

Three INTERVIEWS

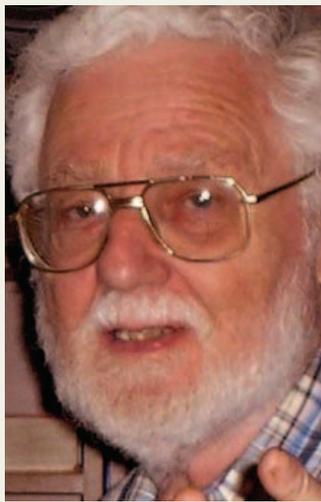
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JOE BAGEANT

Interviewed by
Joshua Frank

“We sit here on the Internet spewing electrons across circuit boards that keep Bill Gates and the stock brokers farting through silk while we preach to the choir who bought our books”



WILLIAM BLUM

Interviewed by
Jason S. Miller

“Allende didn’t deliberately antagonize the US as Chavez does. I wish Chavez would cool it a bit. He’s antagonizing homicidal maniacs, literally”



NORMAN SOLOMON

Interviewed by
Adam Howard

“For people in Vietnam or Iraq, or for U.S. soldiers who are sent to those countries to kill and be killed, it didn’t matter whether LBJ or George W. Bush felt remorseful or gleeful”

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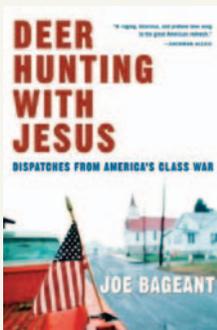
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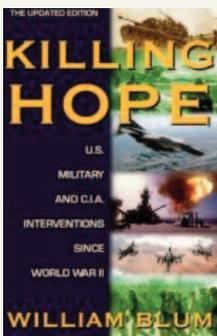
3. EAT, FIGHT, FUCK, PRAY

JOE BAGEANT'S new book is **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches From America's Class War**, published by Random House Crown.

His web site is <http://www.joebageant.com>

Interviewer Joshua Frank is co-editor of Dissident Voice – <http://www.dissidentvoice.com> – and author of Left Out! How Liberals Helped Reelect George W. Bush (Common Courage Press, 2005),

and with Jeffrey St. Clair, the editor of the forthcoming Red State Rebels, to be published by AK Press in March 2008.

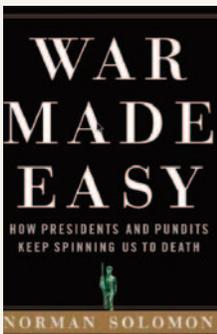


8. RESURRECTING HOPE

WILLIAM BLUM is the author of **Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2, Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower, and Freeing the World to Death.**

His website is <http://www.killinghope.org>

Interviewer Jason Miller is Cyrano's Journal Online's associate editor. His blog, Thomas Paine's Corner is at <http://www.bestcyrano.org/THOMASPAINE>



11. THE LIES OF WAR

NORMAN SOLOMON'S latest book is **War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.** The movie of the book has just been released.

His web site is <http://www.normansolomon.com>

Interviewer Adam Howard is the editor of PEEK, a department of <http://www.alternet.com>, where this interview was otiginally published.

Joe Bageant

EAT, FIGHT, FUCK, PRAY

INTERVIEW BY JOSHUA FRANK

Joe Bageant, the author of *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War*, just published by Random House Crown, recently spoke with Joshua Frank, co-editor of the web site Dissident Voice, about his new book, religion, rednecks and what it's like to serve beer to an underage horse.

Joshua Frank: *So Joe, what the hell is going on with the redneck strain of the working class anyway? Why do they seem more apt to embrace evangelism rather than a labor union? Is it, as psychologists would say, learned helplessness, or worse, idiocy?*

Joe Bageant: Well, Josh, that's a pretty broad brush you're painting with there. In fact, it's too broad to be answered, but that will not stop me from responding with my usual shrillness and tin drum noise punctuated by flatulence. Let me start by saying the term redneck does not apply especially to southerners. I have found indigenous redneck culture and communities in Maine, Oregon Kansas, New York, Massachusetts, and California ... in virtually every state and in large numbers. Among loggers, cowboys, poles, Germans, and even Latino rednecks.

Really. Don't you think beer and low riders

and macho sports aesthetic of Latinos, the heterosexual, patriotic Jesus-focused Catholic is that much different from their Jesus-focused Baptist Dixie and Midwestern counterparts? The low riders of LA are the same as beer and muscle cars of the south. In fact the first rednecks were probably the striking miners at the Ludlow Colorado massacre, who wore red bandanas and were seen as tough, surly, angry working class people who had to be kept down. The sun on the neck definition is another more recent one that got applied especially to Southerners, during the civil rights era I suppose.

We have been taught to use these ethnic, regional and racial labels to cover up the real issue in America that the rich want keep hidden another 200 years – that we are a classist country. That one class owns pretty much the whole country these days and that all the rest are left to suck hind tit and pretend they are all members of something called “the middle class.” The only real middle class is that thin layer of commissars, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and other caterers to the empire, those people necessary to manage it and count the beans, dumb down the kids and lock up enough people to keep the privatized gulags in business.

Anyway, I assume you are referring to the

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heartland white working class people who attend fundamentalist churches. Ever since around 1800 about one-third of white America has been fundamentalist Christians, about one-third of Americans have had a born again experience. The thing that is different now is that these churches have access to political power. They were welcomed across the church-state wall of separation by cynical GOP strategists to whom giving the Republicans another chance to sack Washington, loot the national kitty and maybe pull off a good oil raid in the Middle East, was more important than our constitution. Now that they've let John Calvin's wooly beast into the tent, we find it chewing on the constitution and generally stinking up the joint – it's not going to leave without a fight.

As to the last parts of your question: When it comes to embracing the church instead of a labor union, I can remember a time when the churches stood behind the labor unions. Have we learned to be helpless? Man, we are helpless. Capitalist conditioning has replaced citizenship with consumerism. I mean, what are you or I doing? I write a book so the global publishing chain of Bertelsmann makes more money; you and I both sit here on the Internet spewing electrons across circuit boards that keep Bill Gates and the stock brokers farting through silk while we preach to the choir who bought our books. There are far better alternatives. We could grab some axe handles and heat up the tar bucket and start to burn some shit down. That still works you know.

Frank: *I've always thought that'd work.*

Bageant: But we won't. Because we are all programmed to participate through purchase, whether it is my book at Barnes and Noble or the software that enables us to read CounterPunch. Or choose the candidate that has

been preselected and purchased in advance by the people who have essentially made Americans into a nation of iPod-implanted pizza drivers and well dressed lawn jockeys sitting in front of monitors on the empire's electronic plantations.

Frank: *So how can we change this political myopia?*

Bageant: Our involvement with politics, our political lives, are merely as spectators who listen to commercials for three years before the magical moment before we “cast our vote” by simply going shopping in the tiniest shopping space of all – the voting booth – with the most limited choices possible that can still be called a choice: two twin parties whose parents, the corporations, have to display them against different colored backgrounds so people can get a clue as to their difference. (“I am for fighting the war until the last dog is dead,” as opposed to “I am for pulling the troops out, but not until a few hundred thousand more dogs are dead. I don't wanna be seen as weak on the dead dog thing.” Or my favorite, “We can't leave now or there will be chaos?” What the fuck is it we have created there now?) Right now the owning class, Westchester Country Club Democrats, is offering us two flavors, Hillary Clinton (bitter vanilla) and Barrack Obama (Mocha hope.)

Soooo ... What's going on politically with the great beery redneck nation? Nothing. We don't think about politics until the last half hour before time to vote. Then a sort of a heartburn grips our chests, and all the negative campaign ads, and the sound of Bill O'Reilly's voice and last night's beer and bratwurst and Hillary's stern beady eyes drill in on us ... preachers call down lightning bolts and fighter planes do a double roll over the desert ... then suddenly an acidic clot curdles in our throat, we close our eyes and we projectile vomit all our fears and

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suspicious and prejudices and state injected messages in the direction of the party making the most noise right up until the last minute. That's what we do down here.

What do ya'll do?

Frank: *Well, I grew up in Montana with rednecks aplenty. Most of my own family is small farmers who were forced to move to the little towns in the area because of the onset of industrial agriculture. They lost the land they worked. Most of them are still proud rednecks. I respect the work ethic, but not all the culture that goes along with it. Up in Big Sky country, folks know politicians lie, so they put their trust in God instead.*

Pick up trucks. Gun racks. Elk hunting. Beer drinking. It's a way of life there. I enjoy most of it. It takes some pretty damn rough times before people stand up and say, enough is enough! You'd think they'd be screaming from the mountaintops by now. But they haven't because they don't think they can do a damn thing about their lot. And that's where you get a lot of that anti-government sentiment. The Freeman and the Unabomber. It resonates quite well. As it should. The state doesn't stand up for the little guy, but for the big corporations and they know it. The elites, however, always seem to capitalize off of their collective weakness – mainly their inability to stand up in the face of power. But anymore, the mainstream “right” and “left” are almost one in the same when it comes to the fundamental economic issues of our times.

Anyway, this is supposed to be an interview with you. Not me!

Bageant: I lived in northern Idaho for years and had a lot of truck with Montanans like yourself. And to me they are among the best people in this country, tough uncomplaining people, kinda like Southerners, but with far less racism (unless

you happen to be an Indian). Once when I was tending bar on the reservation, a Montana cowboy led his horse right into the place and demanded a beer for his steed. He had been drunk for two days, driving south toward New Mexico with his horse trailer, down from Alberta, Canada, and was obviously looking for a good, old time, tension-releasing brawl. “Well sir,” I told him. “That horse ain't old enough to drink.” “That horse is 18,” he replied. I peeled back the horse's lips and checked his teeth. I had horses of my own and knew how to check their age. “That horse is nine years old,” I said. “Just about the age a good cow pony starts getting some real sense.” He threw back his head and laughed. The situation was defused and we sat there in the Bald Eagle Bar and jawed until closing time. A good, tough, brave man of the kind America doesn't make anymore. Tipped me ten dollars, then went off to wrap himself in a blanket and sleep in his truck until first light.

At the same time though, there is a belief in authority, a reverence even, that is so typically American. America has never been a nation of true dissenters. Even during the Sixties. Don't let the old newsreels fool you. You gotta remember that when those kids were gunned down at Kent State, one half of America was cheering and an even larger portion did not give a shit. But the footage was so shocking, and we actually had a rather liberal media back then, and so, like Twin Towers footage, it was shown over and over and written about until the message finally soaked in. But Americans for the most part are on the side of their own oppressor and like it that way. Heartland Americans were happy when the working man was shot down at Ludlow, and happy when the Bohunk and Pollack miners were gunned down at the Latimer mines (again, the rewriters of history have made it seem otherwise). The good people of the heartland were happy with the kangaroo courts that

Joe Bageant

framed and murdered Joe Hill and Sacco and Venzetti. And today they are happy when they see police in black Kevlar beating down young radicals in Seattle and old Jewish women in Miami protesting turning that city into a free trade zone labor gulag.

Frank: *Your book has been put out by a major publishing house. As you note, these cats are in the business of making money, and I'm assuming they wanted to make your book palatable to the run-of-the-mill liberal audience. What was that process like?*

Bageant: For lefties it can be infuriating. My publisher is Random House, owned by Bertelsmann, the former Nazi German publisher that made massive profits from Jewish slave labor and published anti-Jewish propaganda for Hitler. It also owns Doubleday, Bantam, and a slew of other media around the world. So today we see the irony of scores of Jewish editors etc working for Bertelsmann, but this time instead of tattoos, they are sporting Blackberries, worrying about theater tickets and treating their Salvadorian nannies like shit.

Anyway, big publishers such as Random House Crown roll the ball right down the middle of the aisle looking for a strike to sell the most books to the broad middle class. No leftie gutter balls. Let Seven Arrows have 'em. On the other hand, Crown publishes Anne Coulter, which tells you something about the real middle road and what sells. Everyone must do that to keep their jobs and climb the ladder of the company, which constitutes the corporate brand allegiance that is their lives, livelihood and personal identity in the Empire. Their lives are the brand. The brand is their lives. As in, "I am an editor at Harper Collins, the one who did the Martini Book of Common Wisdom," or "Hillary's book," or whatever.

At one end, you have the editors, many of

whom care about the life of the mind but have internalized capitalist market driven values, and thus feel courageous when they really are not. At the other end you have the company management, who see all books merely as units. Naturally, in a system like that, the pull is always rightward toward profit-driven and non-risky thinking. Consequently, the American reading public for idea-based books, which is small as hell, thinks it is expanding its knowledge through reading when they buy books, when actually, all most want to do is see their viewpoints reaffirmed. But what really happens is that they are drawn more rightward by the narrowness of available choices in a marketplace that loves the homogeneity and standardization of thought which makes marketing much easier.

In all fairness though, I would be the first to say that a publisher like Random House seems to put energy, resources and talent behind you, once they are committed. Frankly, they put in more than I really care to deal with sometimes. But when I hear the horror stories of some very good writers working with small publishers and their limited resources, I know I have been fortunate that way. Lucky to have the editor, publicist and agent I have. Most writers would kill for what sort of landed in my lap, given that I was not looking to write a book in the first place. I try not to be an ingrate, but at the same time I am not at all impressed with this stuff. I might have been at your age, but not now. Thankfully, it has come too late. It's rather like a beautiful woman coming to the bed of an 85-year old man. Delightful to behold, but no distraction from the path that took so long to hew through the jungle of false thinking and ill-focused passions.

I had the good standard middle class New York Jewish editor. She had the job of reconciling my cranky agrarian based redneck leftist thinking with the publishing environment and

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the marketplace as it is. I am a rather uncontrolled writer given to free association and distracting rants. When it comes to something as long as a book, I absolutely need an editor for guidance. Someone to say, “That sucks. It’s unreadable,” and make suggestions. Without her work, it would not be getting the glowing reviews it is getting so far.

Writer/editor relationships can get very personal as you know, and we had class issues, given was the chasm between our backgrounds. But I must say the editor made every effort to bridge that gap, once she got around to my book, when, at times, I simply refused to. Mostly when drunk and depressed by the glacial process by which books are published. To compound matters, time was running out for me. I was very ill with my lung disease at the time and was diagnosed as having about 18 months to live, which turned out to be somewhat wrong; I’ve got a few more years in me yet. So here I was sneezing blood, working 55 hours a week at a straight gig, and trying to write a book, while my editor had put me on the back burner so she could work on Barack Obama’s book. Needless to say, I was a very miserable camper during much of the process.

At the same time, the entire grisly process brought my editor and I closer together as human beings, and I now consider her among my good friends, even if our backgrounds have forever conditioned us in different directions. I shudder for the fate of her children in this world the same as I do for those of my adopted family in Belize.

As to Belize, I’ve much got my scene together there and consider it my home, though what I will do for money in the long term, I do not know. I’m beginning to understand that I will

always be spending significant amounts of time in the United States, if for no other reason than earning money. A lot has happened in the past several months. I began to live on \$4,000 a year, as I had vowed, which causes stress on my marriage, as you would imagine. And now I have a deep regret for the trees wasted in the publication of my book and hate what my air travel to Belize does to the upper atmosphere, regarding global warming. If I do another book, I can try to do it on recycled paper, insist it be done by union printers, and then, as I do now, donate all the royalties except the \$4,000 to small-scale development projects. But frankly, I don’t have anything to say that is important enough to justify the damage done by publishing it. Nothing that cannot be said on the Internet with far less environmental damage. But who knows? Life has a way of making us eat every word.

Frank: *What do the folks of your town, of which you write so frankly, think about the book?*

Bageant: Not much so far. The working class people in the book, who never buy or read books, seem rather mystified when someone exposes them to parts of it. They relish figuring out who is who and generally agree with its message about class in America. The town’s old families are pissed. Some have called me. One asked why I wrote such “mean things about this town’s leading families.” Leading families! Can you imagine that? Another told me there is “no such thing as class in Winchester. We are all happy and equal.” I just about choked on that one. They tell me the local newspaper is oiling up its guns for an attack. And some upper crust family is bound to try and sue me, I’m sure. #

William Blum

RESURRECTING HOPE

INTERVIEW BY JASON MILLER

Since it rose to military and economic hegemony at the close of World War II, the United States and its proxies, an array of US-installed ruthless tyrants, and the World Bank have worked in concert to slaughter, torture, and impoverish millions of human beings in the “developing world” in an endless quest to satiate our plutocracy’s thirst for power and treasure.

To sharpen our perspective on the American Empire and to renew our sense of hope that human decency has a chance of prevailing, let’s visit with William Blum, a noted researcher and author who has been documenting the crimes of the United States for many years:

Jason Miller: *You are quite a remarkable individual. False modesty aside, if you were introducing yourself to an individual who didn’t know you and giving them a summary of who William Blum is, how would that introduction go?*

William Blum: It would of course depend largely on who the person was and what the circumstances were, but I might say that I spent the first half of my life in the “bourgeois” world, including IBM and the Department of State, and then was radicalized by Vietnam and became a

drug-using, semi-hippie, underground-press writer, world traveler, book author, campus speaker and commie terrorist threat to all that is decent and holy.

Miller: *In early 2006, Osama bin Laden told US Americans that they needed to read your book, **Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower**. What were the immediate effects and consequences for you?*

Blum: Instant celebrity, on many of the major news programs, including CNN, CSPAN, MSNBC, etc., with a chance to say things to the great unwashed that I would never otherwise have had; 1,000 emails, half hostile, a couple threatening.

Miller: *Obviously, the dust has had plenty of time to settle. How has bin Laden’s “endorsement” affected your book sales and impact as a political educator and social activist?*

Blum: About 15,000 extra copies of *Rogue State* sold. I use the experience in my talks on campus, explaining why I was not embarrassed by the endorsement, as I had mentioned on air, and which had bothered my interviewers, like

William Blum

Wolf Blitzer, who wanted me to disown the entire endorsement.

Miller: *In Rogue State, you write, “No matter how paranoid or conspiracy-minded you are, what the government is actually doing is worse than you imagine.” To what extent can you attribute this conclusion to first-hand knowledge derived from your years with the State Department, or otherwise?*

Blum: I was a computer systems analyst and programmer at the State Dept; not much privy to important secrets except for the lists they kept of baddies, foreign and domestic. Reading the news carefully, with a knowledge of the past, is enough to make one suspicious.

Miller: *I note that you spent some time in Chile observing Allende’s attempt to implement socialism. Had Allende survived, how successful do you think he would have been in fending off the relentless tide of neoliberalism?*

Blum: I think he would have done pretty well at that. He was a sincere man of the left, not a Democratic Party-type liberal.

Miller: *How much affinity did Allende have for Castro?*

Blum: As far as I remember, a lot.

Miller: *Please briefly compare and contrast Allende and Hugo Chavez.*

Blum: Allende didn’t deliberately antagonize the US as Chavez does. I wish Chavez would cool it a bit. He’s antagonizing homicidal maniacs, literally. Yet, Allende’s moderation in language and policy didn’t save him from Washington’s wrath. Once you’re an ODE (Officially Designated Enemy) of Washington, your days are numbered, or at least your life and program will be made next to impossible.

Miller: *What chance do you believe the Bolivarian Revolution has of succeeding in becoming a viable alternative and genuine threat to the hegemony of the militaristic, rapacious imperialism which is inextricably linked to “American Capitalism?”*

Blum: Based on past experience, not much chance. But what’s new is the oil money. That changes the picture. But I can’t predict what’s going to happen.

Miller: *You left the State Department in 1967 because of your opposition to the Vietnam War. What do you think the opposition to the Iraqi Occupation, which obviously comprises many people, needs to do to increase its effectiveness?*

Blum: All I can suggest is education. Educate yourself and as many others as you can. I write my books and give public talks with that in mind, giving activists talking points to help them to convince others, giving newcomers new food for thought, planting seeds. Our numbers are indeed growing and I can only hope that at some point it will reach a critical mass and “explode”. I can’t offer more than that.

Miller: *During the Vietnam War, you founded and edited the Washington Free Press. Since there was no Internet, how did you distribute your underground publication?*

Blum: Mainly in street sales and at events, plus dozens of book stores and other venues; at our peak we sold maybe 20,000-25,000 each issue.

Miller: *What contact, if any, did you have with radical groups such as the Black Panthers and the Weathermen, whose members were investigated, pursued, incarcerated, or in some cases, murdered, by our government?*

Blum: I knew individual members, some wrote

William Blum

for the Free Press, but I was never a member of any group. In later years, I was a member of Trotskyist groups in the US and the UK.

Miller: *While there are distinct parallels between Vietnam and Afghanistan/Iraq, there are also a number of differences. Would you kindly lend us your insight by briefly comparing and contrasting the two?*

Blum: The US had no intention of occupying Vietnam. But in Iraq and Afghanistan they have done so because of oil and oil pipelines.

Miller: *What did your work with Philip Agee, former CIA agent and author of Inside the Company: CIA Diary, entail?*

Blum: I didn't work with him so much as with other people in London who had a relationship with him. We were engaged in exposing covert CIA officers in the US embassy.

Miller: *You publicly supported Ralph Nader's bids for the presidency. I have been repeatedly lambasted for voting for Nader. How would you respond to critics who claim that voting outside the deeply corrupt duopoly is a "wasted vote"?*

Blum: It would be hard to imagine a more wasted vote than voting for someone you don't like or support. I should add that I think that most people who voted for Nader would not

have voted at all if he was not a candidate. So for all these people, Nader votes did not rob the Democrats of a vote.

Miller: *When can we expect another book from you?*

Blum: I don't know. I'm sort of burnt out. I'm not an author who feels obliged to keep turning out book after book. I have to see a gap to fill.

Miller: *Your words here: "I'm committed to fighting U.S. foreign policy, the greatest threat to peace and happiness in the world, and being in the United States is the best place for carrying out the battle. This is the belly of the beast, and I try to be an ulcer inside of it." As a veteran of this struggle, you are a true inspiration to the rest of us aspiring ulcers. What words of advice and encouragement do you have for us?*

Blum: See my reply above about education. And when you're in ideological conflict with one of the bad guys, and he's mouthing the usual patriotic/conservative clichés, don't be shy of challenging any of those clichés. He's so unused to having them challenged that he's often thrown for a loss. Like always question the motivation of the US in their interventions from a MORAL point of view. We have morality on our side — look at Iraq, et al. The conservatives have a very difficult time dealing with this. #

Norman Solomon

THE LIES OF WAR

INTERVIEW BY ADAM HOWARD

What's changed in the rhetoric of war since the 1960s? A new film, *War Made Easy*, explores how media and government spin from the Vietnam era to today has kept America at war. The film has been adapted from the critically acclaimed book by Norman Solomon, *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*, which was published in 2005.

Norman Solomon is a nationally syndicated columnist on media and politics. He has been writing the weekly "Media Beat" column since 1992. I spoke with him about the film.

Howard: *How exactly did this project get off the ground?*

Solomon: I'm a writer who's done a lot of radio and occasionally TV, but I'm not a filmmaker. The experience of writing this book was a pretty mind-blowing process for me, and when it was published, I thought about the dimension of archival footage and the media onslaught in favor of war, both past, present and future, for that matter. I'd really admired the Media Education Foundation for a long time. For instance, their film – Hijacking Catastrophe –

I thought was superb on the neocons' global agenda.

So when I talked with people at MEF, they decided to make a film based on the War Made Easy book, and I was thrilled. Eighteen months later, the film is launching this summer, and I'm just really excited about how the analytical, the informational, and the emotional are accessed in this documentary.

Howard: *How has the response been to the film so far?*

Solomon: My hopes have been largely fulfilled during the several screenings I've been to on both the East and West coasts. People are leaving the movie with grief and anger but also motivation to stop the war in Iraq and to prevent the wars that are gleams in the eyes of top officials in Washington.

Howard: *Why do you think there's so much resistance amongst the media to draw parallels between Iraq and Vietnam?*

Solomon: Any geographer will tell you Iraq isn't Vietnam. But the United States is still the United States. The overwhelming issue is how our country continues to drag itself and so

Norman Solomon

much of the world into one horrific conflagration after another.

The pundits and reporters who have the highest profile in this country tend to be eager to see every discredited war as an aberration, and they did the same thing during the Vietnam War. When it became incontrovertible that the war was based on a series of mendacious maneuvers, the response was, “Well, yeah, but that’s not what we’re like. This is an anomaly.” And we’re still getting that. It’s because “Bush is weird, and Cheney’s weird.” You even get that from some liberal pundits.

Howard: *President Bush has said that history will ultimately judge whether or not the Iraq War was a success or failure. Do you believe we’ll one day hear people saying this war was a success (as some have with Vietnam) or will people universally deem this a failure?*

Solomon: Well, both. It is one of the most horrific war choices ever made out of Washington. There will always be people in Washington and in the media who try to justify the war, or they will say if it had been done differently it would’ve been potentially a good use of U.S. military power. One of the key points of the film is that the whole argument against a quagmire is a very narrow one, because it begs the question of whether a war based on imperial assumptions and presumptions of empire can be justified? And how can you competently execute an immoral war? How can you do a better job of managing a war that should never have been launched in the first place?

Those kind of questions are not popular amongst the elite media. Quite frankly, if this war had resulted in a military triumph in the middle of 2003, you wouldn’t have the July 8 editorial in the New York Times saying it’s time to pull the troops out. They would be

celebrating this war along with the rest of the media. I think War Made Easy really draws a thread across the last 50 years of U.S. foreign policy and the American warfare state, to find the patterns that have inflicted so much suffering. It’s what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the madness of militarism,” and it hasn’t stopped yet.

Howard: *How has the way the mainstream press covered war changed or not changed since the Vietnam war?*

Solomon: The style has changed but not the substance. There’s still a reliance on official sources, an echoing of the White House’s rationale for war, a reluctance to challenge the prerogatives of empire. These have been virtual constants.

In terms of content, beyond style and technology, the changes have been implemented more in response to grassroots pressure. In other words, the anti-war protesting that people have done from 2002 until today has had a cumulative effect on our society, and while the news media are slow to react to grassroots pressure against the war, they are still within shouting distance. There is a huge disconnect between anti-war sentiment in the grassroots and what we get from the likes of not only Fox, but CNN, NPR and PBS.

Howard: *What do you make of the analysis of President Bush’s state of mind with regards to war? It is widely believed that LBJ was at least privately tortured about his leadership and the war’s toll.*

Solomon: For people in Vietnam or for people in Iraq, or for U.S. soldiers who are sent to those countries to kill and be killed, it really didn’t matter whether LBJ or George W. Bush felt remorseful or gleeful as the war went on. It’s really about policies that affect peoples’ lives.

Norman Solomon

The media spin has been refined and of course adapted to changes like the advent of cable television. But one of the really stunning things about the archival footage that's been unearthed and put together for the War Made Easy film is the continuity of the propaganda messages to justify the morally and logically unjustifiable.

From the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964 to WMD in 2002 – the rhetoric that Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon used against withdrawing troops from Vietnam is often word for word the same catch phrases and code words that George W. Bush has been using. “You can't cut and run,” “You must stay the course.” These are ways of vilifying the opponents of the war in no uncertain terms.

Howard: *Why is it that so many Americans can fall for the same rhetoric that gets us involved in imperial wars, when it is often so transparent?*

Solomon: George Orwell said it well, “Those who control the past, control the future. Those who control the present, control the past.” The arguments over Vietnam have not only been about a war in the past, it's been an argument over a war in the present and prospectively future wars as well.

The so-called Vietnam syndrome is something we talk at length about in the film

because it's a catchphrase that's used in a negative way by media and war advocates in Washington to try to justify continuing an insane war that's so destructive. It's basically a way to say, if you're against the war, you're a wimp and you don't have fortitude. As one TV pundit said, “You're a weenie.” The epithet of the Vietnam syndrome is based on a series of myths that we unpack in the film.

Howard: *What makes your film unique and worth seeing?*

Solomon: You'll see a panorama of techniques from Lyndon Johnson to George W. Bush, from Walter Cronkite to Bill O'Reilly, that show how we're being scammed in the same ways from one war to another, from one decade to another. I think it's the scope of the film, which uses unarguable TV footage and historical film segments to show just how pernicious and how deep these patterns are.

It's really, for a lot of people, mind-blowing when it's laid end to end from 1964 to 2007. The film, I think, in its unique way conveys not by talking at people but by showing people that we have been subjected to a colossal scam. The results have been so terrible that we better get wise to it and find ways to resist, or the future that we want for the future generations is gravely imperiled.

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