-deal departure might become the only sure way to get Brexit over the line.

Johnson's long-standing and most brazen mouthpiece, the *Daily Telegraph*, was only too ready to abuse opinion poll findings to deliver the headline, "Public backs Johnson to shut down Parliament for Brexit," (Camilla Tominey, 13.8.2019).

"Why so sad on Planet Remain? We're loving it on Planet Brexit" (Brendan O'Neill, 24.8.2019) was the *Sun's* verdict

on polling evidence that showed "ordinary people" wanted the UK to "say adios without a deal".

Any reservations about Johnson's tangled personal life have been obliterated amid gushing coverage for his girlfriend Carrie Symonds. Her treatment in the *Daily Express* has been akin to that of a minor royal: "Why Carrie's the first lady of ethical fashion" (Karen Kay, 24.8.2019).

Despite the *Sunday Times* exclusive (18.8.2019) on the secret "Yellowhammer" report on "Operation chaos: Whitehall's secret no-deal plan", the coverage remained relentlessly upbeat.

Johnson's double act with Donald Trump at the G7 summit in Biarritz was a master class in news management, ending with the US President's promise of a "fantastic" trade deal for the UK.

Dominic Cummings, the Prime Minister's top media strategist has launched what in effect has become the equivalent of a three-month election

campaign.

Pro-Johnson storylines have influenced, indeed dominated, much of the mainstream coverage with ease, not least because of the strength of the pro-Brexit commentariat.

Press reviews and debates on television and radio have been over-run by pro-Leave commentators, from the tabloids, Conservative-leaning think tanks and like-minded websites.

They have outnumbered and outgunned voices representing a pro-Remain and Left perspective and, unlike the build-up to the Referendum, Johnson's first month in office passed by with no sign of a cohesive, coordinated fightback.

No wonder Cummings and Johnson's other long-standing adviser, Lynton Crosby, have advised the Prime Minister that he has nothing to lose by steering clear of potentially hostile broadcast appearances. **CT**

Nicholas Jones is a journalist and former BBC industrial and senior political correspondent

Boris Johnson's 'instinctive sneer' at the Europeans has degenerated into actions that have caused lasting damage to the country's reputation. He's made a fool out of the country and called it patriotism, writes **Ian Dunt**

The UK goes full Basil Fawlty and makes a fool of itself

OUR behaviour has degraded badly. Over the last three years there's been plenty of time to mourn the loss of Britain's international standing and domestic stability. But there's something else worth mentioning: our newfound lack of grace, of basic respectability in the manner we conduct ourselves.

The same process is taking place, with considerably more severity, in the US under Donald Trump. Over the last month, which admittedly has been particularly deranged even by his standards, he's cancelled a meeting with Denmark because it won't sell him Greenland, accused Jewish Democrats of "disloyalty", approvingly quoted his own description as "king of Israel" and "the second coming of God", and tried to abolish limits on the detention of migrant families.

The viciousness and stupidity are one thing. But there is also something else, arguably



NATIONAL DELICACY?: Johnson said Europe wanted to ban prawn cocktail flavoured crisps.

more profound, that is lost with this sort of behaviour. America loses respectability. This exists outside of strength or morality. It's about conduct. And by being so intangible, it is also harder to retrieve once it is gone.

Boris Johnson is nothing like as bad as Trump, but he does seem to be taking inspiration from him, which is a problem, because he's not nearly as powerful

Acting like a degenerate when you have the world's dominant reserve currency and massive trading and military bulk behind you is unfortunate and unseemly, but it is at least a viable strategy, if only for the short term. But acting like one without that kind of fire-power, from a self-imposed position of weakness, is even more misguided.

There's been a long build up. Johnson helped create the standard eurosceptic tropes of the pre-Brexit era through his semi-fictional columns in the *Telegraph* in the 1990s lambasting meddling European bureaucrats for interfering with condoms and prawn cocktail crisps and the like.

As foreign secretary that instinctive sneer at the Europeans remained, usually through a Second World War prism. He compared French leader Francois Holland, for instance, to a concentration camp guard who wanted "to administer punishment beatings" to those who left the EU "in the manner of

some World War II movie”.

Last month he said “there is a terrible kind of collaboration” opponents of no-deal in parliament and the Europeans. The word “collaboration” has a strong association with those who cooperated with fascism in the war. It is the perfect phrase not to use before meeting the leaders of Germany and France.

Then, during the press conferences with Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, Johnson’s approach, and specifically his symbiotic relationship with an enthralled right-wing press, took on a tragi-comic sheen.

When Merkel made an off-hand - even slightly disparaging - comment about whether the backstop problem could be solved in 30 days, Johnson jumped on it. Almost by magic, it transmogrified into government policy, before then being put down by Downing Street, and then coming back to life again, as a new de-facto Brexit negotiation timetable enthusiastically repeated in the press.

The statements of European leaders during the trip bore no relation to the manner in which they were reported in the UK. When Macron said the key elements of the withdrawal agreement, including the backstop, were “genuine, indispensable guarantees to preserve stability in Ireland” it was interpreted in the *Express* as Johnson “winning over hardliner Macron” and in the *Telegraph* as “Macron says withdrawal agreement can be amended”.



MEDIA DELUSION: Front pages of the Daily Mail and Daily Express after Boris Johnson’s meetings with Angel Merkel and Emmanuel Macron.

This kind of tribalistic post-truth coverage, which cannot be disentangled from the politician-journalist prime minister who encourages it, has an effect on the way the rest of the world sees us, just as Trump’s messianic imbecilities do. Apart from the strategic inadequacy, we look desperate, delusional and deeply confused, like a child in charge of a fighter plane.

The British government’s policy now seems to be that it is going to provide border solutions in the next 30 days for a problem which could not be fixed in the last three years. It has arrived at this commitment on the basis of a off-hand comment by a foreign leader. Incredibly, this is portrayed as some form of victory.

When it fails, as it will, Johnson will revert back to his standard approach of blaming the dastardly Europeans, as he has always done before. After all, the rejection of these unspecified alternative arrangements

cannot be fair, because he has already promised that they are viable. So it will have to be because the continentals are unimaginative and obstructive.

Britain, therefore, become two things: desperate and disrespectful. We are at once obsequious and uncivil, like Basil Fawlty elevated the level of international diplomacy. It is quite hard to be both these failings at once, but Johnson and his admirers in the press have contrived to achieve it.

There is no grace in that manner of behaviour, no respectability, no gravitas. And once this thing is over, with whatever economic and political damage it entails, that reputational damage will also last. We’ve made a fool out of ourself and called it patriotism. **CT**

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Ian Dunt is the author of Brexit: What The Hell Happens Now? & editor of www.politics.co.uk where this article was first published.

A group of volunteers works to collect unclaimed bodies, most of them thought of being ISIS members, from the ruins of the Old City district where the militants made their last stand. Iraq, February 2018

12





Ivor Prickett's images from Iraq and Syria highlight the toll of war on civilians and the urban landscape

The final days of the Caliphate

IVOR Prickett's book *End of the Caliphate* is the result of months spent on the ground in Iraq and Syria between 2016 and 2018 photographing the battle to defeat ISIS. Working exclusively for the *New York Times*, Prickett was often embedded with Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish forces as he documented both the fighting and its toll on the civilian population and urban landscape.

The battle to defeat ISIS in the region lasted years, resulted in thousands of civilian deaths and ruined vast tracts of cities such as Mosul and Raqqa. Involving some of the most brutal urban combat since World War II, the fall of Mosul was key to the downfall of the Islamic State: soon after the remains of the so-called "Caliphate" began to crumble.

"For me", writes Prickett, "the story began towards the end of 2016, just after the operation for Mosul had started in late October. Initially I found myself documenting the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding as thousands of people fled the city. Civilians have always been my interest when covering conflict; I've tried to document the savage toll war takes on families caught in its midst".

Prickett's photographs – he was often the only journalist on the ground in many of these situations – capture post-war reality while attempting to reconstruct the final weeks of combat: the devastated cities including abandoned corpses of ISIS fighters, and, months later, families searching for missing loved ones, and civilians returning to reclaim their homes and lives. **CT**



END OF THE CALIPHATE

Ivor Prickett

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TOP: Some people fled the recently liberated Sukar neighbourhood, while others returned, having crossed a destroyed bridge that connects the area to the rest of east Mosul. Iraq, January 2017

ABOVE: Eissa al Ali and his family return to their heavily destroyed neighbourhood in Raqqa after years of being displaced. The battle to liberate the city from ISIS destroyed 80 percent of buildings and likely killed thousands of civilians. Syria, June 2018

RIGHT: An Iraqi special forces soldier fires on ISIS militants from a defensive position on the edge of the Rifai neighbourhood of west Mosul. Iraq, May 2017









LEFT: Civilians who had stayed in west Mosul during the battle to retake the city, line up for an aid distribution in the Mamun neighbourhood. Iraq, March 2017

TOP: 25-year-old Mohammed Sheko fed his SDF comrade, 18-year-old Salah Al Raqqawi, at a hospital for injured fighters in Kurdish-controlled Syria. They were injured while fighting ISIS in Raqqa. Syria, October 2017

ABOVE: Nadhira Aziz looks on as Iraqi civil defence workers dig out the bodies of her sister and niece from her house in the Old City of Mosul, where they were killed by an airstrike in June 2017. Iraq, September 2017

David Niddrie recalls how, during the fight to end apartheid, his partner Collette was detained and interrogated by a notorious police spy at Johannesburg airport. But that was just the beginning of a bizarre story

The spies who peed in my fridge

THROUGH the filter of 40 years of dusty, overfull memory banks, the whole sequence of events that is about to follow seems mildly disgusting – a snapshot of a marginal aspect of apartheid oppression.

It happened because my partner, Collette Caine, was the only person with a passport at the Environmental and Development Agency (EDA), the Johannesburg-based South African NGO for whom she then worked.

The EDA was one of hundreds of anti-apartheid initiatives intended to assist black communities develop economic and political self-reliance and begin baking the bricks with which to construct a post-apartheid economy.

Collette spent much of her time helping rural South African women organise agricultural cooperatives. In fact, the *People's Workbook* she co-authored is sub-titled *Working Together to Change Your Community*. She still occasion-

RADICAL VIGNETTES

A ColdType series

ally gets requests to agree to a reprint

So when EDA's European funders asked for a meeting, it fell to Collette to pack her bags for a two-day visit to Lusaka, the Zambian capital. At the time, the three-hour flight north was a much bigger deal than it is today: flights from Johannesburg's Jan Smuts airport took place daily, but South Africa had no diplomatic relations with the "frontline states" arrayed along its northern border. And Lusaka wasn't just the hub of the "frontline states", it housed the headquarters of the outlawed African National Congress (ANC). Trips there always carried a whiff of hazard.

So it wasn't surprising when Collette didn't emerge from the airport building after her return flight. I waited four long and worrying hours until

she finally appeared, utterly unfazed by what she insisted was an unimpressive attempt to intimidate her.

As she'd presented her passport on arriving home, there'd been much eyebrow raising and many meaningful glances towards the couple of white men in safari suits just beyond passport control, who asked her, when she arrived, to accompany them.

They took her to a windowless office where she met Major Craig Williamson, a morbidly obese Falstaffian figure who had been recently exposed, to the surprise of almost no-one, as a police spy. He'd spent some years in the anti-apartheid student movement, before fairly fruitlessly infiltrating the European anti-apartheid funding movement, and then failing spectacularly to infiltrate the ANC.

A few months before Collette's Lusaka trip, his supposedly heroic time in the cold had been



Already a member of the South African Police Force, Craig Williamson (right) enrolled in 1972 as a student at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and became heavily involved in anti-apartheid politics. With him are other student leaders (from left): Mike Stent, Cedric de Beer and Barry Gilder. Williamson later applied to the Truth Commission for amnesty for the murders of Ruth First and Jeanette and Katryn Schoon, and for the bombing of the ANC's London headquarters in 1982.

breathlessly, if not entirely accurately, serialised in South Africa's *Sunday Times* newspaper. The first instalment was illustrated with a picture of Williamson in Moscow's Red Square, headlined "Our man in Moscow". A week later I shared a byline in a competing paper over a story explaining that Williamson had been in Moscow, but only on a two-day Intourist tour. The picture had been taken by his wife.

Still basking in the *Sunday Times*'s manufactured glory,

Williamson had spent very little time asking Collette anything about her trip to Zambia. Instead, he tried to impress her with his knowledge of her co-workers, but Collette, utterly fearless about most things, simply waited him out. And he eventually had to let her go, although his failure to impress her obviously rankled.

That seemed to be the end of the matter.

Then, two days later, we arrived home from work to find someone had broken into

our cottage. They hadn't stolen anything, but had dumped our food all over the lounge floor and scattered our books and papers. Our cats were outside unharmed and apparently unconcerned. There didn't even seem to have been a serious attempt to search the place – we did have some things we needed to hide, but they were still hidden. Inconvenient and ... odd.

The day after that we got home to a more disturbing break-in. The burglars had targeted just two things: Collette's

dressing table and the fridge. At the dressing table someone, obviously black from the hair left behind, had made extensive use of Collette's hairbrush. We only realised later that someone (and that someone would have to have been white) had assumed that, as a white South African, Collette would have been revolted by a black person using her hairbrush. It showed surprising ignorance, for Collette spent weeks at a time in rural South Africa living and working with village women while setting up small-scale agricultural cooperatives. But it did tell us something about the mindset of whoever who staged the break in.

The other focus – the fridge – told us more: whoever came in had not only fiddled with all the food, making sure we could see they had – fingerprints on the butter and so on. More disturbingly, someone had pissed in it before turning it off, leaving it reeking of stale urine.

And so it continued for another week. On one day an obviously very dirty and very hairy black person had bathed and depilated in the bath – fairly silly, although the obsession

The visitors chose that day for the highlight – carefully removing the bedcover, they took a dump in the middle of our top sheet. Then they left, never to return

someone had with black people's hair was illuminating. On another, they took our clothes out of the cupboard and pissed on them. Disgusting, but hardly life threatening.

It didn't take a genius to work out the link between Williamson's "interrogation" and the daily invasion of our cottage at 16 Orange Street – especially when we learned that the day before the invasion started the burglars, apparently accidentally, went into 16 Lemon Street (in Afrikaans, the language of the security police, the word for Orange is *lemoen*) and did pretty much what they did to us in the first invasion.

But what do you do when the police are dumping your food on the lounge carpet and piss-

ing in your fridge? After a few days we decided we'd better get someone to watch the house. So I spoke to my news editor, who agreed to get someone to hide in the bush and photograph the next visit. But he had to reassign the journalist he'd selected on the chosen day, so our cottage had one more unprotected day.

The visitors chose that day for the highlight – carefully removing the bedcover, they took a dump in the middle of our top sheet. Then they left, never to return.

But there was a more sinister side to Williamson. He did more than just visit Moscow on an Intourist bus and, assuming he was responsible, get someone to shit on our bed. He later confessed to the South African Truth Commission that he was responsible for the mid-1980s parcel bombs that killed communist party journalist and academic Ruth First in Mozambique, and exile Jenny Curtis and her daughter in Angola. **CT**

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David Niddrie is a Johannesburg-based journalist, and a regular contributor to ColdType

Read - and see - more about Craig Williamson and the evils of apartheid

Download and read **Good & Evil**, ColdType's 2002 24-page excerpt from Gillian Edelstein's book **Truth & Lies** published in England by Granta; in South Africa by M&G; and in the USA by The New Press. Click on the link below to download:

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ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at

www.issuu.com/frontline.south

Hamid Dabashi remembers Bernard Lewis and the tragic consequences of the author's 'extraordinary capacity for getting everything wrong'

Alas, poor Bernard Lewis, a fellow of infinite jest

HERE'S a skull now; this skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years," the gravedigger tells Hamlet. It turns out the skull is Yorick's, the king's jester.

It is here that Hamlet says his famous lines: "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."

I was instantly reminded of Yorick's skull and Hamlet when I heard Bernard Lewis had died. Then the lines of an Omar Khayyam poem and his unceasing awareness of the mortality of human presence ran through my mind:

"For I remember stopping by the way

To watch a Potter thumping his wet Clay:

And with its all-obliterated Tongue

It murmur'd – 'Gently, Brother, gently, pray!'"

It is unseemly to recall the horrors of a horrible man upon his passing. But Bernard Lewis was not a regular rogue. He



Bernard Lewis spent a lifetime studying people he loathed.

was instrumental in causing enormous suffering and much bloodshed in this world. He was a notorious Islamophobe who spent a long life studying Islam in order to demonise Muslims and mobilise the mighty military of what he called "the West" against them.

Just imagine: What sort of a person would spend a lifetime studying people he loathes? It is quite a bizarre proposition. But there you have it: the late Bernard Lewis did precisely that.

He was the chief ideologue

of post-9/11 politics of hate towards Islam and Muslims.

"Dr Lewis's friendship – and ideological kinship – with the Cold War hawk and Israel supporting Sen Henry M "Scoop" Jackson (D-Wash)", we are told, "opened prominent doors in the capital, eventually giving Dr Lewis favoured status among top White House and Pentagon planners before the 2003 invasion of Iraq".

That is the most recent legacy of Bernard Lewis. The invasion, occupation, and destruction of Iraq.

But Lewis's affiliation with powers of death and destruction went much deeper than that. Afghanistan and Iraq are in ruins today, millions of Arabs and Muslims have been murdered, scarred for life, subjected to the indignity of military occupation and refugee camps, in no small measure because of the systemic maligning of Muslims Lewis advanced in his books and articles, and with them informed generations of imperial officers.

Photo: Wikimedia

For them, Lewis was the source for what Islam is and who the Muslims are. When US President Donald Trump said “Islam hates us,” it was Bernard Lewis speaking. When Trump’s first National Security Adviser Michael Flynn said “Islam is ... like cancer,” it was Bernard Lewis speaking.

I was still a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania when I first encountered Lewis in person at a Princeton University conference. There was always a distance, a manufactured aloofness between him and the rest of the scholarly community.

He was more at home with heads of state, spy chiefs, military officers, intelligence communities, settler colonialists in Palestine, imperial viceroys in conquered Muslim lands.

He had power and basked in it. We detested power.

He is now showered with praise by the most powerful Zionist Islamophobes in the US and Israel. We are on the opposite side of the fence – with Palestinians, facing Israeli sharpshooters whom he favoured, enabled, encouraged, weaponised with a potent ideology of Muslim and Arab hatred.

With the death of Bernard Lewis, the long saga of exchanges between him and Edward Said finally comes to an end. I was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard and present at their now legendary debate in Boston on November 22, 1986, during the Middle East Studies

Association convention.

Long before that, like thousands of other young scholars, I followed their debates on the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. I was, and I remain, squarely on Said’s side. But that was not, nor is it now, a merely political position; rather, it was and is a potently moral and intellectual disposition.

The difference between the two men was the difference between the politics of lucrative power and the intellectual courage to revolt.

Lewis was a historian of power and in power and for the power that ruled us all and he served happily and rewardingly. The more powerful the imperial audacity of a mode of knowledge production, the more Lewis pursued and served it.

Said was precisely on the other side of the fence, in the tradition of anticolonial struggles of Asia, Africa, and Latin America – which he theorised into our reading of Palestine.

You looked at Lewis, and you saw Lawrence of Arabia incarnate – a British colonial officer with a clumsy command over the natives’ language and culture, out in the field to serve the most vicious colonial enterprise of the century. You looked at Said, and you saw him in a direct line from the most revolutionary critical thinkers of all time – alongside Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, VY Mudimbe, Enrique Dussel, and of course Antonio Gramsci and Theodore Adorno.

Said attracted an entire generation of critical thinkers from

every continent on planet earth. Lewis attracted career opportunists who, like him, wanted to be near and dear to power.

In January 2003, just a few months before Said passed away, he and I were invited to Rabat, Morocco for a conference on “Dialogue of Civilisation”. He could not go. He called me from Spain insisting I go.

I went to Rabat, only to learn upon my arrival that Lewis was there, too. For the entire duration of the conference, while I was sitting with the late Egyptian philosopher Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and literary theorist Ferial Ghazoul discussing hermeneutics, Lewis was chaperoned by the young Noah Feldman, the legal adviser to Paul Bremer, who was the “provisional coalition administrator” of Iraq after the US invasion.

In one shot you could see how Lewis was passing the baton of service to empire to the next generation.

The current state of opinion about Bernard Lewis, now appearing in various post-mortem reflections and obituaries, has him hated by the global left, adored by the right-wing Zionists, and in between, you have these goody-two-shoes who try to sound wise and impartial and speak “in nuances”. Yes, he was a great scholar early in his career, they now say, but later his scholarship diminished, and he became too political. Such branding of Lewis, loved by some and hated by others, deeply distorts a much more serious issue.

Beyond the political and

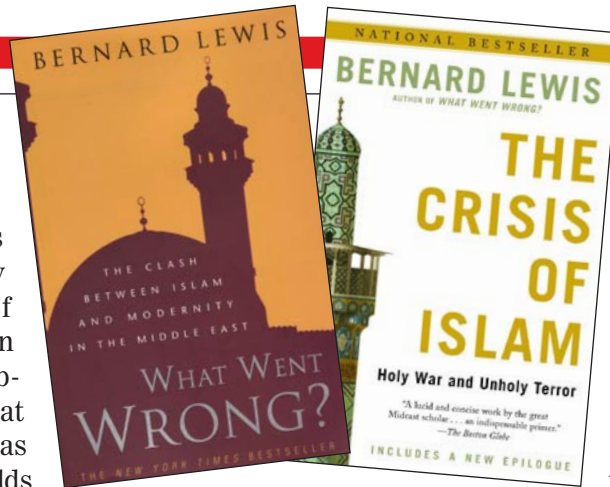
moral abhorrence for Lewis is the legacy of his mode of thinking and writing, his colonially and racially infested manner of knowledge production that was as much subservient to powers that read and enriched him as it was profoundly at odds with the critical turning point in postcolonial knowledge production.

Lewis was no scholar objectively committed to historical truth. Quite the contrary: he has left behind not a single book in which he was not cherry-picking facts and figures to demonise Muslims, dismiss and denigrate their civilisation, and subjugate them normatively, morally, and imaginatively to the colonial domination of those who he served.

His most famous recent book, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2002) is not a work of scholarship. It is a manual of style, an indoctrination pamphlet, for teaching security, military, and intelligence officers in the US and Europe as to why they must seek to control the Muslim world.

Lewis was always on the wrong side of history, blinded by his hatred, animated by the most racist clichés in the trade. His reaction to the rise of Arab revolutions in 2011 is the perfect example of who Bernard Lewis was and how he thought.

“Another thing is the sexual aspect of it”, he opined at the commencement of Arab revo-



WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY: Covers from two of Lewis's books

lutions, “One has to remember that in the Muslim world, casual sex, Western-style, doesn't exist. If a young man wants sex, there are only two possibilities – marriage and the brothel. You have these vast numbers of young men growing up without the money, either for the brothel or the bride price, with raging sexual desire. On the one hand, it can lead to the suicide bomber, who is attracted by the virgins of paradise – the only ones available to him. On the other hand, sheer frustration”.

This is obscenity in black and white – moral, political and intellectual bankruptcy on full throttle.

His book *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (1967), which serious scholars like Farhad Daftary later dismissed as nonsensical gibberish, was definitive to the manner he wanted to portray Muslims – as congenital murderers.

His forte was in manufacturing a cosmic divide between “Islam and the West”, between Muslims and the modern world, a subject that was the

staple of his writing, most condescendingly in his two books: *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (1982) and *Islam and the West* (1993).

Bernard Lewis was no scholar of Islam. He was a British colonial officer writing intelligence for his fellow officers on how to rule the Muslim world better. A *Handbook of Diplomatic and Political Arabic* (1947) – one of his earliest volumes – foretold his career as a colonial scribe at the service of the British and later American empires.

Today, when we think of Bernard Lewis's legacy, we think of the Islamophobic industry that has US President Donald Trump and his gang of billionaires crowned at the White House.

Today, when we think of Bernard Lewis, we think of his political progenies – John Bolton, the national security adviser of the United States, the most degenerate sabre-rattler sitting right behind the US president. Today, when we think of Bernard Lewis, we think of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a notorious bigot with a pathological hatred of Muslims. Today, when we think of Bernard Lewis, we think of Gina Haspel, the newly appointed director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, a woman who ordered the torture of Muslims.

No one was more instrumental in manufacturing the illusion of a fundamental and irrec-

oncilable difference between “Islam and the West” than Lewis – his singular achievement that later Samuel Huntington picked up to produce *The Clash of Civilizations*.

This needs no further evidence and proof than looking at who is praising him after his death. “Bernard Lewis was one of the great scholars of Islam and the Middle East in our time. We will be forever grateful for his robust defense of Israel”, said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, himself, of course, another world-class authority on Islam and the Middle East!

“As a true scholar and a great man”, chimed in newly minted US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, another top-notch scholar in the field of Islamic studies, “I owe a great deal of my understanding of the Middle East to his work [...] He was also a man who believed, as I do, that Americans must be more confident in the greatness of our country, not less. Thank you, Mr. Lewis, for your life of service”.

“You simply cannot find a greater authority on Middle Eastern history”, this according to Dick Cheney, the former vice president who brought us waterboarding and Abu Ghraib torture chambers and who, of course, is also a stellar authority on Islamic history and doctrine himself.

You put Netanyahu, Pompeo, and Cheney together, with their vast love and admiration for Lewis, and you can gather the company he kept, the hatred he

flamed, the death and destruction he sought visited upon the people he “studied” to death.

Bernard Lewis died long before he met his creator. The rich and diversified world of critical thinking – in Asia, Africa, Latin America, as well as in Europe and the US – to which Edward Said was integral and definitive, left Lewis and his books a very long time ago in the dustbin of Orientalist history.

“Lewis’s verbosity”, as Said put it succinctly some 36 years before Lewis died, “scarcely conceals both the ideological underpinnings of his position and his extraordinary capacity for getting everything wrong”.

Lewis is often compared with Said as if the two were equal. They were not. They were the polar opposites in every sense. Said was a towering critical thinker who revolutionised the field of literary and postcolonial studies.

Lewis was an ideological functionary, an intelligence officer, on par with Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, competing for the ears of powerful people to tell them how to hate Muslims more persuasively.

Said enabled the moral authority of a generation of critical thinkers. Lewis taught military strategists how and why to rule Arabs and Muslims more effectively.

The mode of ideological knowledge Orientalists like Lewis produced was not in the

interest of truth and understanding. It was meant to be used in humiliating and denigrating human beings and dominating their worlds and cultures, killing their sense of self-respect, telling them the only worthy thing to be was a white European settler colonialist.

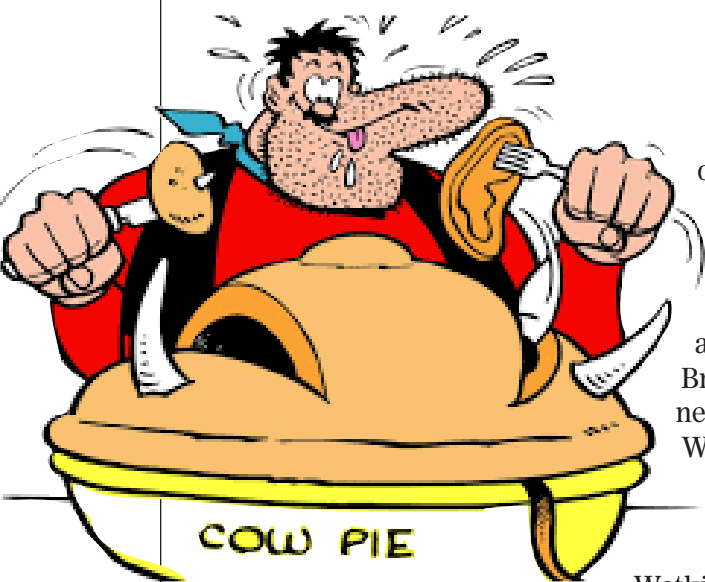
This critique is not solely based on Edward Said’s magisterial book, *Orientalism*. What Lewis produced, French philosopher Michel Foucault – long before Said – called le savoir-pouvoir or power-knowledge: the knowledge that serves power. And it was works like Lewis’ that Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel referred to when he wrote in his book *Philosophy of Liberation*: “That ontology did not come from nowhere. It arose from a previous experience of domination over other persons, of cultural oppression over other worlds. Before the ego cogito, there is an ego conquiro; ‘I conquer’ is the practical foundation of ‘I think.’”

Both Said and Lewis are now gone. But Lewis left behind a racist legacy of raising a fictitious “West” at the expense of “the Rest”, while Said summoned the best and most noble in each for a better future for all. **CT**

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David Anderson tells how artist Dudley D. Watkins made generations of British comic fans roar with laughter

The man behind the legend of Desperate Dan



COW PIE: Desperate Dan tucks in.

YOU may not be familiar with the name Dudley Dexter Watkins, but chances are you will recognise his art. Half a century after his death, the work of the talented British comic strip artist and illustrator is as well known, and as much loved, as it has ever been.

Characters such as Desperate Dan, who Watkins illustrated for *The Dandy* comic, and Lord Snooty for *The Beano*, have remained favourites for many years, their silly antics and predicaments now kept alive by other artists.

This summer, a trail of outdoor statues has been placed across Scotland featuring one of Watkins' most popular creations, Oor Wullie, who appeared alongside The Broons in the *Sunday Post* newspaper from 1936 until Watkins' death in 1969.

Born the son of a lithographer artist in Greater Manchester in 1907,

Watkins was just a few months old when his family moved to Nottingham. It was there that his artistic talents were first recognised. Encouraged by his father, Watkins took up a place at Nottingham School of Art.

By 1925, Watkins had moved to Scotland where his work caught the eye of publishing house DC Thomson. Aged just 18, he joined the Dundee-based company, an employment that would last more than 40 years. During this time, Watkins created some of Britain's most iconic comic characters.

In his first decade with Thomson, Watkins worked on

a group of boys' weekly action papers known as The Big Five – *Adventure*, *The Rover*, *The Wizard*, *The Skipper* and *The Hotspur*. These publications experimented with the comic strip format and focused on sport, school and war adventure stories. Watkins produced many of the front covers for The Big Five, and contributed comic strips to small format supplements that accompanied *The Rover* and *The Skipper*.

In 1936, when Thomson produced a supplement to *The Sunday Post* named The Fun Section, the spikey-haired, dungaree-clad *Oor Wullie* and the close-knit working-class Broons family were born. Written in Scots dialect, the capers of these characters, drawn weekly by Watkins for more than three decades, still feature in the newspaper today.

The look of these characters has changed little since their first appearance. It is this sense of regularity and reassurance

that still arouses nostalgia in generations of readers, fuelled by an inexhaustible range of associated books, clothing and other merchandise.

Spurred on by the success of The Fun Section, Thomson released two new comics for boys and girls: *The Dandy* in December 1937 and *The Beano* in July 1938. These launches brought into being some of Watkins' most recognisable characters including Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty and Biffo the Bear.

Based on an idea by editor Albert Barnes, cow-pie-eating Desperate Dan, one of Watkins' most enduring creations, debuted in the first issue of *The Dandy*. In the black-and-white half-page strip, Dan is seen buying a horse that promptly collapses under the cowboy's considerable weight. Watkins apparently based Dan's super-sized square-jaw on Barnes's own chin, and Dan's exaggerated toughness – he shaves with a blowtorch and shoots a bullet through his hair to part it – personified the robust humour of *The Dandy*.

Watkins' peers acknowledged his rare talent. He was said to draw at lightning speed, effortlessly encapsulating the wit and wonder of his distinctive comic characters. Such was the importance of Watkins' work,



LEGENDARY: The art of Dudley D. Watkins.

he was exempted from active military service during World War II and instead served as a war reserve constable in Fife.

In 1946, Watkins began signing and initialling his published work, a privilege afforded to only a few comic strip artists in those days (it also ensured his loyalty to Thomson following attempts by a rival publisher to lure him away from Dundee).

Wartime paper shortages forced *The Dandy* and *The Beano* into a fortnightly publishing schedule, but by the 1950s not only had Thomson returned to weekly editions of these comics, it had launched two other, tabloid-style, publications – *The Topper* and *The Beezer*. Watkins was tasked with illustrating the front cover characters, introducing Mickey

the Monkey and Ginger to a new generation of humour comic fans.

A prolific artist, Watkins' output extended beyond his Thomson portfolio. Inspired by his Christian faith, he often led Bible discussions and delivered illustrated talks on religious themes to children at the Church of Christ in Dundee. In his spare time, he also drew strip cartoons for *Young Warrior*, a children's paper published by the Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade.

Watkins died at his drawing desk in 1969, aged 62. His artwork, particularly his early strips in comics and annuals, have become increasingly collectable, connecting with current trends for childhood nostalgia.

While many fans still display the same affection for Watkins' characters that they felt as children, the way in which we experience comic strip art alters as we grow up. While as children we simply loved how the drawings captured tongue-in-cheek humour, as adults we are able to view with a more mature appreciation the creative endeavour gone into producing them. **CT**

David Anderson is senior lecturer in Political and Cultural Studies at Swansea University, Wales. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Chris Hedges interviews a renegade British politician who believes the chaos of Brexit may lead to the election of Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister

The world according to George Galloway

28

THERE are few politicians in Britain who are attacked by the courtiers in the press and the mandarins in power more ferociously than George Galloway, a former Member of Parliament and an icon of the left. They routinely shower him with insults and accusations. This is because there are few politicians willing to as ferociously name and condemn the crimes and injustices carried out by the American and British governments.

He has for many years stood up to defend the human rights of Palestinians, thundered against Israeli war crimes and demanded justice, leading him to be attacked as an antisemite. He has long opposed the Western sanctions and the endless wars in the Middle East, generating charges that he is a defender of terrorists. He has steadfastly raised his voice on behalf of those persecuted by the American government, including WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange.

The *Economist* once described Galloway, who spent more than 25 years in Parliament, as “the hate figure for the British establishment”, which, given who constitutes the establishment, is the highest of compliments.

I interviewed Galloway in London.

Hedges: *Let's begin with this strange political moment – the rise of figures like Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, a very Trump-like figure, perhaps a smarter version of Trump. How did we get here? From the start of your political career, you spoke out on behalf of the working class, how it was being attacked through neoliberalism, which corrupted the Labour Party the same way it did the Democratic Party in the United States.*

Galloway: Ontology is important. We need to define what is right-wing and what is populist. Some of the appeal of Trump, of Nigel Farage, the leader of the Brexit Party in Britain, is

the very non-right-wingness. The apparent standing up for the little man, standing up for the worker against big business, against the bankers and the establishment – Trump played that card very well in the Rust Belt of the United States. Nigel Farage played it very cannily in similar places in the Brexit referendum in Britain. The support they garnered was not in fact right-wing, but left-wing. It was an anti-capitalist critique of the kind of finance capitalist model that has beggared millions of people and whole areas of your country and mine. When they say populist, I wonder if they really mean popular. I am attacked as a left-wing populist. But what does that actually mean?

My politics have not changed – perhaps this is a condemnation of me – not a single inch from my teenage years. I stand at exactly the same place. It's everyone else that moved around me. Insofar as the kind of politics and approach and style that I'm employing are popular, that's what drives the



GEORGE GALLOWAY: "My politics have not changed - perhaps this is a condemnation of me - not a single inch from my teenage years".

prevailing orthodoxy crazy. Dr Johnson, a great Englishman of letters, said, "The grimmest dictatorship of them all was the dictatorship of the prevailing orthodoxy". I stand up against that from my political standpoint. So does Farage. So, to an extent, does Trump.

Now we come to the ontology of what you call the resistance. The pussy hats and the achingly liberal resistance to Donald Trump leave me entirely cold. I know they would not be out there protesting the

worst crimes that the Clinton crime family and the crooner Obama would and did commit. It's the vulgarness, the brashness, the ugliness of Trump they oppose. But Trump is just American imperialism without the lipstick. Hillary would have had the lipstick, but the crimes would have been the same - arguably much worse.

Hedges: *Figures like Trump and Boris Johnson are con artists. They are using the issues you spent your political*

career actually fighting for. ...

Galloway: Certainly Boris Johnson. Beyond the mop of blond hair and the rancid morals, I don't think there's that much to compare between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. Boris Johnson is unequivocally a character of the one percent. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. He has spent his whole life in the milieu of the ultra-rich. The real upper class. Donald Trump, on the other hand, is to some extent on the outside. He was fabulously

rich, although six times bankrupt. Perhaps not as rich as he claims. He has some identification with those on the outside. Con artist, definitely. But not the same kind of con artist as Boris Johnson. I was not happy that Donald Trump became the president of the United States. But I was very happy that Hillary Clinton did not.

Hedges: *The Clintons, like Tony Blair, betrayed their base. Obama [did so] as well. He was quite conscious of what he was doing, unlike George W. Bush.*

Galloway: Trump is failing the people he conned. Boris Johnson won't even try to con them. He will not pretend to the British working class that he's in it for them. Not really.

Hedges: *What is the attraction of figures like Johnson and Trump who turbocharge the looting and pillage by the one percent and the consolidation of power by the global oligarchic elite?*

Galloway: The way they win power is by correctly identifying real, material, objective realities amongst the masses of the people. Trump said to the people in the so-called Rust Belt [that] it's the Clintons, NAFTA and super-nationalism, and the finance capital model that these people represent, that have done this to you. That was a correct identification and correct analysis. The fact that he's a creature of the same swamp, and far from draining it is filling it, only comes later. But the



The failure of the Labour government of the 1970s, the rise of Thatcher Reaganomics, knocked the stuffing out of the left. They began to follow the line, "if you can't beat them, join them"

existence of these grievances is what the left ought to have been doing. The British Labour [Party] movement, not just in Parliament, but in a broader movement, even in trade unions, in political parties of the left, bought into neoliberalism. The failure of the Labour government of the 1970s, the rise of Thatcher Reaganomics, knocked the stuffing out of the left. They began to follow the line, "if you can't beat them, join them".

Hedges: *[Margaret] Thatcher reportedly said, "My greatest creation was Tony Blair".*

Galloway: New Labour was her greatest creation. The left went along with that. And then the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a further oceanic loss of confidence. Instead of con-

sistently standing up for working-class interests – against corporate capitalism, against globalised capitalism, standing up for the people of your own country – they liquidated their previous existence. The working people, quite correctly, thought, "You're no longer for me. You're no longer part of me. You're no longer with me". That's a correct identification.

Jeremy Corbyn has rowed back from that into more familiar waters. Insufficiently well, hampered massively by the Blairite rump. It's not really a rump, it's a ramp actually because it's quite a lot of MPs whose main purpose is to sabotage him. I know these are not things that can compare across the Atlantic all that easily. But that's what's happened here. The working class was abandoned by social democrats. Of course, people to the right of them, these populist figures can move in and steal some of their former clothes.

Hedges: *How do we effectively build a political movement that stymies the rise of these very frightening alt-right entities and these political figures? We're not doing a very good job of it in the United States.*

Galloway: Not that good here, either. First, we have to correctly critique what is wrong with the approach of the alt-right populists. That is to say, not critique what is right about what they're saying, but to say it better and more convincingly. To say to the workers in the Rust Belts of our countries,

“We stand for you. We’re going to fight for you and everything that is in your interests we will support. Everything that is against your interests we will oppose. Whoever else is saying the same thing, you can believe us because we are a part of you. We are your party. We are the people who represent you on a daily basis”. Secondly, to develop an iconography, a vocabulary, that can appeal to people. If you’re waving the flag of the European Union, you will leave the working class in the north and the south, in the west, and south Wales, cold.

The people of this country identify with this country. So, you have to. If you sneer at patriotism, if you sneer at people who actually, warts and all, love their country. ... John Lennon once said, “If you want a revolution, don’t go waving pictures of Chairman Mao”. He was right. Chairman Mao leaves them cold on the streets of England. You have to find the iconography, the vocabulary, that fits.

The most impressive figure of my political lifetime was Georges Marchais. He was the leader of the Communist Party of France. He talked of socialism in the colours of France. He talked of France keeping its nuclear weapons but pointing them both ways. He was a figure of the French working class. It’s no accident that as an individual he was the most popular political figure in France, left or right.

Hedges: Are xenophobia and

Islamophobia the driving forces behind support for Brexit?

Galloway: If you fill the atmosphere with hatred of the Muslims as an other, to further your foreign policy abroad, you’re going to get blowback at home. If you tell everyone that one new Hitler after another – from Nasser, through Arafat, Saddam Hussein, Gadhafi, Bashar al-Assad ... I’ve probably forgotten a few Hitlers on the Nile and the Euphrates – if you fill people, the atmosphere, with that kind of mentality, then how do you expect some people not to blame Abdul, who owns the news agent, or the 7-Eleven, on the corner? It’s inevitable. We predicted it. It’s come to pass.

Hedges: *Is the resurgence of white nationalism an effective mechanism in the hands of figures like Trump and Boris Johnson? Does this divide the country and disempower socialists such as yourself?*

Galloway: There is racism in Britain, of course; how can it be otherwise? We were the senior partner in empire for a very long time. You can’t have an empire without notions of racial superiority. How else can you justify occupying and ruling other people and their countries? You’re the father figure holding their hand until they are able to govern themselves. There is racism in Britain. But if you think Britain’s racist, you’ve never lived in France.

It is not as bad in Britain as it is elsewhere in the European Union. Similarly, there are real material reasons for

racial antagonism on the part of the majority here. The British government moved a group of Islamist fanatics to Manchester who were known as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. The clue was in the name. That Libyan Islamic Fighting Group were cosseted there by the British state for the day they could be sent back to fight in Libya.

One of their sons blew up a lot of our children in the Manchester Arena not that long ago at an Ariana Grande pop concert. It’s legitimate to hate the people who did that. It’s not racist to hate the people who murdered people on this very bridge. [He motioned toward London Bridge.] [Who] cut their throats, drove cars into them. It’s not racist to hate them. If you claim it is, you are actually helping the racists. The existence of an element of Islamist fanaticism on the edges of the Muslim community here in Britain or anywhere in the world should be attacked as ruthlessly by the left as it is for opportunistic reasons by the right.

This is a mistake the left has made. I always say to people, “Never confuse me with a liberal”. I’m not a liberal. I’m actually quite ill-liberal in many regards. I’m a socialist, not a liberal; that’s a different thing. Never get caught seeming to support extremism amongst sections of the community. Be as ruthless. If I was the mayor of London, I’d be hunting down al-Qaida. I’d be out there in a high-vis vest with the police in the mornings, raiding their houses. Whereas quite often,

the so-called left looks like they care more about the criminal than the victim. They care more about the human rights of the terrorists than the victim of the terrorist. So, we have to be much smarter.

Hedges: *I have interviewed members of al-Qaida and Islamic Jihad. These figures do not come out of religious households. They came out of petty crime, sometimes more than petty crime, drug addiction.*

Galloway: Sri Lanka is the first time one of these suicide mass murderers came from families that were actually religious and not petty criminals. So, that's undoubtedly true. But it's not to say they don't exist. They exist. They are a Siren on the rocks, seeking to lure young Muslims onto those rocks of extremism and a cult of death. We have to call them out. We have to struggle against it. It can't only be solved by the military, the police and legal action. It's necessary but not sufficient.

Hedges: *The North African immigrants that live in banlieues outside of Paris have no jobs. They live in appalling conditions. The racism, as you pointed out, in France runs very deep. They are segregated from most French people. They are not considered – although they may have lived in France since they were two – to be French by the French. They go back to Tunisia and they're not considered Tunisian. There's a loss of identity, a loss*



We contributed to the rise of fanaticism ... by supporting corrupt dictators, medieval kingdoms, leaving the people of these countries bereft of any other path out of their misery

of work. These are the contributing factors, which gets back to the reconfigurations of these economies by neoliberalism, which cast aside not just immigrants but huge sections of the working class and working poor as human refuse.

Galloway: Exactly. I've just been writing for my website about the BBC series *The Looming Tower*. We contributed to the rise of this fanaticism in three ways. The first one you just mentioned. The second is by endlessly supporting by all means corrupt dictators, medieval kingdoms, leaving the people of these Muslim countries bereft of any other path out of their misery. Thirdly, by directly assisting al-Qaida and ISIS in Iraq, in Syria. We provided funding, weapons, propaganda and other material on the prin-

ciple that my enemy's enemy is my friend. So, if an Islamist fanatic is blowing himself up in the Caucasus, in Chechnya, that's fine. We'll help him. We'll talk about his human rights. But if he's running on the bridge in London cutting people's throats, we'll describe him in quite different terms. Thrice we have assisted the development of this fanaticism.

Hedges: *Those of us who stand up for Palestinian rights are immediately attacked as anti-Semites. The press is an echo chamber, amplifying those attacks. Does Israel have a lock on Britain as they do in the United States?*

Galloway: It doesn't. But it has a bigger lock than I imagined. The last four years of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, the success by which they have done that, the scale of which they have done that, shows they do have a bigger lock than I thought. Not even in Israel does this Zionist movement have a bigger lock than it does in the United States. Nothing compares to that.

It's a trick. An Israeli Cabinet minister, Shulamit Aloni, giving me dinner in her house in Tel Aviv, literally told me it was. "It's a trick", she said. "We always do it". They do it because it works. If someone stands up for Palestinian rights, the first default position is to call them an antisemite. The fact that someone like me [is attacked as an antisemite], with my politics, and the basis of my politics is so heavily Jewish, from

Marx, through Trotsky and Chomsky. Half of the Bolshevik Party's central committee was Jewish. According to the right wing, I am involved in a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. The idea that I can be described as an antisemite is pitifully absurd. Ditto Jeremy Corbyn, who comes out of the same stable as me more or less. I'd like to think it doesn't work. But to some extent it does. My wife, who is a person of colour, an Indonesian woman, was abused in the street the other day as the wife of an antisemite, the wife of a racist. It's absurd and effective, but less effective than it was before. If you call everybody an antisemite, then eventually nobody is an antisemite. The boy who cried wolf is a parable of note for a reason.

Hedges: *The real antisemites, the Christian right of the United States, have become a political ally of Israel. It's the equation of*

anti-Semitism with opposition to the government of Israel. One of the biggest racists in the Middle East is [Israeli Prime Minister] Bibi Netanyahu.

Galloway: There's worse than him waiting in the wings.

Hedges: *Where are we going? It's a frightening direction if things don't go right. What are the forces that frighten you? What does the left have to do?*

Galloway: I'll be honest, I'm not as pessimistic as you. I have faith in the people. I always have. I can only speak for my own people here. We hate fascism. We stood alone against fascism. Anyone who presents in the form of fascism will be rejected here. There's not a single fascist councillor in Britain, not a single fascist MP in Britain. There never will be. Fascists are counted in the hundreds, not in the millions, like they are in many European countries. They are in almost

every parliament in Europe. They're in many governments in Europe. But they never will be here.

I believe in the chaos of the British political scene at the moment. It's perfectly possible that the Labour Party could be the next government. Maybe soon. Parliament is in complete chaos over the Brexit issue. It's one of the reasons I supported Brexit. But not the main reason. Out of that chaos, it may welcome a Jeremy Corbyn-led government. As someone who has known Corbyn well for 40 years, I can hardly believe I'm saying those words. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a New York Times best-selling author, a professor in the college degree program offered to New Jersey state prisoners by Rutgers. This interview was first published at www.truthdig.com



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If you are wondering why I would buy vaginal eggs, especially as I don't have a vagina, then you obviously do not have celebriphilia, writes **Michael McCaffrey**

Obsessed Americans look to the stars for guidance

AMERICANS are blessed to have a plethora of benevolent celebrities who are willing to share their infinite knowledge and wisdom with them.

After a thorough examination by a team of top-notch doctors, I was recently given some very disturbing news ... I was diagnosed with an acute case of stage 4 platonic celebriphilia. In case you don't know, celebriphilia is a disease where the afflicted have an abnormal and overwhelming adoration of celebrity.

My medical team, which includes Dr Phil, Dr Drew and Dr Oz, tells me that the symptoms of celebriphilia include feeling a false sense of familiarity and intimacy with celebrities which leads to the afflicted projecting an inordinate amount of inappropriate intelligence, wisdom and expertise upon celebrities.

My celebriphilia first manifested itself a few years ago when Academy Award winning actress Gwyneth

Paltrow created her "lifestyle brand" Goop. Through Goop, Gwyneth sold new age, alternative therapies and devices at exorbitant prices, including "vaginal eggs" that were meant to be inserted into the vagina in order to aid "hormonal balance, and feminine energy".

After re-mortgaging my home in order to finance the purchase, I bought a dozen vaginal eggs from Gwyneth. Now if you are wondering why I would buy vaginal eggs whose miracle powers were debunked in a lawsuit, especially since I don't have a vagina, then you obviously do not have celebriphilia.

The way I see it is this, if I had a vagina, I would trust my friend Gwyneth to tell me (and sell me) the right wonder egg to stick into it in order to cure whatever ails me. If I'm going to trust anyone regarding my non-existent vagina, you can bet your bottom dollar it would be the woman who played Pepper Potts in the Iron Man movies ... that alone makes her an authority in vaginacology.

The same is true of anti-vaccination proponent Jenny McCarthy. Jenny is a TV host and former Playboy model, which is the celebrity equivalent of being a Phd in immunology, which is why I faithfully obey her when she orders me not to vaccinate my kids because they could get autism.

Suzanne Somers starred on Three's Company 40 years ago, which is equal to getting a Master's Degree in Bio-Genetic Engineering, and so when, contrary to mainstream medical opinion, she claims that "bio-identical hormone therapy" is the fountain of youth ... I trust in Suzanne's knowledge and wisdom.

You may think my Celebriphilia is so severe I need to take some medication to temper it ... well ... you'd be wrong. Kirstie Alley and her Scientology Lord and Saviour, Tom Cruise, have informed me that psychiatry is a "quack" science and psychiatric drugs are dangerous. Kirstie was on Cheers, where everybody knows your

name ... and Tom Cruise is ... well ... TOM CRUISE!! So they definitely know what they're talking about and I trust their expertise implicitly and will remain untreated, thank you very much.

My celebriphilia isn't limited to just medical questions, the infection has spread to my thoughts on foreign policy and politics too. Thanks to celebriphilia I now blindly trust in Hollywood to tell me what to think. When Hollywood churns out star-studded, pro-war, pro-empire propaganda films and tv shows that have their scripts controlled by the Pentagon in exchange for military equipment, personnel, access and budgetary relief, I absorb the indoctrination unquestioningly.

We celebriphiliacs only get our news from rebellious comedians like John Oliver, Bill Maher and Stephen Colbert, and believe in every establishment talking point they sell us. I whole-heartedly put my faith in these second rate hack comedians desperate to stay in the good graces of their corporate overlords to tell me the unvarnished truth.

As a celebriphiliac I get all my insights regarding Russia from Rob Reiner, who is an expert because he played Meathead on the 1970's sitcom All in the Family. When Meathead tells me that we are at war with Russia because they stole our election in 2016, I treat his anti-Russian proclamations with all the respect it deserves.

To get my political opinions I go to all the top experts ... Rob-

ert DeNiro, Matt Damon, Bruce Willis, Brie Larson, Alec Baldwin, Tim Allen, Angelina Jolie, James Woods, Chris Evans and George Clooney. Sometimes these experts have conflicting opinions on political matters, like maybe Bruce Willis and Alec Baldwin disagree on tax policy, or Tim Allen and Chris Evans have opposing thoughts on immigration. In order to resolve these deeply troubling quagmires, I do the logical thing and choose what I believe by siding with the celebrity who has the most Twitter followers.

Luckily for me, I am not alone in being afflicted with celebriphilia, as it is a raging epidemic in America. Here in the USA we adore our celebrities so much we actually vote them into high office. In the last forty years alone we have elected a senile, bad B-movie actor, Ronald Reagan, and a silver-spooned, D-list reality TV con-man, Donald Trump, to the presidency.

In my state of California, the epicentre of the celebriphilia epidemic, we have elected a sex-abusing, steroid-injecting, son-of-a-Nazi, movie star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to two terms in the Governor's mansion, and the city of Carmel-by-the-Sea elected Dirty Harry himself, Clint Eastwood, to be mayor 25 years before he berated an empty chair at the RNC convention in 2012.

We American celebriphiliacs not only forgave these men for their shortcomings, we also imbued them with a wisdom, competency and expertise they

did not possess, all because of their status as celebrity.

You may think that because I suffer from celebriphilia and treat celebrities like experts on things well outside their skill set, that I am insane. If the definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results", then considering the level of corruption, incompetence and malevolence on display by "real" establishment experts in government, Wall Street, Big Pharma and the media over the years, be it in regards to 9-11, WMD's and the Iraq war, the housing bubble and ensuing 2008 economic collapse, the 2016 election, Russiagate and the opioid epidemic, then listening to, believing in, or trusting in these "official" experts is equally as insane as buying vaginal wonder eggs from Iron Man's wife, Pepper Potts.

The bottom line is this, I am not a doctor, nor do I play one on TV, but I have seen other people play them on TV, and I am a certified celebriphiliac, which I think qualifies me to make a formal diagnosis of what ails celebrity obsessed, and expert-addled America. After careful study and deep thought I have come to this conclusion ... contrary to popular opinion, America is not losing its mind ... just like me, it has already lost it. **CT**

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Michael McCaffrey is a Los Angeles based columnist, film critic and screenwriter, whose work can be found at www.mpmacting.com/blog

After his third reading of 1984, **Tom Engelhardt** is confident that he - along with the rest of us - has been living in a dystopian world for all of his life

Orwell revisited in the age of Trump

I, **WINSTON SMITH** - I mean, Tom Engelhardt - have not just been reading a dystopian novel, but, it seems, living one - and I suspect I've been living one all my life.

Yes, I recently reread George Orwell's classic 1949 novel, *1984*. In it, Winston Smith, a secret opponent of the totalitarian world of Oceania, one of three great imperial superpowers left on planet Earth, goes down for the count at the hands of Big Brother. It was perhaps my third time reading it in my 75 years on this planet.

Since I was a kid, I've always had a certain fascination for dystopian fiction. It started, I think, with *War of the Worlds*, that ur-alien-invasion-from-outer-space novel in which Martians land in southern England and begin tearing London apart. Its author, HG Wells, wrote it at the end of the 19th-century, evidently to give his English readers a sense of what it might have felt like to be living in Tasmania, the island off the coast of Australia, and

have the equivalent of Martians - the British, as it happened - appear in your world and begin to destroy it (along with your culture).

I remember, at perhaps age 13, reading that book under the covers by flashlight when I was supposed to be asleep; I can remember being all alone, chilled (and thrilled) to the bone by Wells' grim vision of civilisational destruction. To put this in context: in 1957, I would already have known that I was living in a world of potential civilisational destruction and that the Martians were here. They were then called the Russians, the Ruskies, the Commies, the Reds. I would only later grasp that we (or we, too) were Martians on this planet.

The world I inhabited was, of course, a post-Hiroshima, post-Nagasaki one. I was born on July 20, 1944, just a year and a few days before my country dropped atomic bombs on those two Japanese cities, devastat-

ing them in blasts of a kind never before experienced and killing more than 200,000 people. Thirteen years later, I had already become inured to scenarios of the most dystopian kinds of global destruction - of a sort that would have turned those Martians into pikers - as the US and the Soviet Union (in a distant second place) built up their nuclear arsenals at a staggering pace.

Nuclear obliteration had, by then, become part of our everyday way of life. After all, what American of a certain age who lived in a major city can't remember, on some otherwise perfectly normal day, air-raid sirens suddenly beginning to howl outside the classroom window as the streets emptied? They instantly called up a vision of a world in ashes. Of course, we children had only a vague idea of what had happened under those mushroom clouds that rose over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As we huddled under our desks, hands over heads, "ducking and cover-



What American of a certain age who lived in a major city can't remember air-raid sirens suddenly beginning to howl outside the classroom window as the streets emptied? They instantly called up a vision of a world in ashes

ing” like Bert the Turtle while a radio on the teacher’s desk blared Conelrad warnings, we knew enough, however, to realise that those desks and hands were unlikely to save us from the world’s most powerful weaponry. The message being delivered wasn’t one of safety but of ultimate vulnerability to Russian nukes. After such tests, as historian Stephen Weart recalled in his book *Nuclear Fear*, “The press reported with ghoulish precision how many millions of Americans ‘died’ in each mock attack”.

If those drills didn’t add up to living an everyday vision of the apocalypse as a child, what would? I grew up, in other words, with a new reality: for the

first time in history, humanity had in its hands Armageddon-like possibilities of a sort previously left to the gods. Consider, for instance, the US military’s Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) of 1960 for a massive nuclear strike on the Communist world. It was, we now know, meant to deliver more than 3,200 nuclear weapons to 1,060 targets, including at least 130 cities. Official, if then secret, estimates of casualties ran to 285-million dead and 40-million injured (and probably underestimated the longer term effects of radiation).

In the early 1960s, a commonplace on the streets of New York where I lived was the symbol for “fallout shelters” (as they

were then called), the places you would head for during just such an impending global conflagration. I still remember how visions of nuclear destruction populated my dreams (or rather nightmares) and those of my friends, as some would later admit to me. To this day, I can recall the feeling of sudden heat on one side of my body as a nuclear bomb went off on the distant horizon of one of those dreams. Similarly, I recall sneaking into a Broadway movie theatre to see *On the Beach* with two friends – kids of our age weren’t allowed into such films without parents – and so getting a glimpse, popcorn in hand, of what a devastated, nuclearised San Fran-

cisco might look like. That afternoon at that film, I also lived through a post-nuclear-holocaust world's end in Australia with no less than Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, and Fred Astaire for company.

So my life – and undoubtedly yours, too – has been lived, at least in part, as if in a dystopian novel. And certainly since November 2016 – since, that is, the election of Donald Trump – the feeling (for me, at least) of being in just such a world, has only grown stronger. Worse yet, there's nothing under the covers by flashlight about The Donald or his invasive vision of our American future. And this time around, as a non-member of his “base,” it's been anything but thrilling to the bone.

It was with such a feeling growing in me that, all these years later, I once again picked up Orwell's classic novel and soon began wondering whether Donald Trump wasn't our very own idiosyncratic version of Big Brother. If you remember, when Orwell finished the book in 1948 (he seems to have flipped that year for the title), he imagined an England, which was part of Oceania, one of the three superpowers left on the planet.

The other two were Eurasia (essentially the old Soviet Union) and Eastasia (think: a much-expanded China). In the book, the three of them are constantly at war with each other on their borderlands (mostly in South Asia and Africa), a war

**It's a world in which
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newspaper, every bit
of history is constantly
being rewritten**

that is never meant to be either decisive or to end.

In Oceania's Airstrip One (the former England), where Winston Smith is a minor functionary in the Ministry of Truth (a ministry of lies, of course), the Party rules eternally in a world in which – a classic Orwellian formulation – “WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.” It's a world of “inner” Party members (with great privilege), an outer circle like Smith who get by, and below them a vast population of impoverished “proles”.

It's also a world in which the present is always both the future and the past, while every document, every newspaper, every bit of history is constantly being rewritten – Smith's job – to make it so. At the same time, documentation of the actual past is tossed down “the memory hole” and incinerated. It's a world in which a “television” is in every room, invariably announcing splendid news (that might have been terrible news in another time). That screen can also spy on you at just about any moment of your life. In that, Orwell, who lived at

a time when TV was just arriving, caught something essential about the future worlds of surveillance and social media.

In his dystopian world, English itself is being reformulated into something called Newspeak, so that, in a distant future, it will be impossible for anyone to express a non-Party-approved thought. Meanwhile, whichever of those other two superpowers Oceania is at war with at a given moment, as well as a possibly mythical local opposition to the Party, are regularly subjected to a mass daily “two minutes hate” session and periodic “hate weeks.” Above all, it's a world in which, on those telescreens and posters everywhere, the moustachioed face of Big Brother, the official leader of the Party – “Big Brother is watching you!” – hovers over everything, backed up by a Ministry of Love (of, that is, imprisonment, re-education, torture, pain, and death).

That was Orwell's image of a kind of Stalinist Soviet Union perfected for a future of everlasting horror. Today, it might be argued, Americans have been plunged into our own bizarre version of 1984. In our world, Donald Trump has, in some sense, absorbed into his own person more or less everything dystopian in the vicinity. In some strange fashion, he and his administration already seem like a combination of the Ministry of Truth (a ministry of eternal lies), the memory hole (down which the past, es-

pecially the Obama legacy and the president's own discarded statements, disappear daily), the two-minutes-hate sessions and hate week that are the essence of any of his rallies ("lock her up!", "send her back!"), and recently the "hate" slaughter of Mexicans and Hispanics in El Paso, Texas, by a gunman with a Trumpian "Hispanic invasion of Texas" engraved in his brain. And don't forget Big Brother.

In some sense, President Trump might be thought of as Big Brother flipped. In The Donald's version of Orwell's novel, he isn't watching us every moment of the day and night, it's we who are watching him in an historically unprecedented way. In what I've called the White Ford Bronco presidency, nothing faintly like the media's 24/7 focus on him has ever been matched. No human being has ever been attended to, watched, or discussed this way – his every gesture, tweet, passing comment, half-verbalised thought, slogan, plan, angry outburst, you name it. In the past, such coverage only went with, say, a presidential assassination, not everyday life in the White House (or at Bedminster, Mar-a-Lago, his rallies, on Air Force One, wherever).

Think of Donald Trump's America as, in some sense, a satirical version of 1984 in crazed formation. Not surprisingly, however, Orwell, remarkable as he was, fell short, as we all do, in imagining the future. What he didn't see as he rushed to finish that novel



PRESCIENT: George Orwell.

before his own life ended makes the Trumpian present far more potentially dystopian than even he might have imagined. In his book, he created a nightmare vision of something like the Communist Party of the Stalin-era Soviet Union perpetuating itself into eternity by constantly regenerating and reinforcing a present-moment of ultimate power. For him, dystopia was an accentuated version of just such a forever, a "huge, accurately planned effort to freeze history at a particular moment of time," as a document in the book puts it, to "arrest the course of history" for "thousands of years".

Yes, in 1948, Orwell obviously knew about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the weaponry that went with them. (In 1984, he even mentions the use of such weaponry in the then-future 1950s.) What he didn't imagine in his book was a dystopian world not of the grimmest kind of ongoingness but of endings, of ultimate destruction.

He didn't conjure up a nuclear apocalypse set off by one of his three superpowers and, of course, he had no way of imagining another kind of potential apocalypse that has become increasingly familiar to us all: climate change.

Unfortunately, on both counts Donald Trump is proving dystopian indeed. He is, after all, the president who threatened to unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" on North Korea (before falling in love with its dictator). He only recently claimed he could achieve victory in the almost 18-year-old Afghan War "in a week" by wiping that country "off the face of the Earth" and killing "10-million people". For the first time, his generals used the "Mother of all Bombs", the most powerful weapon in the US conventional arsenal (with a mushroom cloud that, in a test at least, could be seen for 20 miles), in that same country, clearly to impress him.

More recently, beginning with its withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, his administration has started trashing the Cold War-era nuclear architecture of restraint that kept the great-power arsenals under some control. In the process, it's clearly helping to launch a wildly expensive new nuclear arms race on Planet Earth. And keep in mind that this is happening at a time when we know that a relatively localised nuclear war between regional powers like India and Pakistan (whose

politicians are once again at each other's throats over Kashmir) could create a global nuclear winter and starve to death up to a billion people.

And keep in mind as well that all of the above may prove to be the lesser of Donald Trump's dystopian acts when it comes to the ultimate future of humanity. After all, he and his administration are, in just about every way imaginable, doing their damndest to aid and abet climate change by ensuring that ever more carbon will be released into the atmosphere, warming an already over-heated planet further. That's the very planet on which humanity has, since 1990, burned half of all the fossil fuels ever used. Despite the Paris climate accord and much talk about the necessity of getting climate change under some kind of control, carbon is still being released into the atmosphere at record levels. (Not surprisingly, US emissions began rising again in 2018.)

This summer, amid fierce heat waves in the US, Europe, and elsewhere, as well as the setting of global heat records, with parts of the Arctic literally burning (while heating twice as fast as the world average), with Greenland melting, and the Antarctic losing sea ice in record amounts, some of the predictions of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for the relatively distant future already seem to be in sight. As climate scientist Marco Tedesco put it recently, speaking of the Arctic, "We are

We are already on a dystopian planet, with threats to our food supply, the swamping of coastal cities, with heat rising to levels that may become unbearable

seeing ice melting now that we expected 30 to 40 years from now".

We are, in other words, already on a dystopian planet. With threats to the world's food supply and the swamping of coastal cities lying in our future, with the migration of previously unheard of populations in that same future, with heat rising to levels that may, in some places, become unbearable, leaving parts of the planet uninhabitable, it is at least possible now to imagine the future collapse of civilisation itself.

And keep in mind as well that our own twisted version of Big Brother, that guy with the orange hair instead of the moustache, could be around to be watched for significantly longer, should he win the election of 2020. (His polling numbers have, on the whole, been slowly rising, not falling in these years.)

In other words, with the American president lending a significant hand, we may make it to 2084 far sooner than anyone expected. With that in

mind, let's return for a moment to 1984. As no one who has read Orwell's book is likely to forget, its mildly dissident anti-hero, Winston Smith, is finally brought into the Ministry of Love by the Thought Police to have his consciousness retuned to the needs of the Party. In the process, he's brutally tortured until he can truly agree that $2 + 2 = 5$. Only when he thinks he's readjusted his mind to fit the Party's version of the world does he discover that his travails are anything but over.

He still has to visit Room 101. As his interrogator tells him, "You asked me once what was in Room 101. I told you that you knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world". And that "worst thing" is always adjusted to the specific terrors of the specific prisoner.

So here's one way to think of where we are at this moment on Planet Earth: Americans – all of humanity, in fact – may already be in Room 101, whether we know it or not, and the truth is, by this steaming summer, that most of us should know it.

It's obviously time to act on a global scale. Tell that to Big Brother. **CT**

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Tom Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a history of the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. His latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War* (Dispatch Books). This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

Somebody stole the presidency from Clinton. If it wasn't the Russians, it had to be the fascists! I mean, after all, who else is there? asks **CJ Hopkins**

Manufacturing mass fascism hysteria

If the neoliberal ruling classes expect to keep the American masses worked up into a white-eyed hysteria over “fascism” until November 2020, they’re going to need to get some better Nazis: the current crop is just not going to cut it. They are neither scary nor Nazi enough. OK, the militia ones look kind of scary, and that “Based Spartan” guy looks kind of ... uh, weird, but most of them just look like regular old rednecks. How hard would it be to get them some brown shirts, or those khaki pants like they wore in Charlottesville, or some other type of Nazi-like uniform?

And some jackboots. People love those jackboots.

Seriously, the Resistance need to get their official narrative optics in order, and they need to do it without delay. Millions of liberals are standing by to be brainwashed into a year-long frenzy of manufactured mass “fascism” hysteria, but they are going to need some halfway convincing Nazis to

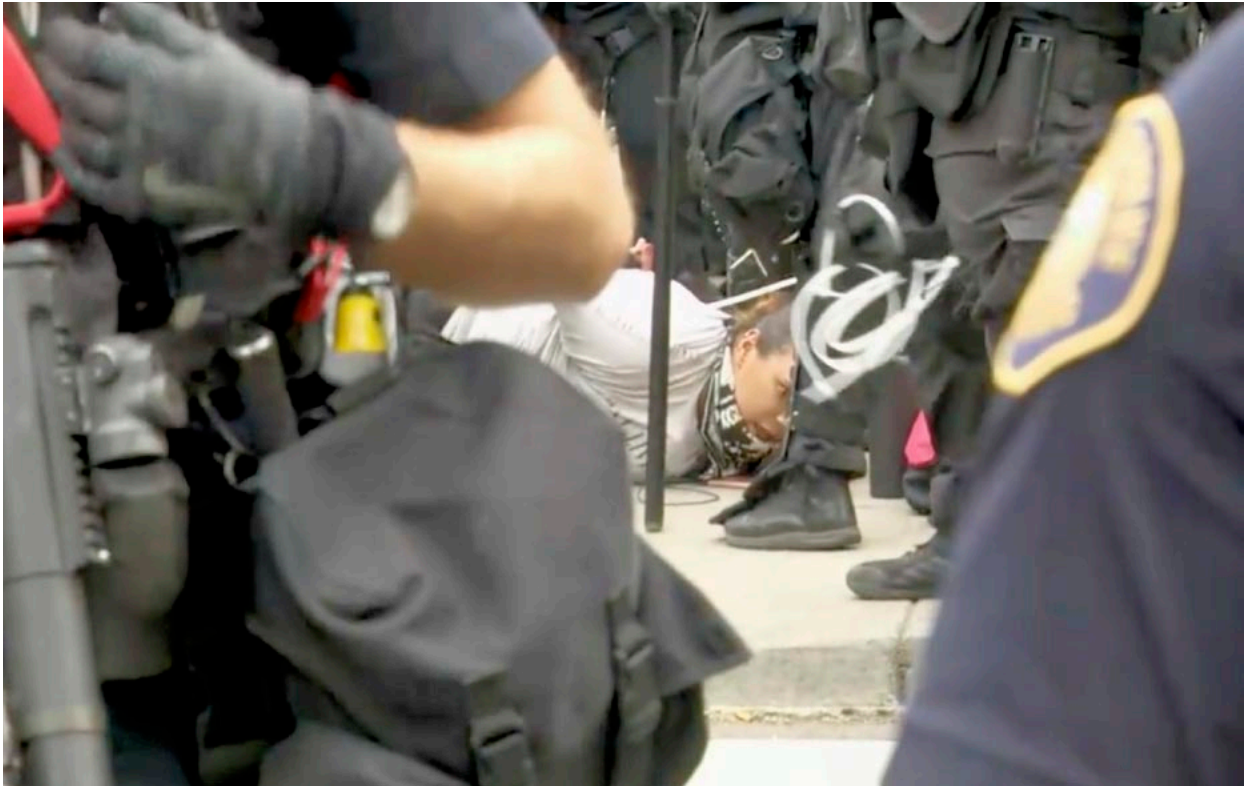
spastically freak out over. A few hundred bozos in MAGA hats parading around with American flags does not exactly a *Sturmabteilung* make.

I’m referring, of course, to the latest “fascist invasion” of Portland that took place last month, which, according to the corporate media, and Antifa, and local fascism experts, was supposed to be a veritable bloodbath. Heavily-armed white supremacist terrorists were flying in from around the country to indiscriminately murder as many “Black, Asian, Latino, indigenous, immigrant, Pacific islander, disabled, houseless, and LGBTQ persons” as possible. This white supremacist terrorist killfest was going to be revenge for the preventively self-defensive beating of Andy Ngo, “the most dangerous fascist grifter in America”, by Antifa militants earlier in August.

Ngo (whom most people had never heard of until Antifa mil-

itants beat him senseless), although he poses as a legitimate journalist by writing for outlets like the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Post*, *Quillette*, and so on, is allegedly a fascist intelligence asset in charge of compiling fascist “kill lists” consisting of the names of assorted well-known Portland anti-fascist figures (who most people had also never heard of until they claimed that Ngo had put them on his “kill list”).

Alexander Reid Ross, for example, an extremely influential “fascism expert”, outreach specialist, and geography teacher, who is hot on the trail of the Putin-Nazi plot to form a syncretic alliance of Assad-loving, Duginist, LaRouchian Nazis led by Max Blumenthal and Vanessa Beeley, or possibly Glenn Greenwald and Tucker Carlson ... or something more or less along those lines (see Ross’ seminal paranoid ravings, which the SPLC was forced to retract by Blumenthal’s fascist legal counsel.) Ross reportedly remains in hiding in a safe-



42

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT: Street protester is handcuffed by the Portland police.

house in an undisclosed location somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, presumably protected by the FBI, while he continues his important work.

And then there are the notorious Proud Boys, a gang of self-described “Western chauvinists” who apparently haven’t been laid in years. According to the SPLC (which has designated them an official “hate group”), there are three degrees of membership within the Proud Boys, and to become a first degree in the “pro-West fraternal organisation” a prospective member simply has to declare “I am a western chauvinist, and I refuse to apologise for creating the modern world”.

To enter the second degree, a Proud Boy has to endure a beat-

ing until they can yell out the names of five breakfast cereals (in order to demonstrate “adrenaline control”) and give up masturbation because, in theory, it will leave them more inclined to go out and meet women. Those who enter the third degree have demonstrated their commitment by getting a Proud Boys tattoo. Any man – no matter his race or sexual-orientation – can join the fraternal organisation as long as they “recognise that white men are not the problem”.

Such is the calibre of the cast the Resistance are featuring in their “fascism” fantasy. As you can see, it’s not exactly the A-list. If they’re going to stick

with the “fascism” hysteria from now until November 2020 (which is really the only option they have left, what with “Russiagate” having blown up in their faces), the least they can do is get some real Nazis, and some semi-respectable Nazi hunters, and cut out this pathetic Portlandia nonsense.

The Resistance owes liberals at least that much, especially after making them look like fools by leading them on for three years with their ridiculous “Russiagate” hysteria. Sure, the “fascism” hysteria is an easier sell, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have to sell it. It’s not like they can just abruptly switch from the “Russiagate” narrative to the “fascism” narrative (as if their Rus-

siagate hoax had not just been exposed) and expect liberals to go along with it like the members of some enormous cult.

Or, I don't know ... maybe they can. The *New York Times* certainly appears to think so. Check out this exchange between executive editor Dean Baquet and an anonymous staffer at an emergency in-house "town hall" meeting convened after the *Times* changed a page one headline because it didn't paint Trump as racist enough. (The transcript is Slate's; emphasis is mine.)

Staffer: I'm wondering what is the overall strategy here for getting us through this administration and the way we cover it ... people don't understand. I think they get confused as to what we're trying to do.

Baquet: OK. I mean, let me go back a little bit for one second to just repeat what I said in my in my short preamble about coverage. *Chapter 1 of the story of Donald Trump, not only for our newsroom but, frankly, for our readers, was: Did Donald Trump have untoward relationships with the Russians, and was there obstruction of justice?* That was a really hard story, by the way, let's not forget that. We set ourselves up to cover that story. I'm going to say it. We won two Pulitzer Prizes covering that story. And I think we covered that story better than anybody else.

"The day Bob Mueller walked off that witness stand, two things happened. Our readers who want Donald Trump to go

away suddenly thought, "Holy shit, Bob Mueller is not going to do it." And Donald Trump got a little emboldened politically, I think. Because, you know, for obvious reasons. *And I think that the story changed. A lot of the stuff we're talking about started to emerge like six or seven weeks ago. We're a little tiny bit flat-footed. I mean, that's what happens when a story looks a certain way for two years. Right?*

"I think that we've got to change. I mean, *the vision for coverage for the next two years is what I talked about earlier: How do we cover a guy who makes these kinds of [racist] remarks? How do we cover the world's reaction to him? How do we do that while continuing to cover his policies? How do we cover America, that's become so divided by Donald Trump? How do we grapple with all the stuff you all are talking about? How do we write about race in a thoughtful way, something we haven't done in a large way in a long time? That, to me, is the vision for coverage. You all are going to have to help us shape that vision. But I think that's what we're going to have to do for the rest of the next two years*".

For anyone not entirely fluent in Pulitzer-winning Professional Journalism Speak, that translates roughly as "OK, no more Russia stuff. We're switching to the fascism and racism stuff, and we'll be hammering on it until Trump is his-

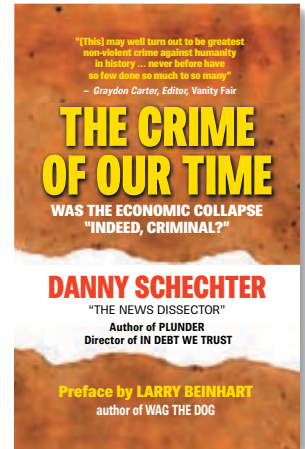
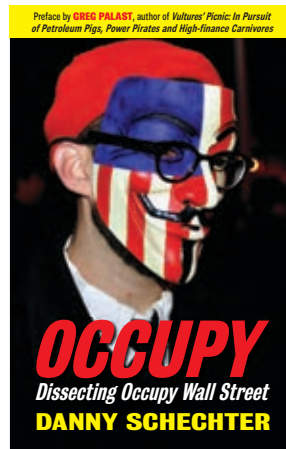
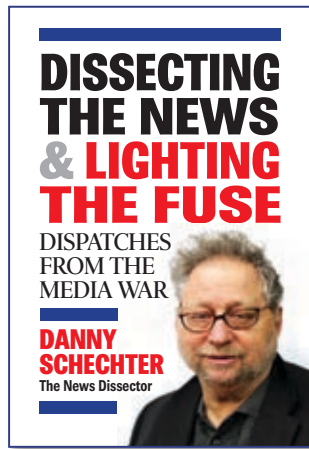
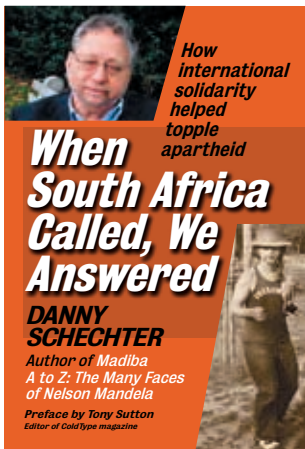
tory".

Which is fine with me. I don't like Donald Trump. And Americans are certainly racists ... uh, working class Americans, that is. Sorry, *white* working class Americans, not Black people, or the staff of the *New York Times*, or the neoliberal ruling classes. Unless they're disabled, or houseless, or Latino, or indigenous, or LGBTQ (ie, the white working class Americans, not the ruling classes). In which case, they get a pass on the racism. But the rest of us are all white supremacists, and homophobic antisemites, and xenophobic racist transphobes, and ... well, basically, a bunch of Nazis.

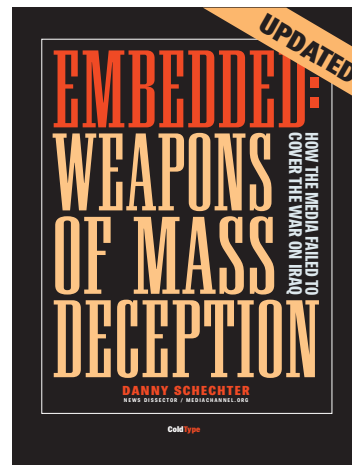
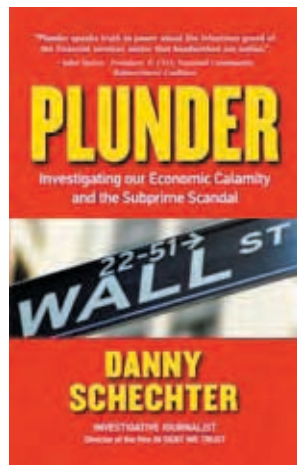
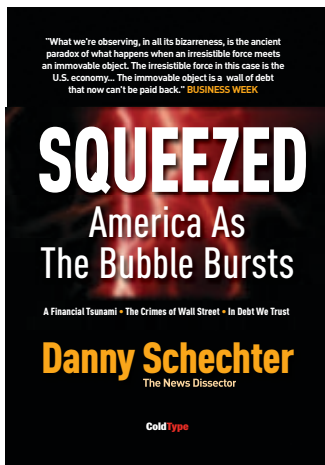
What? You don't believe that most white Americans are Hitler-loving, Sieg-heiling Nazis who want to mass murder all the Jews and the Mexicans and re-enslave all the African Americans? How do you think Donald Trump got elected? Somebody stole the presidency from Clinton. If it wasn't the Russians, it had to be the fascists! I mean, after all, who else is there? **CT**

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CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, *ZONE 23*, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or at www.consentfactory.org

REMEMBERING DANNY SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



44



Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

<http://coldtype.net/SchechterBooks.html>

Insights

If statues could talk

By Philip A. Farruggio

A POEM by Emma Lazarus on the base of the Statue of Liberty contains the following words: *Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me. I lift my light beside the golden door.*

What, I wonder, would our Miss Liberty say if she could speak? One imagines that she would have much to say about the empire that now owns her tons of metal. How could she not?

If you're a working stiff who is but a few paychecks from financial instability, then you are tired. Tired, perhaps, of working too many jobs to pay the man. Or tired of working a dead end job for a bum paycheck. Maybe you are tired from having to trek too far for that job you need. Or perhaps you are a single mom (or dad) who is tired from having to work full time in addition to being responsible for your children's well being.



Forgotten words: New York City's Statue of Liberty.

If you're poor, well, you have way too many obstacles on the road to sustenance. The 'safety net' that was once called government services has been, decade by decade, cut beyond recognition. To rely on the 'charity of others' may have worked well in rural community of the far past, but not now.

If you live in a big city or near factories and plants that puke out pollution, then you

are not breathing free. If you're a convict placed in some 'for profit' prison due to a non-violent crime, who knows how long you will be kept before able to 'breathe free'? Or if you are one of those seeking to cross the border to find work and living accommodations, well, Uncle Donald is keeping you as 'huddled masses'.

As far as 'the wretched refuse of your teeming shore', this doesn't have to be about people, rather the tons of plastics and other items that poison our waters and our wildlife, the waste that our government, and big business, the real culprits, do nothing about as it destroys our drinking water, our groundwater, and our lungs.

The poem says, *I lift my light beside the golden door.* Well, the only way that can be accomplished is if too many of us, the ones the poem describes, stand up and begin speaking truth to power. Frederick Douglass said it best: "Power concedes nothing without demand. It never has. It never will." **CT**

Philip A Farruggio is the son and grandson of Brooklyn NYC longshoremen and a graduate of Brooklyn College, class of 1974. He is host of the 'It's the Empire... Stupid' radio show, and may be contacted at paf1222@bellsouth.net



AVARICE: "Look at credit card rates and how they devour lives. Why shouldn't banks accept some losses..."

46

Climate and debt have always been linked

By Rick Salutin

INDULGE me. Michael Hudson, an eminent left economist, has spent decades studying ancient Mideast economies. Ancient as in Sumer or Babylon. His latest book is ... *and forgive them their debts: Lending, Foreclosure and Redemption from Bronze Age Finance to the Jubilee Year*. Trust me. It's a gas.

History Begins at Sumer: 39 Firsts was a famed book back when I studied that era myself. It started around 3000 BC, including math, astronomy, weights and measures -- one enduring first was debt. It might've begun with owing another family for doing them

some harm. Or needing a loan when weather went bad or soil degraded.

But, Hudson says, with enduring truth, debt always "rises faster than the ability of debtors to pay" -- exactly as we, and especially the young, have experienced in our lifetimes. Debt skyrockets and makes you crazy. It's been "the major cause of economic polarisation from antiquity" to now.

So Sumer's rulers, 4,500-5,000 years ago, decreed periodic, society-wide debt cancellations or "clean slates." They didn't do it out of decency but rather to revitalise a farming "middle" class, which

could then provide them with labour for public projects such as palaces, temples or irrigation; serve as soldiers against invaders; and forestall social fissures. One was Hammurabi, whose renowned "code" recorded many debt amnesties. A thousand years later, the Hebrew Bible copied this in the form of debt forgiveness and Jubilee years.

Back then it wasn't assumed that "all debts must be paid" and all debtors must pay. It was evident that things regularly veer out of control and, at least sometimes, lenders should suffer the consequences. I mean, look at credit card rates and how they devour lives. Why shouldn't banks accept some losses?

Yet after 2008, banks were bailed out as if their survival was sacred while individuals were left to lose their homes, rather than the reverse. It's seen as a law of nature or the mandate of heaven, no matter what damage lenders do. Why doesn't the burden fall on those who push untenable loans on desperate debtors? Instead we feel guilty. Our debts must be paid. But I digress.

The point is that Sumer's leaders, who weren't selfless, acted from the POV of what was socially best overall, not for particular groups like nobles, landlords or lenders. They aimed to restore balance and

order when everything went askew. Their subjects didn't seem to resent excess at the top as long as it didn't utterly impoverish and enslave them. The shared aim was to at least get things back to where they were, rather than deteriorating further. Hudson calls this a cyclical view of history, versus our linear ideas of limitless progress.

You can see how this implicates the climate crisis. Right now, the goal is simply to prevent the planet from declining endlessly. To arrest decay and restore ecological balances that existed previously. Revive forests and glaciers. Most of us would be happy with leadership that was merely, but fearlessly, dedicated to that. Don't aim for the sky, just being able to see it.

In addition, climate has always been implicated in the rise of debt, as it was for Sumerian farmers after droughts or floods. It's not so different now, when people lose homes to wildfires or must move inland from the coasts. They need money, they're desperate, so they borrow. The more things change ...

When the carnage created by bankers and their ilk piles up enough profits, they effectively "govern" their societies – exactly as Bernie Sanders now claims about "millioneahs and billioneahs." The only force that could possibly constrain them was, back then, semi-divine monarchs like Hammurabi and today, "the state." This

exactly presages today's debates over the priority given to active government versus unhampered "market forces." The more things change ...

So it's not surprising that, in our corporatised milieu, those regimes have a bad rep as "oriental despotism." Hudson says they counted, in their time, as equalising "progressives" – though everything's, of course, relative.

But you gotta admire a guy

who dismisses perennial darlings like Athens and Rome as the sources of our so-called civilization, in favour of ancient Mesopotamia – located basically where modern Iraq is: a place relentlessly battered and disparaged by that upstart empire, the USA. Cool.

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Rick Salutin writes about current affairs and politics. This article was first published in the *Toronto Star*

Mass shootings and the rage of alienation

By Ted Rall

MASS shootings prompt simple explanations of the gunman's motivation. At Columbine High School in Colorado, the killers supposedly snapped after being bullied. The guy who shot up a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado was wild-eyed carrot-topped nuts. After a massacre at a Walmart in El Paso, an anti-immigrant manifesto posted online pointed to right-wing politics. Simple mental illness – if there is such a thing – appears to be the culprit in Dayton, Ohio. Also misogyny. But the Dayton shooter's Twitter feed indicates the shooter liked Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. So

right-wing media blames his progressive leanings.

And when there is no obvious explanation such as in Las Vegas in 2017, when the mass murderer doesn't leave a final message and doesn't appear to have subscribed to extremist politics and was financially secure, but drank a lot and may have bought into Internet conspiracy theories, we shrug our shoulders and forget about it. But deep inside we believe there is a simple answer. We just haven't discovered it yet.

Gun control advocates want to ban assault rifles like the semi-automatic AR-15 used in so many mass shootings. But even if those guns disappeared

overnight, gun-related massacres would still occur, albeit with lower body counts. Which would be nice, but it wouldn't address the big question, the one we secretly ask ourselves after such incidents: where does the rage come from?

Flailing about in search of the enablers of personal mass violence (as opposed to state-ordered mass violence) is useful as far as it goes. The NRA and the gun lobby make money with every firearm purchase. Victims of mental illness go uninsured and thus undiagnosed and untreated. Hateful rhetoric, most common on the right and most recently epitomised by President Trump, legitimise the dehumanisation of future victims.

In the beginning, though, is rage.

The blind anger that, like the medieval image of a succubus insinuating itself into a previously healthy brain, suggests that shooting a lot of people is either a solution or at least a satisfying way of venting, is the germ of the idea that leads to the first shot being fired at a military base, an elementary school, a country music concert.

The rage says, "I hate everybody". It continues, "I wish everyone would die". It concludes, "I will kill them all".

I am mystified by the fact that so many people are mystified about rage.

I have been there. I have

hated everyone. I have been so depressed that I didn't care what happened to me. I was furious at how oblivious everyone was to my pain and how nobody cared about me. I wanted them to pay for it. Haven't you ever felt that way?

Mostly it was when I was younger. In junior high school, when I was relentlessly bullied and beaten up and neither my classmates nor my teachers interfered – to the contrary, they thought it was funny – I fantasised about going to school and shooting everyone there.

When I was a junior in college, I spent finals week at the hospital due to a freak injury. Several of my professors refused to allow me to take a make-up exam because they were lazy, I got Fs and landed on academic probation, and the following semester one mean teacher gave me a C+ and so I got expelled. I lost my job, my dorm room and thus a place to live and wound up homeless on the streets of New York. Watching people go about their day, smiling and laughing and exchanging pleasantries and buying luxuries while I was starving, I despised them. Of course it wasn't their fault. I knew that. What was their fault, in my view at the time, was their active decision not to engage in the struggle for a world that was fair and just, not just to me, but to everybody.

I imagine that most, if not

all, homeless people feel that way watching me stroll down the street on my stupid smartphone. They hate me and they are right to hate me.

The NRA and the weapons business and Congress share responsibility, but what really causes mass shootings is the shooters' alienation from society.

Why doesn't America enforce mental health insurance parity? Because the American people don't care enough to raise enough hell to force our elected officials to do so. If you have ever been broke and needed to see a therapist, you probably found out that they charge at least \$200 an hour and that your insurance company probably won't cover it – assuming that you have insurance. American society's message to you is loud and clear: we don't care about you. Go ahead and be insane. Die. Returning society's contempt for you is perfectly understandable.

The so-called "incel" (involuntarily celibate) movement of men who hate women because they won't sleep with them is a perfect example of society's refusal to try to understand a legitimate concern. In 2014 an incel killed six people near Santa Barbara. "I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it", the killer said in a video he posted before his rampage. In 2018 an incel killed 10 people in Toronto with his van.

Experts recommend writing laws to deny incels access to guns, shutting down their online forums so that they don't work each other up, and improving their access to mental health care. Those may be good ideas. But they ignore the root of the problem.

Obviously no one has to have sex with anyone. Incels don't have a constitutional right to get laid. But anyone who has ever been young and sexually frustrated (or old and sexu-

ally frustrated) knows that sexlessness can literally drive you crazy. Glibly suggesting to awkward or clueless or physically unattractive men to hit the gym and get their charm on is just as hopelessly naïve as Nancy Reagan's "just say no" campaign. Feeling condemned to a life without love or physical companionship really truly sucks and we could start by acknowledging that.

Rage, I think, comes less from having a problem that feels hopelessly unsolvable than from the belief that no

one gives a damn about you or your issues. People need to feel heard. People need to be heard.

Given how callous and unfeeling we are about so much suffering around us and among us, the only thing surprising about mass shootings is that they don't happen more frequently. **CT**

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Ted Rall, the political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, is the author of *Francis: The People's Pope*. His web site is www.rall.com - Twitter: @tedrall

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



Will Johnson move UK's embassy to Jerusalem?

By **Craig Murray**

FOLLOWING US National Security Advisor John Bolton's recent talks with Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his ministers in London, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been asked to speed up planning for the UK to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, with an eye to an "early announcement" post Brexit.

The UK is currently bound by an EU common foreign policy position not to follow the United States in moving its embassy to Jerusalem. As things stand, that prohibition will fall on November 1.

FCO officials had previously been asked to produce a contingency plan, but this involved the construction of a £14-million new embassy and a four-year time-scale. They have now been asked to go back and look at a quick fix involving moving the ambassador and immediate staff to Jerusalem and renaming the consulate already there as the embassy. This could be speedily announced, and then implemented in a year.

Johnson heads the most radically pro-Israel cabinet

in UK history and the symbolic gesture of rejection of Palestinian rights is naturally appealing to his major ministers Home Secretary Priti Patel, Chancellor Sajid Javid, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. They see three other political benefits.

Firstly, they anticipate that Labour opposition to the move can be used to yet again raise accusations of "antisemitism" against Jeremy Corbyn, the opposition leader.

Secondly, it provides good "red meat" to Brexiteer support in marking, they believe, popular break from EU foreign policy, at no economic cost.

Thirdly, it seals the special link between the Trump and Johnson administrations and sets the UK apart from other NATO allies.

Bolton also discussed the possibility of UK support for Israeli annexation of areas of the West Bank to "solve" the illegality of Israeli settlements on occupied territory. My FCO sources believe this is going to be more difficult politically for the cabinet to agree than simply moving the embassy, due to lack of support on their own backbenches.

This is an insight into the future of British foreign policy if the Johnson government, and the UK, both survive. In the massive defeat of the UK at the UN General Assembly two months ago over the illegal occupation of the Chagos Islands, the UK was in a voting bloc with only the US, Israel, Australia, Hungary and the Maldives, against the rest of the world.

The Maldives had a maritime interest there, but the leadership of the others – Donald Trump, Viktor Orban, Scott Morrison, Benjamin Netanyahu and now Boris Johnson – constitutes an extreme right-wing bloc. These are very worrying times indeed. **CT**

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. This article was first published at [www. CraigMurray.org.uk](http://www.CraigMurray.org.uk)



MOVING?: The British embassy in Tel Aviv.

The killer clowns are taking over the world

By **George Monbiot**

SEVEN years ago the brilliant impressionist Rory Bremner complained that politicians had become so boring that few of them were worth mimicking: “They’re quite homogenous and dull these days ... It’s as if character is seen as a liability.” Today, his profession has the opposite problem: however extreme satire becomes, it struggles to keep pace with reality. The political sphere, so dull and grey a few years ago, is now populated by preposterous exhibitionists.

This trend is not confined to the UK – everywhere the killer clowns are taking over. Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage, Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro, Scott Morrison, Rodrigo Duterte, Matteo Salvini, Recep Erdogan, Viktor Orban and a host of other ludicrous strongmen – or weakmen as they so often turn out to be – dominate nations that would once have laughed them off stage. The question is why? Why are the deathly technocrats who held sway almost everywhere a few years ago giving way to extravagant buffoons?

Social media, which is an

incubator of absurdity, is certainly part of the story. But while there has been plenty of good work investigating the means, there has been surprisingly little thinking about the ends. Why are the ultra-rich, who, until recently, used their money and newspapers to promote charisma-free politicians, now funding this circus? Why would capital wish to be represented by middle managers one moment and jesters the next?

The reason, I believe, is that the nature of capitalism has changed. The dominant force of the 1990s and early 2000s – corporate power – demanded technocratic government. It wanted people who could simultaneously run a competent, secure state and protect profits from democratic change. In 2012, when Rory Bremner made his complaint, power was already shifting to a different place, but politics had not caught up.

The policies that were supposed to promote enterprise – slashing taxes for the rich, ripping down public protections, destroying trade unions – instead stimulated a

powerful spiral of patrimonial wealth accumulation. The largest fortunes are now made not through entrepreneurial brilliance but through inheritance, monopoly and rent-seeking: securing exclusive control of crucial assets, such as land and buildings, privatised utilities and intellectual property, and assembling service monopolies such as trading hubs, software and social media platforms, then charging user fees far higher than the costs of production and delivery. In Russia, people who enrich themselves this way are called oligarchs. But this is not a Russian phenomenon, it is a global one. Corporate power still exists, but today it is overlain by – and is mutating into – oligarchic power.

What the oligarchs want is not the same as what the old corporations wanted. In the words of their favoured theorist Stephen Bannon, they seek the “deconstruction of the administrative state”. Chaos is the profit multiplier for the disaster capitalism on which the new billionaires thrive. Every rupture is used to seize more of the assets on which our lives depend. The chaos of an undeliverable Brexit, the repeated meltdowns and shutdowns of government under Trump: these are the kind of deconstructions Bannon foresaw. As institutions, rules and democratic oversight implode, the oligarchs extend their wealth and power at our expense.

The killer clowns offer the

oligarchs something else, too: distraction and deflection.

While the kleptocrats fleece us, we are urged to look elsewhere. We are mesmerised by buffoons, who encourage us to channel the anger that should be reserved for billionaires towards immigrants, women, Jews, Muslims, people of colour and other imaginary enemies and scapegoats. Just as it was in the 1930s, the new demagoguery is a con, a revolt against the impacts of capital, financed by capitalists.

The oligarch's interests always lie offshore: in tax havens and secrecy regimes. Paradoxically, these interests are best promoted by nationalists and nativists. The politicians who most loudly proclaim their patriotism and defence of sovereignty are always the first to sell their nations down the river. It is no coincidence that most of the newspapers promoting the nativist agenda, whipping up hatred against immigrants and thundering about sovereignty, are owned by billionaire tax exiles, living offshore.

As economic life has been offshored, so has political life. The political rules that are supposed to prevent foreign money from funding domestic politics have collapsed. The main beneficiaries are the self-proclaimed defenders of sovereignty, who rise to power with the help of social media ads bought by

persons unknown, and think-tanks and lobbyists that refuse to reveal their funders. A recent essay by the academics Reijer Hendrikse and Rodrigo Fernandez argues that offshore finance involves “the rampant unbundling and commercialisation of state sovereignty” and the shifting of power into a secretive, extraterritorial legal space, beyond the control of any state. In this offshore world, they contend, “financialised and hypermobile global capital effectively is the state”.

Today's billionaires are the real citizens of nowhere. They fantasise, like the plutocrats in Ayn Rand's terrible novel *Atlas Shrugged*, about further escape. Look at the “seasteading” venture funded by Paypal's founder Peter Thiel, that sought to build artificial islands in the middle of the ocean, whose citizens could enact a libertarian fantasy of escape from the state, its laws, regulations and taxes, and from organised labour. Scarcely a month goes by without a billionaire raising the prospect of leaving the Earth altogether, and colonising space pods or other planets.

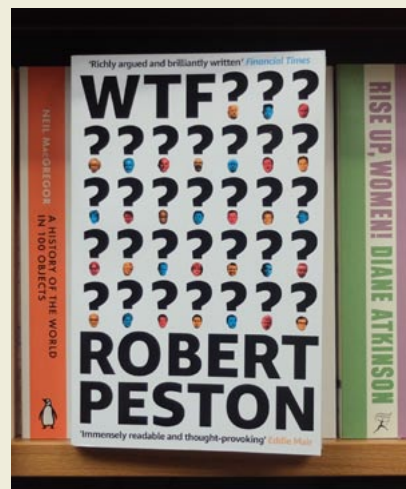
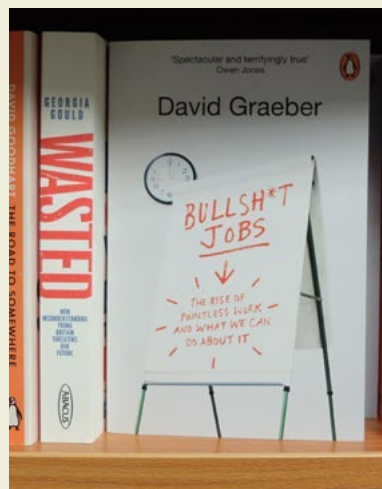
Those whose identity is offshore seek only to travel further offshore. To them, the nation state is both facilitator and encumbrance, source of wealth and imposer of tax, pool of cheap labour and seething mass of ungrateful plebs, from whom they must flee, leaving the wretched earthlings to their well-deserved fate.

Defending ourselves from these disasters means taxing oligarchy to oblivion. It's easy to get hooked up on discussions about what tax level maximises the generation of revenue. There are endless arguments about the Laffer curve, that purports to show where this level lies. But these discussions overlook something crucial: raising revenue is only one of the purposes of tax. Another is breaking the spiral of patrimonial wealth accumulation.

Breaking this spiral is a democratic necessity, otherwise the oligarchs, as we have seen, come to dominate national and international life. The spiral does not stop by itself: only government action can do it. This is one of the reasons why, during the 1940s, the top rate of income tax in the US rose to 94 percent, and in the UK to 98 percent. A fair society requires periodic corrections on this scale. But these days the steepest taxes would be better aimed at accumulated unearned wealth.

Of course, the offshore world the billionaires have created makes such bold policies extremely difficult: this, after all, is one of its purposes. But at least we know what the aim should be, and can begin to see the scale of the challenge. To fight something, first we need to understand it. **CT**

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George Monbiot is a columnist at *The Guardian*, where this was first published. His web site is www.monbiot.com



53

Sh*t! We're b**ked!

It was a smart marketing move when an enterprising publisher produced a bestseller with the word *Fuck* conveniently half-masked by a large asterisk in its title. That not-so-subtle note to readers – Look how cool and smart we are! – worked for a while, but overuse has transformed urban coolness into what might now be seen as oh-hum desperation. A glance through the bestseller displays at WH Smith and Waterstone’s, Britain’s biggest booksellers (after Amazon, of course), during a recent trip to England shows it’s time publishers listened to their own advice and *Get a F*cking Grip* on themselves. But a glance at books in a Canadian Indigo book shop suggests otherwise. A self-help display has five books with obsc*inities in the title, including *Stop Doing That Sh*t*, “from the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Unfu*k Yourself*”. *Tony S*ttton*



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