

INSIDE: MURDER OF A VILLAGE ● A YARD SALE IN
CHERNOBYL ● CYBERSCARES ABOUT CYBERWARS
● MEET MOM, SHE'S A TORTURE-LOVING FASCIST

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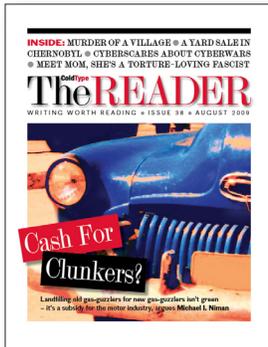


Cash For

Clunkers?

Landfilling old gas-guzzlers for new gas-guzzlers isn't green
– it's a subsidy for the motor industry, argues **Michael I. Niman**

The **ColdType** READER



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Cyberscares about cyberwars

Frida Berrigan on the latest moves of a cybermilitary-industrial complex that is finding new ways to dig into the nation's packets

As though we don't have enough to be afraid of already, what with armed lunatics mowing down military recruiters and doctors, the H1N1 flu virus, the collapse of bee populations, rising sea levels, failed and flailing states, North Korea being North Korea, al-Qaeda wannabes in New York State with terrorist aspirations, and who knows what else – now cyberjihadis are evidently poised to steal our online identities, hack into our banks, take over our Flickr and Facebook accounts, and create havoc on the World Wide Web.

Late last year, in a 96-page report, *Securing Cyberspace for the 44th Presidency*, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) warned that "America's failure to protect cyberspace is one of the most urgent national security problems facing the new administration." In a similar fashion, Dr. Dorothy Denning, a cybersecurity expert at the Naval Postgraduate School, has just described the Internet as a "powerful tool in the hands of criminals and terrorists." And they're hardly alone.

To this chorus of fear, our thoughtful, slow-to-histrionics President added his voice in a May 29th East Room address:

"In today's world, acts of terror could come not only from a few extremists in suicide vests but from a few key strokes on a computer – a weapon of mass disruption...

This cyberthreat is one of the most serious economic and national security challenges we face as a nation."

Uh-oh, and as we know, cybercrime is already on the rise. According to the president, the US experienced 37,000 cyberattacks in 2007, an 800% increase from 2005. He referenced a study estimating that cybercrime has cost Americans \$8 billion in the last two years. A trillion dollars worth of business information has reportedly been stolen from the corporate world.

For Barack Obama, cybercrime is personal. During his bid for the presidency, someone hacked into his campaign's secure network and gained access to sensitive strategy documents and calendars.

Last year, a malicious computer virus hit the US military, infecting thousands of computers and forcing soldiers to give up their thumb drives, changing the way they share information among computers. The Pentagon claims it fended off some 360 million attempts – yes, you read that right! – to break into its networks last year alone, a monumental leap from a "mere" 6 million tries in 2006.

In one such attempt, cyberspies hacked into the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter project, the Air Force's most advanced and, at \$300 billion, most expensive jet fighter under production. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, they "compromised the system respon-

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“There’ve been so many czars over the last 50 years, and they’ve all been failures. Nobody takes them seriously anymore”

sible for diagnosing a plane’s maintenance problems during flight.” In April, Defense Secretary Robert Gates told 60 Minutes’ Katie Couric that the US is “under cyberattack virtually all the time, every day.” The Pentagon recently admitted that it spent \$100 million in the past six months repairing damage caused by cyberonslaughts.

Cyberczar to the rescue

In his speech, President Obama also insisted that help was on the way as he announced the establishment of a new Cybersecurity Office within the White House. It was, he assured Americans, meant to coordinate all government activities to protect US computer networks, while promoting collaboration among a confusing landscape of federal cybergroups with “overlapping missions.” Our digital infrastructure, he said, was the “backbone that underpins a prosperous economy and a strong military and an open and efficient government.” As such, he proclaimed it “a strategic national asset,” which meant that “protecting it is a national security priority.”

All will be better, promised the BlackBerry President, once his cyberczar, or “cybersecurity coordinator” is selected. “I will personally select this official,” he pledged. “I’ll depend on this official in all matters related to cybersecurity and this official will have my full support and regular access to me as we confront these challenges.”

Keep in mind that the president is more than a little czar crazy, perhaps because the vague post of czar (of whatever) turns out not to require confirmation from a somewhat slow and balky Senate, even as it brings instant attention to some new aspect of his mega-agenda. He has already picked his Border Czar, Drug Czar, Counterterrorism Czar, Urban Affairs Czar, and Climate Czar, just to name a few. Foreign Policy counts a staggering 18 Obama czars in all. His still unnamed cyberczar will report to the National Security Council and the National Economic Council.

Many of these new czars have offices within the White House from which they can (theoretically) oversee policy, coordinate among agencies, streamline decision-making, and give a particular issue or area added weight and prominence. In reality, such appointments historically tend to put yet another cook in a chaotic kitchen, while adding a new layer of bureaucracy to already jumbled layers of the same. As Paul Light, a government professor at New York University, told the *Wall Street Journal*, “There’ve been so many czars over the last 50 years, and they’ve all been failures. Nobody takes them seriously anymore.”

I feel better already! Except I do have a small question: How did the word “czar” morph from the title of a discredited autocrat half a world away to the description of a supposedly influential White House official? And why are all these czars jostling for power and order in a democratic government?

That aside, web-surf is up! And here’s the good news: the United States is not just playing cyberdefense. Admittedly, the administration’s plan for cyberoffense – you know, to hack into networks not our own – did not get as much news buzz as the cyberczar, but don’t be fooled: the military is already on the job, mounting an invasion of a whole new territory, cyberspace!

The new nightmare:

Preparing for cyberwar

Yes, the Pentagon sees cyberspace – that expansive online constellation of worlds that never sleeps even when our computers are off – as another battlefield terrain no different from the mountains of Afghanistan or the cities of Iraq (except that maybe on virtual battlefields we can actually win).

In an exhaustive 350-page look at US cyberattack capabilities put out in April 2009, the National Research Council’s Committee on Offensive Information Warfare concluded that “enduring unilateral dominance in cyberspace is neither realistic nor achiev-

able by the United States.” Despite that cautionary word, this very month the Pentagon has moved to establish a new Cybercommand that won’t shy away from either the word “unilateral” or “dominance.” CyCom, as it’s already known, will “develop cyberweapons for use in responding to attacks from foreign adversaries” under the direction of Lieutenant General Keith B. Alexander, who will add another star to his three in the move from the National Security Agency to his new command.

In pursuit of the elusive, impossible dream of unilateral dominance in cyberspace, Defense Secretary Gates is looking to more than quadruple the number of cyberofficers by 2011; and though he didn’t put a dollar figure on it, as the military services all rush to add “cyber” to their portfolio, the monies are going to add up fast. How much? Kevin Coleman, a consultant to the US Strategic Command, which will house CyCom, estimates between \$50 billion and \$70 billion a year for cyberactivities in future Pentagon budgets.

Sounds good! But here’s what I want to know: Can my avatar have long black hair, knee-high boots, and the pass codes to access some of those billions?

As it happens, cyberwar was a Washington preoccupation under President George W. Bush, too. Last year, his Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell warned that a cyberattack on a US bank “would have an order of magnitude greater impact on the global economy” than September 11, 2001, and he compared the potential ability of cybercriminals to threaten the US money supply to a nuclear weapon. How do you fact-check such scare chatter, especially now that the global economy has proved itself quite capable of imploding with devastating impact without a cyberattack in sight?

No matter. Rest assured of one thing: even before the first bot is shot, a down-and-dirty, low-intensity conflict is already well underway. Think of it as a turf war with a twist.

Cyberturf wars

At the moment, cybersecurity activities and responsibilities are spread across the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of Management and Budget, and an alphabet soup of intelligence agencies, all claiming cyberspace – with its secret codes and captured data – as their own. And then there are the uniformed military services: the Navy, Air Force, and Army, all worried about the budgetary future, are desperately interested in securing a large slice of the cyberpie.

When you survey the cyberlandscape, maybe President Obama is right. It could take a veritable Peter the Great of czars to impose a workable structure on the existing labyrinth of competing and proliferating cyberbureaucracies.

Among them all, the Air Force has been the most proactive and aggressive. They just established the 24th Air Force, a new numbered wing, just for the cyberwarfare mission. It will be based in San Antonio, Texas, thanks to Republican Senator Kay Hutchinson, who aggressively courted the Air Force with Texan hospitality. In a press release celebrating her acquisition, Hutchinson bragged that the move will make “San Antonio a key component of our national strategy to defeat the cyber threat.”

In mid-May, Major General William Lord, the provisional head of AFCyber, played host to military-industrial representatives, telling them that the “cyber arena is filled with new business opportunities.” Cyberspace is, he suggested, new territory and he called on Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other high-tech military firms to seize the day. (“We can’t do this without you.”)

He needn’t have said a word. Like the proliferation of competing agencies, the formation of a cybermilitary-industrial complex (made up mainly of the giant corporations already in the non-cyber version of the same) is quite predictable. In fact, it’s already starting to happen. After all,

In pursuit of the elusive, impossible dream of unilateral dominance in cyberspace, Defense Secretary Gates is looking to more than quadruple the number of cyberofficers by 2011; and though he didn’t put a dollar figure on it, as the military services all rush to add “cyber” to their portfolio, the monies are going to add up fast

WAR MACHINE

As early as 2005, the Air Force saw the light on this one, and losing ground to the Army, Navy, and Marines in the boom-times of the Global War on Terror, began moving into cyberspace. It's never stopped

the new cyberspace mission promises more than just Top Gun excitement; it will be worth billions of dollars in a quickly shifting security environment.

As early as 2005, the Air Force saw the light on this one, and losing ground to the Army, Navy, and Marines in the boom-times of the Global War on Terror, began moving into cyberspace. It's never stopped. As Lewis Page, a defense correspondent for the *Register*, a British online tech magazine, points out: "The Air Force's traditional business of operating expensive manned aircraft has been somewhat undercut of late by the proliferation of much cheaper flying robots often operated by the Army, Navy or Marines."

In the fight for the future cyberbudget, then, the Air Force's enemies "are not so much terrorists or sinister foreign powers as the other US Armed Services," writes Page. With new relevance, of course, come new funds. As a start, when the Air Force sent its \$143.8 billion budget request for fiscal year 2009 to Congress, it tacked on a list of as yet unfunded budget requirements, including nearly \$400 million for cyber-related equipment and activities.

The Navy is now in on the game, too. It naturally established a Naval Cyber Forces Command because, as it likes to say, "cyberspace has become the global battlespace." According to Government Executive, the Navy plans to appoint a three-star Vice Admiral to head its new cybercommand, outranking the Air Force's top cyber fly-boy.

Not to be outdone, the Army has set up its own cyberoutpost: the Network Warfare Battalion. Its 2009 Posture Statement asserts that its troops are "executing cyberspace operations" against "a significant and growing cyberthreat" and concludes that, in order to "maintain our dominance in cyberspace, the Army will continue to grow our abilities to better defend our own networks and have capabilities in place to conduct network warfare against adversary networks."

The initial loser in the great cyberbattle appears to be the Department of Homeland Security, that bureaucracy for our old fears. Established in the wake of September 11, 2001, it quickly became a Frankenstein-like mess of more than 22 agencies, on which the Bush administration also downloaded responsibility for cyberoperations. Now, however, it is getting consistently low marks for cybersecurity from places like CSIS and the Government Accountability Office. "Oversight for cybersecurity must move elsewhere," is what James Lewis, senior fellow at CSIS, told Congress.

Industry logs on

The true beneficiaries of the military's cyber turf war are sure to be the major Pentagon contractors that have been positioning themselves to absorb Washington's new cyberdollars just as they have absorbed war dollars, terror dollars, and homeland-security dollars. Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics have already launched a frenzy of buying in the area, gobbling up smaller tech companies and courting cyberinnovators. In 2007, for instance, Northrop Grumman purchased the Essex Corporation, a cyber tech company, which CEO Ronald Sugar says has "grown significantly" since then.

Military contractors have also been taking on hordes of "cyber ninjas" to learn more about hackers. These young laborers have landed in one of the few sectors of the economy hiring these days. A recent *New York Times* description of their work environment should be enough to set screenwriters' pens twitching.

"At a Raytheon facility here south of the Kennedy Space Center, a hub of innovation in an earlier era, rock music blares and empty cans of Mountain Dew pile up as engineers create tools to protect the Pentagon's computers and crack into the networks of countries that could become adversaries. Prizes like cappuccino machines and stacks of cash spur them on, and a gong heralds each major breakthrough."

**The only thing we have
to fear is [fill in the blank]**

Is the United States really in a hypercrisis that warrants putting the word cyber in front of everything and multibillions more in the pockets of military-industrial corporations?

If you listen to official Washington today, the answer is a resounding yes. But is the real threat any more insidious than malware and botnets? Is it really life and system threatening? Is it where we really want to invest our money?

Without a doubt, cybercrime – and even cyberterrorism – pose actual dangers. But listening to all the scare-talk about cyberwar, we tend to forget that the most gruesome wars today are being fought with machetes, AK-47s, and crude improvised explosive devices fashioned out of repurposed walkie-talkies. The fact is that some of the most devastating wars of the future will be fought over food, water, and land, not to speak of religion, and those engaged in their brutal, messy battles will probably never log on to a computer or download a file.

Certainly, cyberterrorism is a novel and sexy label, grist for next year's high-budget

movies and summer pulp fiction. But in Washington it's likely to turn out to be little more than a new catchword in a predictable drama of contracts, turf, and corporations, of agencies and military services intent on capturing taxpayer dollars and winning or losing intra-bureaucratic wars.

The story of how politicians, the Pentagon, and contractors conspire to inflame our fears with well-hyped threats of future cataclysm and then offer high-tech, highly bureaucratic, unbelievably expensive solutions that result in lots of weapons contracts, lots of corporate/military conferences, a few blue-ribbon studies, but no significant threat reduction is really the story of our time.

And when this threat wanes, or simply starts to look more real and a lot less cataclysmic, it's time, of course, to bring out the next boogeyman. **CT**

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Military contractors have also been taking on hordes of "cyber ninjas" to learn more about hackers. These young laborers have landed in one of the few sectors of the economy hiring these days



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Bono, U2 and the crisis of world capitalism

Eamonn McCann looks at the clanging contradictions of Irish superstars Bono, U2 and Bob Geldoff

It's been noted before that Bono's castigation of the Irish Government for directing too small a proportion of its tax receipts to aid for the developing world was swiftly followed by the band transferring its business operation to the Netherlands to avoid paying tax to the Irish government

Shuffling out from U2's Popmart tour – the one with the McDonalds-style Golden Arch – at Lansdowne Road in Dublin ten years ago, I chanced on Philip King, singer, songwriter, television producer and music adviser to the Irish Arts Council.

“Whaddya think?”

“Whatever it is,” pronounced the elf-in Kerry sage, “it's a fucking big one of them.”

Which has always been the way with the emperors of bombast. Now they, or at least their stage sets, are bigger than ever. Biggest ever seen, the PR propaganda assures me. As if that were a measure of musical stature.

The tour kicked off in Barcelona on June 30 to gasps of ecstatic approval, most breathlessly from Irish commentators flown out for the occasion, many of whom apparently believe that saying a bad word about Bono might render them liable for prosecution under the Republic's new Blasphemy Law. The *Belfast Telegraph* reported that, according to the environmental monitoring group carbonfootprint.com, the 18-month, 100 gig tour will involve the band traveling 70,000 miles in their private jet, the 390-tonne set following on cargo planes.

The volume of CO₂ spewed out in the process would be enough to transport U2 34,125 million miles to Mars and back.

(Of course, the damage would be cut by half if they were just flown to Mars and left there.) This odyssey of environmental obliteration – how many endangered species will have been rendered extinct by the time Bono croons a final chorus? I despair for the panda – follows Bono's dreamy pronouncement last year that: “My prayer is that we become better in looking after our planet.”

We should be used by now to the clanging contradictions of U2. It's been noted before that Bono's castigation of the Irish Government for directing too small a proportion of its tax receipts to aid for the developing world was swiftly followed by the band transferring its business operation to the Netherlands to avoid paying tax to the Irish government.

Now drummer Larry Mullen has noticed “a new resentment of rich people in this country ... We have experienced [a situation] where coming in and out of the country at certain times is made more difficult than it should be – not only for us, but for a lot of wealthy people ... The better-off (are) being sort of humiliated.”

So it isn't the people writhing on trolleys in hospital corridors because wards have been closed on account of the economy or children learning arithmetic from the relative speed of rats scuttling across the classroom as a result of the education budget

being slashed to bail out the bankers who are being humiliated in Ireland but . . . the better off.

The little drummer boy's distress at the rich being reduced to tears by hard-faced officialdom was aroused by seeing billionaire tax-exile property developer Dermot Desmond being dissed at Dublin airport. "If this is what (the rich) experience, how can I fly the Irish flag and tell people 'come to Ireland because it's great?' . . . All those rich guys with all those balls[?], all those women that you see organising this and organising that, without them we'd be in a very, very different state."

Perhaps Larry was angry that peasants arriving on no-frills airlines hadn't formed a human carpet on the tarmac for people like himself and Dermot Desmond to walk over. Larry has been particularly saddened by the plight of his pal Ronan Ryan, whose Dublin nosherie, the Town Bar and Grill, has hit hard times on account of fewer people being able to afford the prices. "He got eaten alive," mourned Larry. By ravenous hordes of enraged proletarians, possibly.

Another cook, a Jay Bourk, is threatening to shut up shop if the Government doesn't use taxpayers' money to subsidise the rent of his eaterie in Dublin's Temple Bar. "It's my favourite restaurant," laments Larry. "I'll be broken-hearted if that goes down."

Broken-hearted? That's what you feel when somebody you love leaves you, Larry. Or dies. But I suppose when your bubble-brained tendency towards emotional incontinence is daily indulged by the crass acolytes who surround you, you lose perspective on such matters.

And anyway, if the diner means so much to you, why not give Mr. Bourk the money yourself. U2? Pat Boone (ask your granny) was more rock and roll.

U2 now have their heads inserted so far up their anterior orifices it's doubtful they'll ever succeed in uncorking themselves. Does it not occur to them that the reason there might be a new resentment of the rich on this island is that we have just seen the mass of the people ripped off, homes lost, jobs destroyed, wages slashed, to save the sin-crinkled skin of the hoodlums who have run the economy into ruin? I suppose not.

Then there's Bob Geldof. Kruger Crowe Celebrity Management is currently marketing his services as an "inspirational speaker" on poverty in Africa and other topics at \$80,000 a gig.

This may be a special offer: the south Dublin ego-warrior last year charged \$100,000 for a talk on alleviating poverty to an organisation called Diversity@Work in Melbourne. Would it not have been better if he'd sent them a postcard suggesting the money be spent instead on, say, alleviating poverty?

Not better for Bob Geldof, I suppose. The fee included payment for a bodyguard, luxury hotel suite and first-class travel.

Can anyone think of any individual on the planet who has benefited more than Sir Geldof from Live Aid? Come the revolution into rationality, U2 and Geldof will be recognised as national embarrassments. **CT**

Eamonn McCann is an author, columnist and troublemaker and can be reached at Eamonderry@aol.com

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Whose country is it, anyway?

A political-economic oligarchy has taken over the United States, writes **John Kozy**

Workers and consumers do not extend credit to the companies they work for or buy products from. They are not in any normal sense of the word “creditors.” Yet that distinction is erased in bankruptcy proceedings which preserve companies at the public’s expense

A political-economic oligarchy has taken over the United States of America. This oligarchy has institutionalized a body of law that protects businesses at the expense of not only the common people but the nation itself.

CNN interviewed a person recently who was seriously burned when his vehicle burst into flames because a plastic brake-fluid reservoir ruptured. Having sued Chrysler, he was now concerned that its bankruptcy filing would enable Chrysler to avoid paying any damages. A CNN legal expert called this highly likely, since the main goal of reorganization in bankruptcy is preserving the company’s viability and that those creditors who could contribute most to attaining that goal would be compensated first while those involved in civil suits against the company would be placed lowest on the creditor list since compensating them would lessen the chances of the company’s surviving. This rationale clearly implies that the preservation of companies is more important than the preservation of people. Of course, similar cases have been reported before. The claims of workers for unpaid wages have often been dismissed as have their contracts for benefits.

But there is an essential difference between a business that lends money or delivers products or services to another

company and the employees who work for it. Business is an activity that supposedly involves risk. Employment is not. Neither is unknowingly buying a defective product. Workers and consumers do not extend credit to the companies they work for or buy products from. They are not in any normal sense of the word “creditors.” Yet that distinction is erased in bankruptcy proceedings which preserve companies at the public’s expense.

Business bailouts

Of course, bankruptcy is not the only American practice that makes use of this principle. The current bailout policies of both the Federal Reserve and the Treasury make use of it. Again companies are being saved at the expense of the American people. America’s civil courts are notorious for favoring corporate defendants when sued by injured plaintiffs. Corporate profiteering is not only tolerated, it is often encouraged. The sordid records of both Halliburton and KBR are proof enough. Neither has suffered any serious consequences for their abysmal activities in Iraq while supplying services to the troops deployed there. Even worse, these companies continue to get additional contracts from the Department of State. “A former Army chaplain who later worked for Halliburton’s KBR unit . . . told Congress . . . ‘KBR came first, the soldiers came second.’”

[<http://www.halliburtonwatch.org/news/deyoung.html>] Again, it's companies first, people last. But Major General Smedley Butler made this point in 1935. [See <http://www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/racket.html>] And everyone is familiar with the influence corporate America has over the Congress through campaign contributions and lobbying. Companies expect returns on their money, and preventing workers from unionizing offers huge returns. And on Thursday June 4, 2009 *USA Today* reported that, "Republicans strongly oppose a government run [healthcare] plan saying it would put private companies insuring millions of Americans out of business. 'A government run plan would set artificially low prices that private insurers would have no way of competing with,' Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, said . . ." (Kentucky ranks fifth highest in the number of people with incomes below poverty. Why is he worried about the survival of insurers?)

The profound question is how can any of it be justified?

President Calvin Coolidge did say that the business of America is business and the American political class seems to have adopted this view, but the Constitution cannot be used to justify it. The word "business" in the sense of "commercial firm" occurs nowhere in it. Nowhere does the Constitution direct the government to even promote commerce or even defend private property. The Constitution is clear. It was established to promote just six goals: (1) form a more perfect union, (2) establish justice, (3) insure domestic tranquility, (4) provide for the common defense, (5) promote the general welfare, and (6) secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. Of course, the Constitution does not prohibit the government from promoting commerce or defending private property, but what happens when doing so conflicts with one or more of its six purposes? Shouldn't any law that does that be unconstitutional? For instance, wouldn't it be dif-

ficult to claim that a bankruptcy procedure that protects business and subordinates or dismisses the claims of workers and injured plaintiffs establishes justice? How can spending trillions of dollars to save financial institutions and other businesses whose very own actions brought down the global economy be construed as establishing justice or even promoting the general welfare when people are losing their incomes, their pensions, their health care, and even their homes? These actions clearly conflict with the Constitution's stated goals. Shouldn't they have been declared unconstitutional? Although the Constitution does provide people with the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances, it does not clearly provide that right to organizations or corporations and it certainly does not provide to anyone the right to petition the government for special advantages. Yet that is what the Congress, even after its members swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, allows special interest groups to do. Where in the Constitution is there a justification for putting the people last?

Reading the constitution

How this situation could have arisen is a puzzle? Haven't our elected officials, our justices, our legal scholars, our professors of Constitutional Law, or even our political scientists read the Constitution? Have they merely misunderstood it? Or have they simply chosen to disregard the preamble as though it had no bearing on its subsequent articles? Why have no astute lawyers brought actions on behalf of the people? Why indeed?

The answer is that a political-economic oligarchy has taken over the nation. This oligarchy has institutionalized a body of law that protects businesses at the expense of not only the common people but the nation itself. Businessmen have no loyalties. The Bank of International Settlements insures it, since it is not accountable to any national government. Thomas Jefferson knew it

How can spending trillions of dollars to save financial institutions and other businesses whose very own actions brought down the global economy be construed as establishing justice or even promoting the general welfare when people are losing their incomes, their pensions, their health care, and even their homes?

BUSINESS BEFORE PEOPLE

Woody Guthrie sang, “This Land Is My Land, This Land Is Your Land,” but it isn’t. It was stolen a long time ago. Although it may have been “made for you and me,” people with absolutely no loyalty to this land now own it

when he wrote, “Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gain.” Mayer Amschel Rothschild knew it when he said, “Give me control of a nation’s money and I care not who makes the laws.” William Henry Vanderbilt knew it when he said, “The public be damned.” Businesses know it when they use every possible ruse to avoid paying taxes, they know it when they offshore jobs and production, they know it when they engage in war profiteering, and they know it when they take no sides in wars, caring not an iota who emerges victorious. IBM, GM, Ford, Alcoa, Du Pont, Standard Oil, Chase Bank, J.P. Morgan, National City Bank, Guaranty, Bankers Trust, and American Express all knew it when they did business as usual with Germany during World War II. Prescott Bush knew it when he aided and abetted the financial backers of Adolf Hitler.

Yet somehow or other the people in our government, including the judiciary, do not seem to know it, and they have allowed and even abetted businesses that have no allegiance to any country to subvert the Constitution. Unfortunately, the Constitution does not define such action as treason.

America’s youthful students are regularly taught Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and are familiar with its peroration, “we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom –and that government: of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” If that nation ever existed, it no longer does. And when Benjamin Franklin was asked, “Well, Doctor, what have we got – a Republic or a Monarchy?” he answered, “A Republic, if you can keep it.” We haven’t. What we have ended up with is merely an Unpublic, an economic oligarchy that cares naught for either the nation or the public.

To argue that the United States of America is a failed state is not difficult. A

nation that has the highest documented prison population in the world can hardly be described as domestically tranquil. A nation whose top one percent of the people have 46 percent of the wealth cannot by any stretch of the imagination be said to be enjoying general welfare (“generally true” means true for the most part with a few exceptions). A nation that spends as much on defense as the rest of the world combined and cannot control its borders, could not avert the attack on the World Trade Center, and cannot win its recent major wars cannot be described as providing for its common defense. How perfect the union is or whether justice usually prevails are matters of debate, and what blessings of liberty Americans enjoy that peoples in other advanced countries are denied is never stated. A nation that cannot fulfill its Constitution’s stated goals surely is a failed one. How else could failure be defined? By allowing people with no fastidious loyalty to the nation or its people to control it, by allowing them to disregard entirely the Constitution’s preamble, the nation could not avoid this failure. The prevailing economic system requires it.

Woody Guthrie sang, “This Land Is My Land, This Land Is Your Land,” but it isn’t. It was stolen a long time ago. Although it may have been “made for you and me,” people with absolutely no loyalty to this land now own it. It needs to be taken, not bought, back! America needs a new birth of freedom, it needs a government for the people, it needs a government that puts people first, but it won’t get one unless Americans come to realize just how immoral and vicious our economic system is. **CT**

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who blogs on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the US Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer.

His on-line pieces can be found at <http://www.jkozy.com>

Cruel and mindless carnage

As Britain commemorates the bombings of London in 2005, **Felicity Arbuthnot** reflects on two decades of misery and tragedy inflicted on others by the actions of the UK government

On 7th July, the fourth anniversary of the London bombings, a dedication ceremony was held in London's Hyde Park, for a monument commemorating the fifty two dead and the hundreds injured in the tragedy.

Relatives of the dead gathered to hear The Prince of Wales, Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, Humanitarian Assistance Minister Tessa Jowell and former newsman Sir Trevor Macdonald, who hosted the ceremony, pay their tributes.

As the skies wept, moving words were spoken at the site of the 52 stainless steel pillars, grouped in four clusters, representing those who died in the four attacked locations: Tavistock Square, Edgware Road, King's Cross and Aldgate. Those who were killed in Tavistock Square, did not die in underground trains, as did the others, but on the No. 30 bus, which runs between east London's Hackney and central London's Marble Arch. Ironically they died just yards from the poignant statue of Mahatma Gandhi, central to a tiny, leafy park, aromatic with floral scents, from vibrant, abundant flower beds and shrubs and a place of pilgrimage for visitors from around the globe.

The Prince of Wales spoke, without irony, of " ... a brutal intrusion into the lives of thousands of people and the tragedy of

those who '...did not walk away from what happened on that awful day.'" He commented on the "grief and anguish" of his wife and himself: "at the appalling aberrations in the human consciousness which produce such cruel and mindless carnage ... an inhuman and deplorable outrage."

He continued on a personal note, having some "small awareness of the shattering loss you have all suffered (recalling) the intense despair . . . when my beloved great uncle Lord Mountbatten, was murdered by terrorists thirty years ago next month – together with my godson, his grandmother, and the boatman's son."

He concluded that the "memories of those taken from us" would lead to a path committed "to eliminating the circumstances that caused the violence in the first place" and those memories "lead to a path for peace..."

It has to be wondered that if the bombings were, as we have been told, the work of 'Muslim extremists' – the government has doggedly refused a public enquiry, though under pressure from the relatives of those lost and injured, seem to be caving in, the transparency and independence of the terms await to be scrutinised – if the Prince is a man of reflection. In ten years Britain has joined the United States in three major bombardments of Muslim lands under dubious (the Balkans and Afghanistan) and

It has to be wondered, that if the bombings were as we have been told, the work of 'Muslim extremists, if the Prince is a man of reflection

REFLECTING REALITY

Prince Harry co-ordinated 'overwhelming firepower' from a bunker in Garmsir, in Afghanistan. Before Britain dutifully joined the 'coalition' to blow to bits 'hearts and minds', it had been a 'thriving agricultural town'

Felicity

Artbutthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She was senior researcher for John Pilger's award-winning documentary "Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq"

nil (Iraq) legitimacy.

The Prince, who talked of peace, holds the ranks of Admiral in the Royal Navy, Air Chief Marshall in the Royal Air Force, General in the Army and has been Colonel in Chief of the Parachute Regiment since 1977. The day he spoke, his sister, The Princess Royal, was "cutting the steel for Britain's newest warship ... the HMS Queen Elizabeth, to be followed by the HMS Prince of Wales, a £5 billion project for the Royal Navy. 'The vessels will be capable of carrying up to forty aircraft ... with a flight deck the size of forty football pitches.'

His youngest son, Prince Harry and eldest, Prince William, heir to the throne, are both in the Blues and Royals, one of two regiments that form the Household Cavalry. William was attracted to the regiment's 'outstanding record in recent decades, most notably during the Falklands Conflict, Bosnia, Kosova, in Iraq and Northern Ireland.' (BBC 21st September 2006.) That's an 'outstanding record' of killing.

Prince Harry co-ordinated 'overwhelming firepower' from a bunker in Garmsir, in Afghanistan. Before Britain dutifully joined the 'coalition' to blow to bits 'hearts and minds', it had been a 'thriving agricultural town.' He posed, grinning from ear to ear, while 'manning a machine gun post', his hands on lethal thousand-rounds-a-minute killing-ware. He was pictured on an 'abandoned', pretty smart, motorbike. Surely it wasn't 'liberated' by his mates, the pride and joy and only means of transport and living for some soul? Professor Michael Carmichael of London's King's College, described Harry as "not over complicated." Indeed. Whisked away when his presence was revealed, he was due to go to Iraq but it was feared he might get hurt, killed, or kidnapped and his presence would anyway endanger his 'boys.'

At the Hyde Park ceremony, Tessa Jowell talked of the memorial as, "... a place of great beauty but also a place of great pain."

Did she reflect on the unspeakable agony her country has inflicted which might

have resulted that terrible pain? George Bush announced that the assault on Iraq was a "Crusade." In June 2006, then Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, Jowell, former social worker and mental health expert, flew not one, but two, flags of St. George on her Ministerial car – the Crusaders' flag – in the run up to the football World Cup. She clearly did not reflect that when the British army invaded Basra, they went in flying the same flag of St George. Predictably, those of Muslim faith around the country burned that flag.

Sir Trevor Macdonald, a former newsreader, read the names of the dead. Did he reflect how long it would take to read the names of the dead of the slaughters of the Bush-Blair-Brown years?

Three weeks earlier, the Queen's birthday flypast over Buckingham Palace, marked 'nearly two decades of RAF operations in Iraq.' 'Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, Chief of Air Staff, told the *London Evening Standard*, "This year marks the end of nineteen years of RAF operations over Iraq, this flypast recognises this significant achievement." Did he reflect that the 'operations' during ten of those 13 embargo years – bombing child shepherds and their sheep, towns, villages, ancient archeological sites, Baghdad repeatedly – were outlawed by the Geneva Convention,? Did he reflect that the invasion itself was illegal? Did he reflect the "cruel and mindless carnage ... the deplorable outrage"?

Gordon Brown doesn't do reflection. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, he wrote the cheques for ten years for causing grief, trauma and decimation across Mesopotamia. And he wrote the cheques for the illegal invasion and its near unequalled human cost, as he is doing now for Afghanistan's decimation.

Those public figures in Hyde Park on 7th July should above all, have reflected that the actions of the British government brought similar pain to their own people as they have wrought on others, just as innocent, across the globe. **CT**

A yard sale in Chernobyl

Joe Bageant returns home to Virginia and finds a nation bamboozled by propaganda and obsessed by shopping

It's only a system," she said, as we floated through the sprawling supermarket's gleaming commodity-lined indoor streets. "THE HELL IT IS! It's a god-damned air conditioned zombie hell of waste and gluttony," I thought to myself, before the usual vertigo completely enveloped me. Just back from Central America's simple, comprehensible mercados, bodegas and street cart vendors, the effect of this most common American shopping venue was, as always, one of vertigo. Head splitting light beats down on pyramids of plastic eggs, as if to incubate their hatching of the ladies stockings within, dozens of kinds of toothpaste, well scrubbed dead chickens, lurid baskets of too-perfect flowers, plastic wraps, tissue for faces, asses and wrapping gifts, row upon row of polished vegetables and fruits standing like soldiers waiting for the annihilation of salads or the ovens of casseroleedom.

And all those hushed and not so hushed shopper cell phone conversations, this one consoling someone at the home base pod: "Oh, I am so sorry, baby, but I think they've quit making the Ranch flavored Pringles. Yes I know you don't like the jalapeno Pringles. I am so sorry. Really I am." Both parties seemed genuinely distraught.

And I imagine Allen Ginsberg in this supermarket, as he once imagined Walt Whitman in a supermarket in California and wonder, as Allen wondered, "What sphinx

of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate their brains and imaginations?"

The meat department workers in blood stained white smocks recite their corporate programmed litany: "Welcome to Food Lion. How can I best serve you today?" I cannot help but politicize such moments, so I say, "Humiliating, isn't it, to say that a thousand times a day to people who just want to be left alone to shop." Once in a while I get a knowing glance back, but usually they do not respond, because cameras cover every inch of the place.

Only the Mongoloid bag-faced boy seems happy to be here. His smile is a deep mysterious void. What it must be like to be so unfazed, to be in another country of the mind? What sphinx rules his Republic of One? Does it have the same unknowable corporate face as governs our obedience to this one?

It was to the spectral triumph of corporatism Allen Ginsberg referred in the epic poem, "Howl": Moloch, whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

The world at that time, 1956, understood what Ginsberg was saying. Around the planet, Howl, remains the most well-known American poem of the twentieth century. Here in the Republic of Amnesia though,

Head splitting light beats down on pyramids of plastic eggs, as if to incubate their hatching of the ladies stockings within, dozens of kinds of toothpaste, well scrubbed dead chickens, lurid baskets of too-perfect flowers, plastic wraps, tissue for faces, asses and wrapping gifts, row upon row of polished vegetables and fruits standing like soldiers waiting for the annihilation of salads or the ovens of casseroleedom

ZOMBIE HELL

If you ask, you will find that most of our citizenry are indeed “happy to be born in America” – Fat City, the beacon of bacon. The great 24/7 all-you-can-eat buffet republic, where you can walk in without a cent in your pocket and buy a car, or, until the credit meltdown, even a house

“Howl” is all but lost amid the crackling digital noise of the immediate moment. Allen’s hairy assed existential yalp for humanity just doesn’t go well with the body waxed décor of our current American aesthetic.

President Obama understands the featureless not-so-new American aesthetic. So well that he had the world’s most politically correct, authority sanctioned, but absolutely worst poet, Elizabeth Alexander, read at his inauguration. (“We encounter each other in words, words spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed, words to consider, reconsider”) Like the soothing, ambiguous language of the Super Corporate State, it sounds as if it means something. Which is close enough for government work. More importantly, she has been vetted by proper authorities and is credentialed and licensed by Yale University to practice poetry. The marketing theme of the event was Obama’s alleged blackness. Alexander is a sorta black too, but not black enough to scare away business. Welcome to the domination of the business aesthetic. Literate people all over the world found Alexander’s reading to be like one of those eye watering farts you just wait through until it blows away. Still, millions of Americans listened and cried, in accordance with the marketing theme, “happy to be born in America, where a black man can be elected president.” Personally, I was sorry as hell I’d sworn off bourbon for the month.

If you ask, you will find that most of our citizenry are indeed “happy to be born in America” – Fat City, the beacon of bacon. The great 24/7 all-you-can-eat buffet republic, where you can walk in without a cent in your pocket and buy a car, or, until the credit meltdown, even a house. People immigrate here for just that: to possess more commodities and goods than previously available (as in none, zilch); or to accumulate money to ensure such goods in the future. Or to escape political machinery that deprives them of goods, and sometimes kills them if they object. “Your basic lack of democracy,” as we’re constantly reminded. I’ve met a few genuinely starving people in my day, and to

be truthful, democracy was the last thing on their minds.

However, they usually believed the American free market sell job about a profoundly bountiful place with plentiful opportunities, or at the very least, plenty of edible commodities. And from their experience and perspective, there surely is truth to the claim. For the most part, these immigrants are utterly unconcerned about the resource depletion or ecocide inherent in a superheated capitalist system designed to burn up as much of the planet as possible as fast as possible, in order to generate as many commodities as possible for the quickest buck possible. Show’em the money and the meat! If I were an average citizen in Haiti or Somalia, I’d feel the same way.

But even more fortunate people among them believe the hype. My Central American friend Rodrigo, who is in no danger of starving because he owns a couple of tamale and panade street carts, says, “A new car, that’s what I want to go to America for. A car and an apartment with one of those things that go up and down inside the buildings.”

“An elevator?”

“Si! An elevator. A glass one!”

When I get back down there, I’ll be sorry to tell Rodrigo that we went bust before he got his glass elevator ride. But if he needs an eight-bottle Pier 1 wine rack or a particle board book shelf that leans decidedly to the right, we can fix him right up. America is one big yard sale now, as we close out the books on industrial capitalism, only to discover that all our neighbors were as broke as we were. That it was all “on the plastic,” the furniture, the wines, the digital toys, the camping gear that never got used. There is something eerily sad in these tens of thousands of suburban Saturday morning sales. There are seldom any buyers, not even many “free box” takers – only sellers. An uncharacteristic silence hangs in the air, and there is the feeling of some unspoken recent disaster of immense proportion, some Chernoybl like thing that left everything standing.

“It’s only a system,” I told myself during

the 24/7 blanket coverage of Michael Jackson's corpse, deeply suspicious that that so many millions of Americans were really distraught over the loss of this weirdly mutated media flesh puppet. Morbidly curious maybe, but not distraught. There were the high ceremonial tributary rituals, the carefully written and rehearsed incantations as to how Jackson pushed the global cause of racial equality to new heights. Even Nelson Mandela said so. Why am I not sharing in this great and tragic stirring of the masses? This news event apparently of massive import?

A politician dips his pecker in the wrong honeypot, and it plays for days, dies down, then returns months later when the honeypot sues him for support, his wife sues him for divorce. A congressman offers a black dude a blowjob in a public restroom because, "I was afraid of him and wanted to accommodate the situation." Cheap spectacle and the distractive buffoonery of folly, along with the latest reasons we should be afraid, these are primary grist for the media entertainment divisions called "news."

But seldom to never do we get news and information as to the global scale of the genuine emergency facing humankind. Bad news is bad for business, therefore said to be bad for you and me. We all accept that consumer confidence is the foundation of the whole shebang, the confidence game that is capitalism. Thus confidence and cheery optimism is mandatory among the citizen consumer-producer marks. Willingly we self-police our behavior, shunning, criticizing or mocking what we perceive as "negative people." We drive past the empty parking lots, abandoned housing developments, through networks of cameras and cops with radar guns, stun guns and real guns every few blocks, numb to it all, listening to government commercial propaganda officialized by Katie Couric and Ben Bernanke. Just like us, they have internalized the system as a matter of education and "professionalism." But unlike us, they've done it to such an effective degree as to warrant seven figure re-

muneration.

Somewhere waaay down the ladder of the propaganda machinery, we find the anonymous guy or gal who writes the crap that keeps the front page of our web browsers so slow. The top story on my browser yesterday was: "Is Facebook hurting American productivity?" (begging the question as to whether there is any production to hurt). On one level you gotta wonder who the hell put that story there and for what reason. On the other hand, the story carried a link to Facebook. Was that a small act of personal rebellion at AOL? A corporate state message? Or a Facebook plant to direct traffic in its direction? In all likelihood though, it was just another piece of meaningless shit, generated by some kid news editor at AOL, a guy who has one of those rare things in America these days, a job, because he's already internalized the system far too well. In any case, my attention was momentarily diverted, sucked into AOL World, snared away from what other world I do not know, but certainly one fraught with paranoia, or at least hyper suspicion, if a browser screen can arouse so much speculation as to its motives.

Speaking of motives, there are those who worry about an American authoritarian police state one day rounding folks up, shuffling them off to geographically remote camps, such as the Department of Homeland Security's scattered FEMA Camps. But physical geography isn't the only geography. There is geography of the mind too, where another kind of hellish internment may be conducted. One without razor wire or sirens but surely as confining and in its own way, as soul chilling as any concentration camp. One with plenty to eat and filled with distractions and diversions enough to drown out the alarms and sirens that go off inside free men at the scent of tyranny. If a round up of Americans is real, then it began years ago. And as far as I can tell, everyone went peacefully, each one alone, like children, whose greatest concern on that day when the gates were closed, was the absence of Ranch flavored Pringles.

"It's only a system," I told myself during the 24/7 blanket coverage of Michael Jackson's corpse, deeply suspicious that that so many millions of Americans were really distraught over the loss of this weirdly mutated media flesh puppet

CT *Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's class war* (Random House, 2007) and a frequent contributor to the BBC and other international media.*

Cash for clunkers?

Landfilling old gas-guzzlers for new gas-guzzlers isn't green
– it's a subsidy for the motor industry, argues **Michael I. Niman**

Is a 70-year-old, fuel-guzzling, soot-belching car really the green model for the future?

Let's be honest and get one simple fact straight. The Obama administration's "Cash for Clunkers" program is a \$1 billion subsidy to the auto industry. We can debate whether or not that's a good thing and how it will or won't help pull us out of our economic morass. But let's not make believe this is about protecting the environment.

Building a car produces, on average, about seven tons of CO₂. The steel and aluminum for that car comes from iron, chromium, bauxite, and nickel. More and more, steel production is carried out in countries with lax environmental and worker safety regulations. The largest bauxite producers are Guinea, Jamaica, Brazil, and Australia. Bauxite is harvested through strip mining, where the surface forest and soil is destroyed.

Other ingredients in your car include zinc, whose production byproducts include heavy-metal-laced slag, sulfur dioxide, and cadmium vapor. Interiors, electronic and mechanical components, and upholstery are often made from PVC – a material whose production and disposal releases persistent carcinogenic environmental toxins such as dioxin. More and more, these plastic components are made in overseas sweatshops, again, with lax environmental and worker safety regulations. The costs of producing new cars are both environmen-

tal and social, with entire communities being poisoned and workers being sickened and crippled.

So let's look at the alternative: keeping old cars on the road. That's the Cuban model, where they've taken this concept to the extreme. Go to Havana and hail yourself a 1937 Chevy taxicab and you'll see this theory in action. Of course the Cubans weren't thinking about the environment when they opted out of the new car game. It was economic necessity. As a communist bloc country, Cuba didn't have access to hard currencies. After the fall of the Soviet empire, Cubans had little access to any currency. The same conditions led Cuba to become a global leader in organic agriculture. Cubans couldn't afford pesticides. They also couldn't afford most disposable goods associated with a consumerist economy.

By the time Cuba's economy started to pick up during the last decade, it had already become recognized as the model for sustainable development. So they ran with it, essentially replacing the red flag with a green one.

But is a 70-year-old, fuel-guzzling, soot-belching car really the green model for the future? Let's compare keeping this 10-miles-per-gallon dinosaur on the road to the American model of keeping cars on the road for 10 years. While the contemporary American Crown Victoria, at 18 miles

per gallon, is a cleaner machine, the hidden environmental cost is buried in the production of seven of these cars, six of which have long ago been crushed.

For a visual comparison, imagine a Cuban house with a 1955 Chrysler in the driveway. Then imagine an American house, with a 2006 Chrysler in the driveway, and five rusted wrecks in the garden. Whose environmental footprint is smaller?

You'll never quite see the comparison with such stark visuals, however, since in the US, we send all of our trash and wastes to the mythical land of Away, never to be seen or thought of again.

My argument pops a hole or two, however, when that 1937 Chevy rumbles by, with soot belching from its 1965 Russian diesel engine. While the American model of disposable cars clearly produces far more carbon pollution, the newer American cars produce far less smog. So while they foul the global environment, they're much easier on the local environment. This is the magic of American pollution – it all goes to the land of Away. The Cuban model offsets this problem with the reality that there just aren't that many cars, of any vintage, on the road. Most of Cuba's population relies on government-subsidized mass transportation. Putting more people in busses and subways, not crushing 16-miles-per-gallon clunkers and replacing them with 18-miles-per-gallon clunkers, is the real green solution. In this light, the billion dollars that the Obama administration plans to spend subsidizing the purchase of personal automobiles is a billion dollars not spent on mass transportation infrastructure or operations.

The Cash for Clunkers program also really doesn't address the smog issue, since you can only trade in a vehicle that is 25 years old or newer. Hence, all the clunkers will already be equipped with catalytic converters and will be relatively clean. The oldest of these cars, whose pollution control systems have already failed, will stay on the road, since their poorer owners will

not be able to afford new cars, even with the cash incentive. If smog was the issue, some of the clunker cash could have been better spent as grants to repair anti-pollution systems on cars whose owners could not otherwise maintain them.

There are other problems with the Cash for Clunkers program. For one, it rewards past irresponsible, and dare we say, anti-social behavior. If you bought a gas-guzzling SUV, say, 10 years ago, when it didn't take an Einstein to figure out the environmental footprint of such a pig, you now get up to \$4,500 dollars as an unearned reward.

The more selfish you were back then, and hence, the lower the miles-per-gallon rating on your clunker, the more selfish you can be today, with your new clunker only having to best your old clunker's lousy fuel efficiency by two to five miles per gallon. Hence you can trade in your used 16-miles-per-gallon vehicle for a new 18-miles-per-gallon SUV and get \$3,500, or best your old pickup by two miles per gallon for a \$4,500 windfall. If, by comparison, you shopped responsibly 10 years ago and bought, say, a 35-miles-per-gallon Ford Focus, and you now want to trade up to a 50-miles-per-gallon car, there's nothing here for you, since the program only buys cars getting less than 18 miles per gallon – and that new car will cost a few grand more due to all the clunker cash flowing into the new car market.

This program only benefits those who can afford a new car. And it hurts those who can't, since the crushing of hundreds of thousands of perfectly good used cars will tighten the bottom end of the used car market, causing prices to rise. Hence, the oldest and dirtiest cars will have to stay on the road a bit longer since their owners can't afford to replace their 20-year-old car with a 10-year-old model.

The influx of all this clunker cash into the new car market will also cause prices to rise as the market heats up with more new car buyers. Hence, where automakers were offering deep discounts to lure consumers

Putting more people in busses and subways, not crushing 16-miles-per-gallon clunkers and replacing them with 18-miles-per-gallon clunkers, is the real green solution

COVER STORY

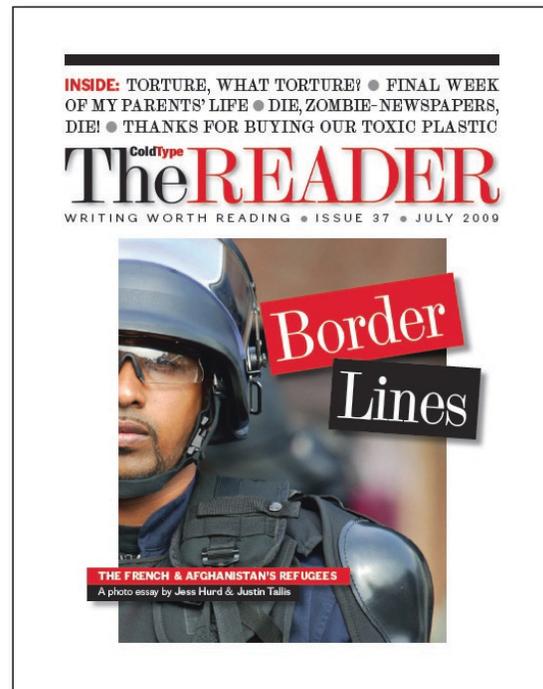
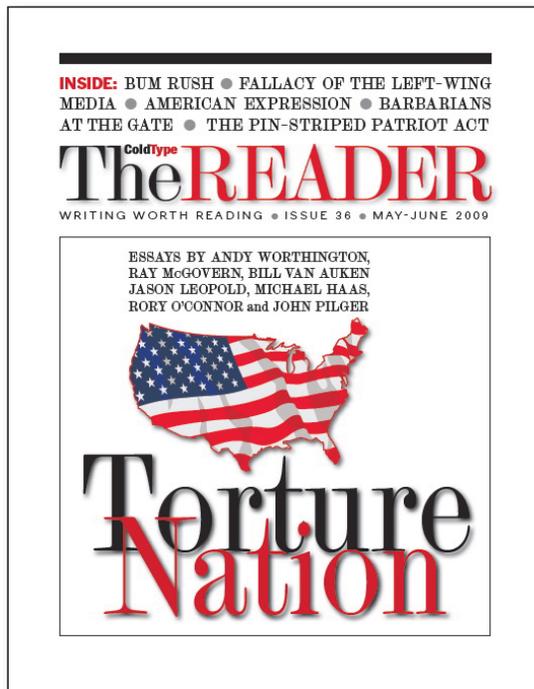
into showrooms, they now can simply advertise that they'll give you \$4,500 of the government's money for your junker—and ditch the deep discounts. In this scenario, the Cash for Clunkers program becomes a direct subsidy to automakers who can now sell cars at higher prices to newly cash-rich buyers. Again, if you never bought a gas-guzzler in the first place, this gravy train ain't for you, and all you get is higher new car prices.

Cars are like anything else. Throwing

away usable things so you can replace them with new "green" products isn't green. It's just a way for you to feel good about being a consumer at a time when the world can no longer afford consumerism. Only now, the government will pay you to consume, and bless your new gas-guzzler with a green aura. **CT**

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The era of Iconomania

Danny Schecter examines the cult of hero-worship and the place of Walter, Michael and Nelson in America's cultural consciousness

What a time for Iconomania, none of it critical, none of it questioning, none offering deeper perspective or leading to very revealing coverage.

Politicians may rule, but celebrities dominate in a culture where every politician dreams of shaping an aura that inspires hero worship and adoration. That was Barack Obama's trump card with his eloquence often blinding us to the substance of his stances.

First there was Michael Jackson's death with wall-to-wall coverage dominated by our info-tainment media where show biz and news biz merges more easily than media companies.

Michael's moon walk excited many more of us than Neil Armstrong's reral thing did 40 years ago. The gloved one transcended the planet of the strange to join the pantheon of the adored, achieving in death what he failed to achieve in life, despite his fans, impact and commercial success. He became larger than life, at least until all the details of his tragic death emerge.

Now joining Jackson on that astral plane of idol worship, is Walter Cronkite who rocketed from a life of a journo journeyman into the hero's circle. His many media-mates and wannabes pumped the airwaves with non-stop nostalgia, and testimonials, but paid little attention to his dismay with

the direction "his" industry had taken, and the colleagues who hijacked it.

In the early days, Cronkite referred to his operation as the CBS NEWS CONTROL CENTER – and yes, the big nets did CONTROL what we saw, and who we saw. There is a reason that the room most TV shows take place are out of is called the CONTROL Room. From there, the signal goes to MASTER CONTROL. Control is still the metaphor for media mediation.

Pushed out at 65

To add star power to CBS's non-prime time tribute its greatest news star since Murrow, the legend who recruited him, the network that pushed him out at 65 turned to actor George Clooney and comic Robin Williams who got more airtime than most of his colleagues and competition, the likes of Charlie, Barbara, Mike, Andy, Ted, Diane, Katie and even Dan.

By the time I got into broadcast news – at WBCN in Boston, the station that the CBS corporation killed a month ago, I did not want to emulate him, considering him and his co-anchors skills for the system and emblems of a corporate news system that Cronkite himself would later critique. The CBS News Special featured exactly one soundbite with Walter's concerns about the way TV News now undermines our democracy

To add star power to CBS's non-prime time tribute its greatest news star since Murrow, the legend that recruited him, the network that pushed him out at 65, turned to actor George Clooney and comic Robin Williams

67 minutes of service is not a lifetime of struggle. Forgive me my skepticism. I am not really a bad news bear, but really?

He had told us at Mediachannel when he became our advisor, “As you know, I’ve been increasingly and publicly critical of the direction that journalism has taken of late, and of the impact on democratic discourse and principles. Like you, I’m deeply concerned about the merger mania that has swept our industry, diluting standards, dumbing down the news, and making the bottom line sometimes seem like the only line. It isn’t and it shouldn’t be.”

We welcomed Cronkite’s support in hopes that it would lead the rest of the media world to take our work seriously. Most didn’t, tethered as they were to news as a profit center. Ratings and revenues continue to come before truth seeking.

I was saddened to learn he died of dementia. He certainly was a man of integrity and a champion of international peace and world federalism. The right wing still bashes him, accusing him of selling out the Vietnam War. On the left, he has his critics and supporters in the world of independent media who noted that he had been a supporter of the war before he pronounced it unwinnable. For a weekend, he was bigger than American Idol.

Mandela pageant

Another world icon, Nelson Mandela still survives. His achievements and courage were marked here in New York on “Mandela Day” with a pricey all-star benefit concert at the Radio City Music Hall. It was presented in the name of his prison number, 46664, now a charity to fight AIDS. The event was packaged beautifully by a team of production and PR pros, who also took the edge off his political mission and history as a one time believer in armed struggle.

This most political of freedom fighters was depoliticized in the slickness of celebrity tributes. He had been rebranded as everyone’s smiling grandfather with little information offered about his long march to freedom, a march that has not yet ended.

He had become the celebrity who made

other celebrities feel good and important, a flock of global entertainment notables and politicians, including France’s first lady Carla Bruni, who toasted Nelson Mandela’s 91st birthday. Let us hope he doesn’t end up remembered for one phrase such as Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream.”

It was a great event but it also inadvertently sanitized the problems South Africa and the continent still face. The brutal legacy of apartheid was not really explained nor was the work his foundations are doing. Will the crowds still stand up for what he stood up for once he is gone?

We don’t need another hero’s holiday – we need more reporting and caring about the need to engage with the issues they raised. I used to think popular musicians would help take us there but consciousness has now been turned into charity, and movements into logos and personalities.

“For Mandela Day, people across the world were asked to spend 67 minutes of their time for worthy causes,” said one report. “The number 67 echoes the years Mandela spent in public service, from his early political involvement with the African National Congress in 1942 to today.” 67 minutes of service is not a lifetime of struggle. Forgive me my skepticism. I am not really a bad news bear, but really?

Michael Jackson gave us We Are The World. Can we live it, not just sing about it? Walter Cronkite wanted to inform us about our society so we would care enough to change it. He was not just “Uncle Walter.” And Nelson, the man so revered as “Madiba” and who I have helped make six films about, has lessons for us to learn about organizing, commitment, collective action and fighting for what’s right, despite the odds.

We do need heroes and role models to respect. We shouldn’t have to wait until they grow old or die to honor them. The media should help us learn their lessons so we can share their passions, not sit there passively in awe until the next commercial break distracts us again. **CT**

News Dissector
Danny Schechter
blogs for
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He is making a film
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crisis as a crime
story. Comments
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The man in the mirror

Chris Hedges on the variety show with a coffin
– yes, it’s the final performance of Michael Jackson

In celebrity culture we destroy what we worship. The commercial exploitation of Michael Jackson’s death was orchestrated by the corporate forces that rendered Jackson insane. Jackson, robbed of his childhood and surrounded by vultures that preyed on his fears and weaknesses, was so consumed by self-loathing he carved his African-American face into an ever-changing Caucasian death mask and hid his apparent pedophilia behind a Peter Pan illusion of eternal childhood. He could not disentangle his public and his private self. He became a commodity, a product, one to be sold, used and manipulated. He was infected by the moral nihilism and personal disintegration that are at the core of our corporate culture. And his fantasies of eternal youth, delusions of majesty, and desperate, disfiguring quests for physical transformation were expressions of our own yearning. He was a reflection of us in the extreme.

His memorial service – a variety show with a coffin – had an estimated 31.1 million television viewers. The ceremony, which featured performances or tributes from Stevie Wonder, Brooke Shields and other celebrities, was carried live on 19 networks, including the major broadcast and cable news outlets. It was the final episode of the long-running Michael Jackson series. And it concluded with Jackson’s daughter,

Paris, being prodded to stand in front of a microphone to speak about her father. Janet Jackson, before the girl could get a few words out, told Paris to “speak up.” As the child broke down, the adults around her adjusted the microphone so we could hear the sobs. The crowd clapped. It was a haunting echo of what destroyed her father.

The stories we like best are “real life” stories – early fame, wild success and then a long, bizarre and macabre emotional train wreck. O.J Simpson offered a tamer version of the same plot. So does Britney Spears. Jackson, by the end, was heavily in debt and had weathered a \$22 million out-of-court settlement payment to Jordy Chandler, as well as seven counts of child sexual abuse and two counts of administering an intoxicating agent in order to commit a felony. We fed on his physical and psychological disintegration, especially since many Americans are struggling with their own descent into overwhelming debt, loss of status and personal disintegration.

The lurid drama of Jackson’s personal life meshed perfectly with the ongoing dramas on television, in movies and in the news. News thrives on “real life” stories, especially those involving celebrities. News reports on television are mini-dramas complete with a star, a villain, a supporting cast, a good-looking host and a dramatic, if often

The lurid drama of Jackson’s personal life meshed perfectly with the ongoing dramas on television, in movies and in the news.

Fame is its own denominator. And every anecdote seemed to confirm that when you spend your life as a celebrity, you have no idea who you are

unexpected, ending. The public greedily consumed “news” about Jackson, especially in his exile and decline, which often outdid most works of fiction. In “Fahrenheit 451,” Ray Bradbury’s novel about a future dystopia, people spend most of the day watching giant television screens that show endless scenes of police chases and criminal apprehensions. Life, Bradbury understood, once it was packaged, scripted, given a narrative and filmed, became the most compelling form of entertainment. And Jackson was a great show. He deserved a great finale.

Those who created Jackson’s public persona and turned him into a piece of property, first as a child and finally as a corpse encased in a \$15,000 gold-plated casket, are the agents, publicists, marketing people, promoters, script writers, television and movie producers, advertisers, video technicians, photographers, bodyguards, recording executives, wardrobe consultants, fitness trainers, pollsters, public announcers and television news personalities who create the vast stage of celebrity for profit. They are the puppet masters. No one achieves celebrity status, no cultural illusion is swallowed as reality, without these armies of cultural enablers and intermediaries. The producers at the Staples Center in Los Angeles made sure the 18,000 attendees and the television audience (even the BBC devoted three hours to the tribute) watched a funeral that was turned into another maudlin form of uplifting popular entertainment.

The memorial service for Jackson was a celebration of celebrity. There was the queasy sight of groups of children, including his own, singing over the coffin. Magic Johnson put in a plug for Kentucky Fried Chicken. Shields, fighting back tears, recalled how she and a 33-year-old Jackson – who always maintained that he was straight – broke into Elizabeth Taylor’s room the night before her last wedding to “get the first peek of the [wedding] dress.” Shields and Jackson, at Taylor’s wedding, then joked that they were “the mother and father of the bride.”

“Yes, it may have seemed very odd to the outside,” Shields said, “but we made it fun and we made it real.”

Mandela and Kermit the Frog

There were photo montages in which a shot of Jackson shaking hands with Nelson Mandela was immediately followed by one of him with Kermit the Frog. Fame reduces all of the famous to the same level. Fame is its own denominator. And every anecdote seemed to confirm that when you spend your life as a celebrity, you have no idea who you are.

We measure our lives by these celebrities. We seek to be like them. We emulate their look and behavior. We escape the messiness of real life through the fantasy of their stardom. We, too, long to attract admiring audiences for our grand, ongoing life movie. We try to see ourselves moving through our lives as a camera would see

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us, mindful of how we hold ourselves, how we dress, what we say. We invent movies that play inside our heads with us as stars. We wonder how an audience would react. Celebrity culture has taught us, almost unconsciously, to generate interior personal screenplays. We have learned ways of speaking and thinking that grossly disfigure the way we relate to the world and those around us. Neil Gabler, who has written wisely about this, argues that celebrity culture is not a convergence of consumer culture and religion so much as a hostile takeover of religion by consumer culture.

Jackson desperately feared growing old. He believed he could control race and gender. He transformed himself through surgery and perhaps female hormones from a brown-skinned African-American male to a chalk-faced androgynous ghoul with no clear sexual identity.

And while he pushed these boundaries to the extreme, he did only what many Americans do. There were 12 million cosmetic plastic surgery procedures performed last year in the United States. They were performed because, in America, most human beings, rich and poor, famous and obscure, have been conditioned to view themselves as marketable commodities. They are objects, like consumer products. They have no intrinsic value. They must look fabulous and live on fabulous sets. They must remain young. They must achieve notoriety and money, or the illusion of it, to be a success. And it does not matter how they get there.

The moral nihilism of our culture licenses a dark voyeurism into other people's humiliation, pain, weakness and betrayal. Education, building community, honesty, transparency and sharing are qualities that will see you, in a gross perversion of democracy and morality, ridiculed and voted off any reality show. Fellow competitors for prize money and a chance for fleeting fame elect to "disappear" the unwanted. In the final credits of the reality show "America's Next Top Model," a picture of the woman

expelled during the episode vanishes from the group portrait on the screen. Those cast aside become, at least to the television audience, nonpersons. Celebrities who can no longer generate publicity, good or bad, vanish. Life, these shows teach, is a brutal world of unadulterated competition and constant quest for notoriety and attention. And life is about the personal humiliation of those who oppose us. Those who win are the best. Those who lose deserve to be erased. Those who fail, those who are ugly or poor, are belittled and mocked.

Human beings are used, betrayed and discarded in a commodity culture, which is pretty much the story of Jackson's life, although he experienced the equivalent of celebrity resurrection. This has been very good for his music sales and perhaps for his father's new recording company, which Joe Jackson made sure to plug at public events after his son's death. Compassion, competence, intelligence and solidarity are useless assets when human beings are commodities. Those who do not achieve celebrity status, who do not win the prize money or make millions in Wall Street firms, deserve their fate.

Cult of self

The cult of self, which Jackson embodied, dominates our culture. This cult shares within it the classic traits of psychopaths: superficial charm, grandiosity and self-importance; a need for constant stimulation, a penchant for lying, deception and manipulation; and the incapacity for remorse or guilt. Jackson, from his phony marriages to his questionable relationships with young boys, had all these qualities. This is also the ethic promoted by corporations. It is the ethic of unfettered capitalism. It is the misguided belief that personal style and personal advancement, mistaken for individualism, are the same as democratic equality. It is the celebration of image over substance.

We have a right, in the cult of the self, to get whatever we desire. We can do

Life, these shows teach, is a brutal world of unadulterated competition and constant quest for notoriety and attention. And life is about the personal humiliation of those who oppose us. Those who win are the best. Those who lose deserve to be erased. Those who fail, those who are ugly or poor, are belittled and mocked

HERO WORSHIP / 2

The fantasy of celebrity culture is not designed simply to entertain

anything, even belittle and destroy those around us, including our friends, to make money, to be happy and to become famous. Once fame and wealth are achieved, they become their own justification, their own morality. How one gets there is irrelevant. It is this perverted ethic that gave us Wall Street banks and investment houses that willfully trashed the nation's economy, stole money from tens of millions of small shareholders who had bought stocks to finance their retirement or the college expenses of their children. The heads of these corporations, like the winners on a reality television program who lied and manipulated others to succeed, walked away with hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation and bonuses. The ethic of Wall Street is the ethic of celebrity.

The saturation coverage of Jackson's death is an example of our collective flight into illusion. The obsession with the trivia of his life conceals the despair, meaninglessness and emptiness of our own lives. It deflects the moral questions arising from mounting social injustice, growing inequalities, costly imperial wars, economic collapse and political corruption. The wild

pursuit of status, wealth and fame has destroyed our souls, as it destroyed Jackson, and it has destroyed our economy.

The fame of celebrities masks the identities of those who possess true power – corporations and the oligarchic elite. And as we sink into an economic and political morass, as we barrel toward a crisis that will create more misery than the Great Depression, we are controlled, manipulated and distracted by the celluloid shadows on the wall of Plato's cave.

The fantasy of celebrity culture is not designed simply to entertain. It is designed to drain us emotionally, confuse us about our identity, make us blame ourselves for our predicament, condition us to chase illusions of fame and happiness and keep us from fighting back. And in the end, that is all the Jackson coverage was really about, another tawdry and tasteless spectacle to divert a dying culture from the howling wolf at the gate. **CT**

Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His new book is Empire of Illusion (Knopf)

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I saw the news on TV today. Oh boy!

David Michael Green draws a parallel between the lives and deaths of Michael Jackson and John Lennon, icons of different ages

I caught all of about ten minutes of televised coverage of the Michael Jackson memorial service last month (I was in a pizza parlor, waiting for my slice to heat up) – which, as it turned out, was about eleven minutes too many for my taste. I don't mean to sound like somebody's craggy old grandpa, incessantly whining about how "it was better in our day", but I couldn't help thinking about the degree to which Jackson – in life and death – personified the utter shallowness of the culture we now endure.

And I certainly don't mean to play the game of *My Dead Rock Star Is Better Than Your Dead Rock Star*, but I also couldn't help being thrown back upon my memories and grief at the loss thirty years ago of a cultural figure who really did matter, John Lennon.

The two individuals, their contributions and contexts, our reactions to them, and even their deaths, say everything about America then and now.

The fact that some commentators have exposed the worst excesses of the Jackson media death-bacchanalia suggests there may be a shred of hope for us as a society yet. But stack those lonely voices up against the tidal wave of televised coverage of this non-event, and the grim visage of our unbearable lightness as beings comes into an altogether too clear focus.

Despite being twenty years past his prime at the moment of his death, Michael Jackson personified that lack of seriousness that has become to this society what water is to fish. As an entertainer – and that is the operative term – he struck me as a profound regression to an era whose demise I surely did not lament. Like, say, Sammy Davis Jr., Jackson could sing and dance, and was a black man successful at penetrating the white man's world. But like the entire milieu from which Davis emanated, Jackson's work (as opposed to art) was careful to demand little from its customers – again, this being the operative term. (Not for nothing was the song-writing machine that penned the Jackson Five's early hits known as "The Corporation".)

Sultans of smarm

Hence the silliness that has been attendant to his death, and in particular the Academy Awards-like public ceremony featuring Mariah Carey and all the usual sultans of smarm. It would be most unpleasant to admit to ourselves that one of our greatest cultural icons lacked depth. That could only mean, ergo, that the fellow in the mirror is the proud owner of a substantial and uncomfortable absence of there there.

And so we desperately try to append qualities to Michael Jackson in death that he never possessed in life, the better to ex-

It would be most unpleasant to admit to ourselves that one of our greatest cultural icons lacked depth. That could only mean, ergo, that the fellow in the mirror is the proud owner of a substantial and uncomfortable absence of there there.

ven in Jackson's most obvious potential arena for political leadership – the question of race – his preeminent contribution seems to have been reminding people across the globe that black is not beautiful, and that those who can afford to should follow his lead in trying to become more white

plain away our own vacuousness.

Jackson himself strikes me as a sort of tragic figure, according to the most gracious rendering I can put together, in honor of speaking as charitably about the dead as one can. His father appears to have been a success-obsessed sadist who may own the lion's share of responsibility for what his seventh child became, both good and bad.

And what that was more than anything, it seems to me, was a boy locked forever in the body of a man. I certainly don't begrudge anyone that, if that's how they choose to live their lives (sans the penchant for pedophilia, of course, or the use of one's own child as a daredevil photo-op prop). What I wonder about is what it says about us that we elevate such an individual to the highest ranks of those we adore as a society.

Honored by the Reagans

Yes, I know Michael Jackson gave money to charities. And that he was honored by Ronald and Nancy Reagan for his work in fighting drug addiction. Gosh, I feel better already. In so many ways, Jackson – like his contemporary, Madonna – represented

the emptying of content from the great flowering of popular culture that preceded him. Once the substance had been entirely sucked out, all that was left was the bogus symbolism of anti-establishmentarianism and the hollow tropes of faux danger and commercialized dissent.

When John Carlos and Tommy Smith held up their single gloved hands at the Olympics in 1968, it took guts; you knew what they were saying, and it was in your face. By the time Michael Jackson did it fifteen years later the glove was now covered with sequins, it was part of a dance costume, and what exactly did it mean...? Wrong question, sucka. Meaning was by then already so dated a concept. It was enough that is just seemed "Bad" – a real "Thriller".

Where Lennon had the stones to put his celebrity to work in dissing religion or composing a gutsy feminist screed like "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World", Jackson gave us insidious fluff and candy, complete with tricky dance moves. I can't think of a single substantive contribution he made toward advancing this culture during his lifetime, a period which fairly screamed out for all

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the help it could get from anyone with a microphone.

No, sorry, the moonwalk did not make us a better, more moral people. Even in Jackson's most obvious potential arena for political leadership – the question of race – his preeminent contribution seems to have been reminding people across the globe that black is not beautiful, and that those who can afford to should follow his lead in trying to become more white.

Common themes?

Ostensibly, both Lennon's "Imagine" and Jackson's "We Are The World" have a common theme. In reality, they couldn't be further apart. Where Lennon offered a work of beautiful simplicity that called for the eradication of tribalism and superstition, Jackson's sing-along is really a paternalistic paean to self-reverence, clothed in the garb

of a charity benefit.

Worse still, it's pablum, and it worships the very superstitions that Lennon sought to eradicate. In Jackson's anthem to the starving children of the world, we get this line: "We can't go on pretending day by day that someone, somewhere will soon make a change", directly followed – without the slightest sense of irony – by this one: "We are all a part of God's great big family and the truth, you know love is all we need".

Sorry. I guess I do sound like an old geezer, after all, romanticizing how it was so much better back in my day.

But, you know what? Take a look around.

It was so much better then.

CT

David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York.

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz

White House Ghost...



Meet Mom, she's a torture-loving fascist

Robert Corsini loves his mother, even though she's an Italian-Catholic, fascist and Fox News viewer

Although my mother would never admit it, she probably would grant the benefit of the doubt to the nefarious and twisted ambitions of the Inquisition

It's truly stupefying that today, in the midst of the Obama era, that legions of Americans continue to find it so easy to rationalize and doggedly defend the Bush administration's torture program.

As more details are revealed it's clear that never before in human history has such a complex system of abduction, international rendition, and judicial and legislative manipulations been employed to advance and empower an extremely narrow yet far reaching political agenda.

Bush and Co. have turned American democracy on its head and redefined political criminality and neo-fascistic hubris while injecting their poison into the minds of untold millions of Americans via a compliant and self-serving media system. They have rendered Orwell's horrific vision for the future of humanity in '1984', quaint. But above all, what is most astonishing to me is how they have made my 86 year old Italian-Catholic, Jesus loving mother, embrace torturers and denounce Peace Makers.

My two brothers and I used to have a good laugh when my parents would talk about the 'good' Mussolini brought to Italy. For my entire adult life, spirited political hyperbole and great food have always been a part of my family's dinner table experience. 'Pass the ravioli – the Japs deserved two nuclear bombs!' 'How could you say such a thing I thought you believed in Jesus?'

A study released in April by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press indicates the more often people attend church, the more likely they are to support torture. Sadly, the sobering data supports my own personal struggle growing up in an extremely conservative, Italian Catholic family. I will always remember my parents' deep-seated belief that the biggest mistake 'Il Duce' ever made was aligning himself with Hitler (I think Hitler saw it the other way around) and how amazing my mother's gnocchi were.

Even in the face of obvious political malfeasance and criminality, my parents always justified the 'right' and demonized the 'left'. Diabolical acts like the bombing of Cambodia or My Lai or the blatant illegal dabblings of Richard Nixon, seemingly antithetical to the 12 years of Catholic education I received were always 'justifiable'.

Although my mother would never admit it, she probably would grant the benefit of the doubt to the nefarious and twisted ambitions of the Inquisition. Murder and torture in the name of Jesus are 'A- OK', as long as the Pope gives his blessings, unless the Pope contradicts the President – then that's another story. My mother is a truly wonderful and beautiful woman — she is just so profoundly frightened by what she has been told about the world, that her value system has been turned inside out.

My parents were children of Italian immigrants and have been ardent Republicans, defenders of Nixon, detractors of FDR, haters of the Beatles, unions, gays, environmentalism and consumer advocacy. As far as African Americans go, suffice to say that the angst ridden look on my parents' faces is forever etched in my mind when I told them an African American girl (and Catholic) asked me to her prom and I accepted.

It was the first indication that I was on a different path. Although neither of them completed college, my father (now deceased) and mother were great, committed loving and intelligent parents who encouraged their three sons to aim high and achieve great things. But there was always this ever-present layer of fear based bigotry on their part that tainted our relationship and generated extremely frustrating and painful arguments.

Enrico Romolo Corsini was a proud first generation, Brooklyn born, Italian-American and a WWII and Army Air-Corps veteran. When we argued politics, he would always make me prove my claims. I would say to him, 'Dad – the Soviet Union lost 20 million people during WWII' and his classic response would be, 'Show me where you read that! Who wrote that?... That can't be true!' and I would respond angrily, 'Here it's in your Encyclopedia Britannica!' And I would open the volume and read down to the casualties. He was silent, then grumbled. Although it took a lot of effort, God bless his soul, Dad's ego would succumb to the weight of evidence, albeit grudgingly. My mother is another story altogether.

Nun's attack

My own political evolution toward a liberal point of view probably began on the day I witnessed a Catholic nun strike a six year old boy. Sister Mary Agnes, Principal of Holy Family grammar school was tall, skinny and had beady-eyes. Her coke-bottle lenses on 60s style pointy eyeglasses made her eyes shrink to the size of steely-cold ball bearings. She was scary. I clearly

remember the day Sister Agnes made a young boy stand on a bench so she could have a clean swipe at him and reared back and slapped him across the face.

He collapsed to the asphalt. I caught the act of blatant child abuse from a distance as I was crossing an empty playground following recess – I was in eighth grade. More profoundly disturbing than the act itself, was the lack of response and incredulity my parents exhibited towards the revelation when I recounted the story.

This kind of 'denial' scenario would extend into my high school years when my brother and I would report to our parents the strange behaviors of a certain Franciscan priest who liked to wrestle 9th graders in an isolated room during 'Saturday detentions.' He was the Dean of Discipline. No joke. If you beat him, you could get out of your detention. He had a disgustingly protruding stomach and would take groups of a half dozen juvenile 'detainees' to a remote classroom, clear the desks and begin his matches.

He would make his opponents wear a leather 'protective' jacket to avoid marks and bruises and he liked to smother challengers with his massive gut. Being well trained football players, both my brother and I were able to defeat him, but only after nearly choking him to death in a head lock. I remember his eyes would bulge as sweat poured down his face – and he just wouldn't give up. And although there was no overt sexual contact that I witnessed, I now understand that near asphyxiation was part of his sexual fetish. He was 'getting off' and we were 'weirded' out. My parents thought it was funny and we weren't sure what to think.

Thirty years later Father Chris Kearney has been caught up in the church's self-inflicted wounds of sexual abuse, scandals and mendacious cover-ups; in a way, a victim himself of unfathomable denial. Honestly, Father Chris was a likeable person. He wasn't brutal and had a quirky sense of humor that most students liked. But he was sick and needed help. His behavior went on for two decades at the same High School implicating

Sister Mary Agnes, Principal of Holy Family grammar school was tall, skinny and had beady-eyes. Her coke-bottle lenses on 60s style pointy eyeglasses made her eyes shrink to the size of steely-cold ball bearings. She was scary

HOME TRUTHS

although I love and would do anything for my Mom, she and I have had a highly antagonistic relationship primarily based on the moral hypocrisy she consistently displays between her 'faith' and the reactionary socio-political values of her cherished GOP and its sacrosanct media mouthpiece, the FOX News Channel

administrators, teachers and priests alike for their lack of attention and inaction. Everyone knew that Father Chris was a little 'odd' and no one did anything about it, including hundreds of parents. That's where the real crime began.

Two hundred cases later and after nearly a billion dollars in liability has been paid out, Archdiocese of Los Angeles Cardinal Mahoney has publicly apologized for the church's transgressions including those of Father Chris – and my mother remains dismissive and even refused my suggestion to see the film 'Doubt' with its uncanny presentation of the complexity of Church's pedophilia cover-up scandals. One thing I can say about my Mom is that she has been consistent and tenacious in her denial. For obvious reasons I left the church far behind as I began my college years at UC Santa Barbara, much to my mother's disappointment. Ever since, although I love and would do anything for my Mom, she and I have had a highly antagonistic relationship primarily based on the moral hypocrisy she consistently displays between her 'faith' and the reactionary socio-political values of her cherished GOP and its sacrosanct media mouthpiece, the FOX News Channel.

She's a fan of Hannity, Bill-O, Rush and others of similar demeanor. Over the years, for my own mental health, I just had to accept the familial divide – but the task has proved to be more challenging than I ever could have imagined. Both my sense of spirituality and commitment to non-violence have been fundamentally challenged by my own mother, her self-righteous Catholicism and myopic Republican doctrines.

My life experience, education and professional work would say one thing, and she would say the opposite. Whether my insights from spending two years in the Peace Corps or my work producing documentary films about the inner-city, she would always say '...why do you care so much about those people?' For most of my life I was able to accept the differences between us, enjoy her as a loving mother well into my adult years and

appreciate her impeccable Italian cooking. Then came the attacks of September 11th 2001 and everything changed, including the nature and tone of our political differences. Dinner at Mom's has never been the same.

As America prepared for war and revenge, Pope John-Paul II admonished the Bush Administration publicly for its bellicosity and condemned all acts of vengeance. For once in my life I was able to feel inspired and hopeful that perhaps all was not lost with the church if the Pope was able to stand up for the essence of Christianity. Of course, we all know the outcome of that story. George Bush Sr. was immediately dispatched to the Vatican for a private audience with the maverick 'Pontiff'. John-Paul would not budge on his position and the elder Bush returned to Washington licking his wounds from the greatest diplomatic defeat of his political career. It's no coincidence to me that soon afterward, the 'revelations' of the Catholic priest pedophile scandals reached fever pitch across the nation and especially here in Los Angeles. It seemed as though every day there was another nightmare story about priests having violated children. But the question begged to be ask, why all of a sudden did the issue explode into the mainstream when people had known about the church's pedophile problem for a very long time?

It appears that there was a clear political consequence for the Pope taking the position he did. The American Catholic Bishops have fallen into line ever since and not a word in the pulpits about the 'immorality' of the war – and by extension, torture. The behavior of the American Bishops toward President Obama speaking at Notre Dame University's commencement is yet another example of their profound hypocrisy. Pre-emptive war is acceptable, but not a woman's right to choose.

But shockingly when I brought up the Pope's position on the war to my mother, her response was '...well, that's what the Pope is supposed to say? What are we to do, nothing?' Then she accused me of being naïve. It was at that moment that I came to the in-

controvertible conclusion that my mother is really a fascist because her response to the world around her was and remains grounded in fear, racism and arrogant American 'exceptionalism.' Facts be damned – we need to kick some ass. The Constitution is just another piece of paper.

The extent of the Bush-era global catastrophe is just beginning to emerge in the hearts and souls of Americans. It's clear that Obama's rise to the presidency was unequivocally enabled by the vast numbers of anti-war activists who marched consistently throughout the Bush years. I was one of them.

Despite my personal responsibilities, family and work, I marched, organized and committed hundreds of hours in the Los Angeles area working on a grass-roots level resisting the push to war and subsequent occupations. For me it was a simple question about what I wanted for my toddler son and teenage daughter – I refused to allow the Bush crimes to go unanswered – that somehow, I had to make an extended effort to challenge the status-quo.

One day in March of 2003 I was visiting friends and family in Europe just prior to the invasion of Iraq. I recall browsing the magazine rack in an Amsterdam bookstore and came across a Newsweek issue displaying the cover story "Bush and God". I was aghast at the image of the President – striking a very 'Calvinist' and prayerful pose. A young Senegalese immigrant was standing next to me and sensed my displeasure with what I was seeing. He said to me, "America doesn't deserve this." It was one of the most profound and personally impactful statements about our country I had ever heard – from a West African immigrant, in an Amsterdam bookstore.

Airport demonstration

My return flight to Los Angeles was booked through Washington-Dulles and I decided that I would seize the moment. I purchased some foam-core and made a sandwich placard that read 'War is Not the Answer'

on both sides. I tied the placards together, wrapped them in paper to cloak the message and boarded my flight from Brussels to Washington-Dulles. I had a 90 minute lay-over and my plan was to unwrap the placard, slip it over my shoulders and walk in silence down the center of the United Airlines terminal.

I was nervous, sweating yet determined. As I traversed the polished floors of the concourse making my quiet, yet highly visible demonstration against the war in the heart of American power, my action became a study in American 'realpolitik' as I gauged the range of responses from outright thumbs up support from African American airport janitorial staff, to hateful disdain and hard looks from pilots and cowboy-hat toting Texans. After walking up and down the crowded terminal several times, subjecting myself to a gauntlet of jeers and sneers before thousands of people, I sat down to pull myself together before making my connection to Los Angeles.

I was surprised that I wasn't arrested – but I knew the key would be not to utter a word as I walked and it worked. While sitting down, still shaking from the intensity of the moment, a teenager was crossing the terminal with his mother, approached me and said, 'Sir, I want to thank you and shake your hand for doing what you just did. It was the most courageous thing I have ever seen.' As he turned and walked away tears welled up in my eyes because a total stranger, a teen no less, completely understood and appreciated the meaning and intention of my action – while I could only expect disdain from my own family if they ever knew what I had done.

Although the peace movement in those years failed to stop the war, it did succeed, despite a near total media blackout and negative bias, in demonstrating to the world that many millions of Americans stood in public opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. My mother called me an 'anarchist' as I flew to New York City to demonstrate against the Republican Convention in 2004.

A young Senegalese immigrant was standing next to me and sensed my displeasure with what I was seeing. He said to me, "America doesn't deserve this." It was one of the most profound and personally impactful statements about our country I had ever heard – from a West African immigrant, in an Amsterdam bookstore

HOME TRUTHS

'You won't believe what Noni said about Obama – that's he's the anti-Christ and that closing down Guantanamo Bay show'd that he's weak and that we have to torture these people to defend ourselves.'

Robert Corsini is a documentary filmmaker, producer and writer. Mr. Corsini has produced television news and various incarnations of 'reality' television for nearly 20 years with dozens of national credits with NBC News, Discovery Channel, TLC, PBS and PAX to his name

She said that I was ruining my life by becoming one of 'them'. I have to say Mom was right in some ways. I was a rare 'forty-something' activist, new to the game and I was definitely the exception among people I knew. My activism did undermine my work as a producer and my marriage suffered as well. But at the time, I followed what was deep in my heart and at the core of my being.

Despite the myth of a 'liberal media' broadcasters, newsrooms and production companies marginalized and ignored the masses of demonstrators standing against the war. They would often find ways to silence and purge individuals within their companies who dared challenge the mindless 'group-think' that lead America into the 'quagmire' we're in today. I'm fully confident that my anti-war work has soured numerous job opportunities for me over the years. It's sad, but true and a sacrifice that I chose to make.

Just recently my daughter was home from college and had dinner with her grandmother and one of my nephews. Following another of Noni's fine homemade Italian meals, my daughter called me almost in tears and said 'You won't believe what Noni said about Obama – that's he's the anti-Christ and that closing down Guantanamo Bay show'd that he's weak and that we have to torture these people to defend ourselves.' Unfortunately and more significantly I learned that my 20 year old nephew agreed with all of these FOX News/Dick Cheney talking points stating, 'Sometimes you just have to torture....'

The lesson has been painful and consistent. Fascism is a dark and twisted human phenomenon that transcends gender, ethnicity, borders, cultures, political parties, religions and even families. It lives with us and against us. It's capable of justifying the worst, fear based and manipulative aspects of humanity; murder, torture, racism and war – even pedophilia. It steals lives and brainwashes and organizes masses of people to act against their own self-interest and that of their grandchildren, friends and families. It's diabolical in nature and cloaks itself with

many disguises – fascism lives on the 'right' as well as the 'left'. It's a cancer that feeds on our fears and insecurities and easily proliferates like the Swine Flu, into a pandemic catastrophe.

Things are indeed changing in America and President Obama is leading the way. But unfortunately the architecture of fascism in America is both physical and psychological and remains firmly entrenched. The new brand of American fascism's deconstruction will transcend our lifetimes and may not succeed. As long as people like my 86 year old, Italian/Catholic mother can justify torture and diminish peace makers – it's easy to understand how Hitler drove the world to the brink of oblivion with the support of his compliant and manipulated populations.

The 'good German' Nazi enabler, lives right next door and sometimes even within our own families. When masses of fellow Americans can attribute the worst of motives to Obama's overtures toward diplomacy and peace and prohibitions against torture, the country has already crossed the threshold into fascism. Turning this paradigm around will require progressively minded Americans to confront and dissuade the forces of misguided hubris, ignorance and racism everywhere they find them, both in our personal and professional lives.

People cannot support torture while claiming to be Christian – they are mutually exclusive. Just like fascism and democracy. Sorry Mom, I love you and your pasta, but you and masses of other right-wingers out there and not the Beatles, homosexuals, Muslims, hippies or rappers, have undermined the footing of American democracy.

You have abandoned your own Christian values of humility, forgiveness and compassion and have empowered craven, greed driven politicians to frighten our nation into submission.

It takes far more strength of character to stand for peace, than succumb to war. This is why Jesus was tortured and murdered by people who feared the truth. Fascists all of them!

CT

Murder of a village

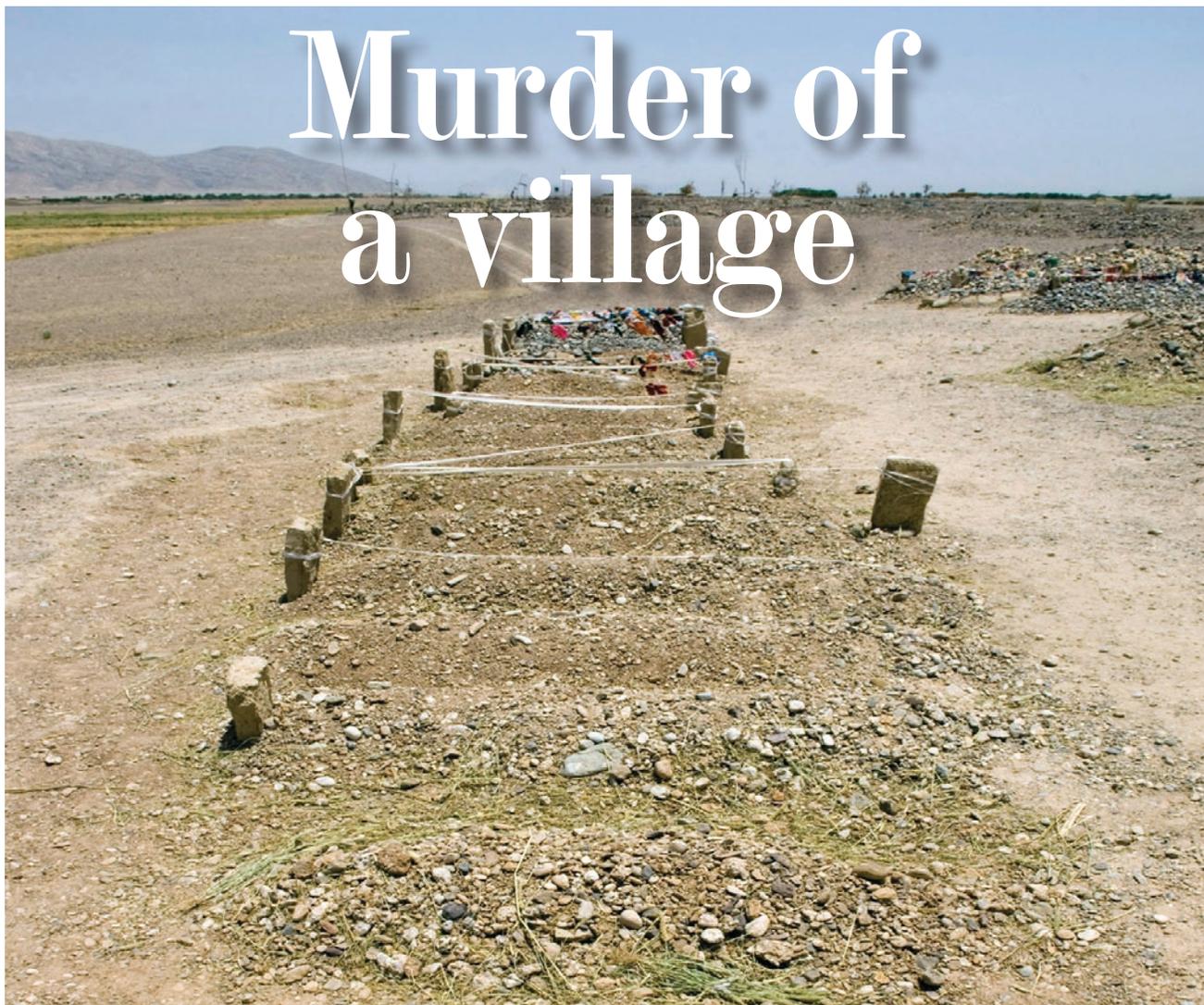


PHOTO © GUY SMALLMAN 2009

Photojournalist **Guy Smallman** was the only Western reporter to visit Granai, the Afghanistan village that was devastated by a US air attack in early May. He questions the conclusion of the investigation into the incident

On the evening of 4 May the people of Granai, a village in Farah province in western Afghanistan, attended evening prayers in their local mosque. It had been a long day. Many families had spent over six hours sheltering from a battle some three kilometres away between Taliban insurgents and US forces and their Afghan allies.

Fighting lasted all afternoon and only

ended after US warplanes strafed Taliban positions. The battle had finished an hour and a half before the villagers began to gather in the garden of the mosque. It was dark and things had returned to normal.

Then without warning, at 8.44pm, several guided bombs landed in their midst. According to local people they killed dozens and wounded many more.

A first bomb hit the centre of the village

PHOTO ESSAY



PHOTO © GUY SMALLMAN 2009

In less than half an hour 147 innocents were dead – the biggest single loss of civilian life since the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan

and a second landed in a compound one kilometre to the south.

In their panic, women and children headed to a compound in the north of the village, away from the site of the first two strikes. This group numbered some 100 people from around 15 families. At 9.12pm they were struck by a 2,000 pound guided bomb dropped by a B-1B strategic bomber.

In less than half an hour 147 innocents were dead – the biggest single loss of civilian life since the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan. The response from the population was immediate. A riot erupted in nearby Farah City. A furious crowd surrounded and broke the windows of the regional governor's house. The following Saturday angry students marched through the capital Kabul chanting, "The blood of Farah will never dry".

I visited the village along with a guide shortly after the attack. Granai is typical of rural Afghanistan, like many villages I have seen in my three trips to the country. The people are desperately poor, their meagre income from poppy cultivation rapidly

shrinking. They have little or no access to healthcare or education.

For the most part they have no interest in the outside world – not in the occupation, its government or the insurgency. Like most Afghans, after decades of outside interference, they just want to be left alone.

Despite the news of the killings, and the photographic evidence and testimonies from the families, the US military stated that 65 Taliban insurgents had been killed in the attack, adding that 20 civilians may also have died.

Occupation forces promised an immediate and thorough investigation into what had happened. But the US military's enquiry into the bombing, which was released on 18 June, leaves many questions unanswered. The 13 page unclassified document paints a frightening picture of how civilians can become targets in this unending war. According to the document a team of investigators, including US officers and Afghan officials, moved into the village to assess the impact of the airstrikes.

The report states that the first indica-



PHOTO © GUY SMALLMAN 2009

tion of the coming battle came from locals fleeing a nearby village of Dizak, eight kilometres away from Granai. The Dizak villagers told Afghan troops that the Taliban instructed them to leave as they were preparing to attack occupation troops.

The US report says that Taliban fighters did the same in Granai. But locals in Granai say there were no insurgents or orders to flee. This is just one of the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the report. The investigation notes that the mosque was destroyed in the bombing. However, it was still standing when I visited the village. The report states that “the mosque was used by the Taliban both as a madrassa [religious school] for teaching extremist ideology and as a barracks for foreign fighters”.

The only evidence produced to back up these claims was “real time intelligence” by the US commander on the ground.

The commander said that he intercepted radio messages from insurgents indicating that they were preparing to mount another attack that night.

The US officer called in a B-1B super-

sonic bomber that, according to the report, tracked groups of fighters for 20 minutes as they moved through the village. Yet no evidence has been released to back up this claim. All the cockpit footage from the bombers and unmanned drones that were present during the slaughter remain classified for undisclosed reasons.

The report states that during the actual battle that afternoon four F-18 Hornet warplanes “conducted a show of force, dropping flares”.

The commander decided, in the middle of the battle, to “warn” the insurgents. But he gave no warning when he ordered the deadly B-1B attack on the village.

Similarly, as Granai was far from the site of battle, the easiest way to tell if they were actually groups of fighters would have been to track them once they left the village and began moving towards occupation troops.

By this time the Afghan soldiers were joined by US marines and could have easily engaged the advancing fighters.

Yet the decision was taken to attack Granai hours after the battle had ended.

The US officer called in a B-1B supersonic bomber that, according to the report, tracked groups of fighters for 20 minutes as they moved through the village. Yet no evidence has been released to back up this claim

PHOTO ESSAY



PHOTO © GUY SMALLMAN 2009

More disturbing than the report itself is what it omits to say. Nowhere do the authors question the wisdom of dropping devastating 2,000 pound bombs on a civilian area

The B-1B dropped two bombs. Then, according to the military, “The crew identified a third group form in the centre of the village... similarly sized adults moving rapidly in the dark across difficult terrain in an evenly spaced formation – and led both the B-1B commander and the ground forces commander to believe this group was another Taliban element.”

According to the battle map produced in the report, this group of people were heading north, away from the occupation troops. So they did not present any immediate danger if they were fighters, and there could have been a chance for the “real time intelligence” to show that they were in fact groups of women and children. The report also claims that two thirds of the 80 casualties were “Taliban extremists”. Yet the documentary evidence lists names and dates of birth of those killed. We know that 93 of the fatalities were children. It is absurd to describe these people as “similarly sized adults”. And “moving rapidly across difficult terrain” is a strange formulation, as the people were using the same track through the village they used every day.

More disturbing than the report itself is what it omits to say. Nowhere do the

authors question the wisdom of dropping devastating 2,000 pound bombs on a civilian area. Nor does the document point out that there was no engagement between the insurgents and occupation forces in the village itself. Neither I nor my translator saw a single bullet hole or shell casing during our visit.

The villagers insist that the Taliban did not retreat to Granai after the battle, nor were fresh forces brought into the village. Their claims ring true as the village is bordered by a river and swamp. A large group of fighters entering the area would have been trapped by the local geography and cut down by occupation forces.

And as the report points out, the Taliban had driven locals out of a nearby village to set up firing positions. Why they did not do the same in Granai is left unexplained.

In their report the Americans say, “No one will ever be able conclusively to determine the number of civilian casualties.” Yet high above Granai lie row upon row of traditional Muslim graves. My guide took me to the resting place of his sister and her children who died in the final airstrike.

He said that some of the graves contained entire families. The villagers had used a tractor to dig the holes in their desperate rush to bury the victims the following day in keeping with tradition. At one end of the village cemetery lies an enormous mass grave stretching 30 metres across. It contains the remains of 55 people who had to be buried together as it was impossible to match the body parts recovered with individuals.

The massacre at Granai is the latest in a string of similar attacks by occupation forces that have claimed thousands of innocent lives. Neither the US military nor their allies plan to stop targeting villages. And the US commander who gave the orders to bomb the sleepy village in western Afghanistan has not been disciplined. **CT**

Guy Smallman is a London-based freelance photojournalist

Lies, damn lies

Rupert Murdoch's newspapers have relentlessly assaulted truth and decency, but their most successful war has been on journalism itself, writes **John Pilger**

I met Eddie Spearritt in the Philharmonic pub, overlooking Liverpool. It was a few years after 96 Liverpool football fans had been crushed to death at Hillsborough Stadium, Sheffield, on 15 April 1989. Eddie's son, Adam, aged 14, died in his arms. The "main reason for the disaster", Lord Justice Taylor subsequently reported, was the "failure" of the police, who had herded fans into a lethal pen.

"As I lay in my hospital bed," Eddie said, "the hospital staff kept the *Sun* away from me. It's bad enough when you lose your 14-year-old son because you're treating him to a football match. Nothing can be worse than that. But since then I've had to defend him against all the rubbish printed by the *Sun* about everyone there being a hooligan and drinking. There was no hooliganism. During 31 days of Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry, no blame was attributed because of alcohol. Adam never touched it in his life."

Three days after the disaster, Kelvin MacKenzie, Rupert Murdoch's "favourite editor", sat down and designed the *Sun* front page, scribbling "THE TRUTH" in huge letters. Beneath it, he wrote three subsidiary headlines: "Some fans picked pockets of victims" . . . "Some fans urinated on the brave cops" . . . "Some fans beat up PC giving kiss of life". All of it was false; MacKenzie was banking on anti-Liverpool prejudice.

When sales of the *Sun* fell by almost 40 per cent on Merseyside, Murdoch ordered his favourite editor to feign penitence. BBC Radio 4 was chosen as his platform. The "sarf London" accent that was integral to MacKenzie's fake persona as an "ordinary punter" was now a contrite, middle-class voice that fitted Radio 4. "I made a rather serious error," said MacKenzie, who has since been back on Radio 4 in a very different mood, aggressively claiming that the *Sun's* treatment of Hillsborough was merely a "vehicle for others".

When we met, Eddie Spearritt mentioned MacKenzie and Murdoch with a dignified anger. So did Joan Traynor, who lost two sons, Christopher and Kevin, whose funeral was invaded by MacKenzie's photographers even though Joan had asked for her family's privacy to be respected. The picture of her sons' coffins on the front page of a paper that had lied about the circumstances of their death so deeply upset her that for years she could barely speak about it.

Such relentless inhumanity forms the iceberg beneath the *Guardian's* current exposé of Murdoch's alleged payment of £1m hush money to those whose phones his *News of the World* reporters have criminally invaded. "A cultural Chernobyl," is how the German investigative journalist Reiner Luyken, based in London, described

The picture of her sons' coffins on the front page of a paper that had lied about the circumstances of their death so deeply upset her that for years she could barely speak about it

MURDOCH'S METHODS

The message was clear: Thatcher was willing to use death squads. The *Sunday Times* and the *Sun*, side by side in Murdoch's razor-wired Wapping fortress, echoed Thatcher's scurrilous attacks on Thames Television and subjected the principal witness to the murders, Carmen Proetta, to a torrent of lies and personal abuse

Murdoch's effect on British life. Of course, there is a colourful Fleet Street history of lies, damn lies, but no proprietor ever attained the infectious power of Murdoch's putrescence. To public truth and decency and freedom, he is as the dunghill is to the blowfly. The rich and famous can usually defend themselves with expensive libel actions; but most of Murdoch's victims are people like the Hillsborough parents, who suffer without recourse.

Hanged himself

The Murdoch "ethos" was demonstrated right from the beginning of his career, as Richard Neville has documented. In 1964, his Sydney tabloid, the *Daily Mirror*, published the diary of a 14-year-old schoolgirl under the headline, "WE HAVE SCHOOL-GIRL'S ORGY DIARY". A 13-year-old boy, who was identified, was expelled from the same school. Soon afterwards, he hanged himself from his mother's clothesline. The "sex diary" was subsequently found to be fake. Soon after Murdoch bought Britain's *News of the World* in 1971, a strikingly similar episode involving an adolescent diary led to the suicide of a 15-year-old girl. And Murdoch himself said, of the industrial killing of innocent men, women and children in Iraq: "There is going to be collateral damage. And if you really want to be brutal about it, better we get it done now . . ."

His most successful war has been on journalism itself. A leading Murdoch retainer, Andrew Neil, the Kelvin MacKenzie of the *Sunday Times*, conducted one of his master's most notorious smear campaigns against ITV (like the BBC, a "monopoly" standing in Murdoch's way). In 1988, the ITV company Thames Television made *Death on the Rock*, an investigative documentary that lifted a veil on the British

secret state under Margaret Thatcher, describing how an SAS team had murdered four unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar with their hands in the air.

The message was clear: Thatcher was willing to use death squads. The *Sunday Times* and the *Sun*, side by side in Murdoch's razor-wired Wapping fortress, echoed Thatcher's scurrilous attacks on Thames Television and subjected the principal witness to the murders, Carmen Proetta, to a torrent of lies and personal abuse. She later won £300,000 in libel damages, and a public inquiry vindicated the programme's accuracy and integrity. This did not prevent Thames, an innovative broadcaster, from losing its licence.

Brown in full fawn

Murdoch's most obsequious supplicants are politicians, especially New Labour. Having ensured that Murdoch pays minimal tax, and having attended the farewell party of one editor of the *Sun*, Gordon Brown was recently in full fawn at the wedding of another editor of the same paper. Don Corleone expects nothing less.

The hypocrisy, however, is almost magical. In 1995, Murdoch flew Tony and Cherie Blair first-class to Hayman Island, Australia, where the aspiring war criminal spoke about "the need for a new moral purpose in politics", which included the lifting of government regulations on the media. Murdoch shook his hand warmly. The next day the *Sun* commented: "Mr Blair has vision, he has purpose and he speaks our language on morality and family life."

The two are devout Christians, after all. **CT**

John Pilger's latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback

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Keeping track of the empire's crimes

William Blum thinks we should be very careful when the CIA starts admitting to 'canceled' assassination programs

If you catch the CIA with its hand in the cookie jar and the Agency admits the obvious – what your eyes can plainly see – that its hand is indeed in the cookie jar, it means one of two things: a) the CIA's hand is in several other cookie jars at the same time which you don't know about and they hope that by confessing to the one instance they can keep the others covered up; or b) its hand is not really in the cookie jar – it's an illusion to throw you off the right scent – but they want you to believe it.

There have been numerous news stories in recent months about secret CIA programs, hidden from Congress, inspired by former vice-president Dick Cheney, in operation since the September 11 terrorist attacks, involving assassination of al Qaeda operatives or other non-believers-in-the-Empire abroad without the knowledge of their governments.

The Agency admits to some sort of program having existed, but insists that it was canceled; and if it was an assassination program it was canceled before anyone was actually assassinated. Another report has the US military, not the CIA, putting the plan –or was it a different plan? –into operation, carrying out several assassinations including one in Kenya that proved to be a severe embarrassment and helped lead to the quashing of the program.¹

All of this can be confusing to those following the news. And rather irrelevant. We already know that the United States has been assassinating non-believers, or suspected non-believers, with regularity, and impunity, in recent years, using unmanned planes (drones) firing missiles, in Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia, if not elsewhere. (Even more victims have been produced from amongst those who happened to be in the same house, car, wedding party, or funeral as the non-believer.)

These murders apparently don't qualify as "assassinations", for somehow killing "terrorists" from 2000 feet is morally and legally superior to doing so from two feet away.

But whatever the real story is behind the current rash of speculation, we should not fall into the media's practice of at times intimating that multiple or routine CIA assassination attempts would be something shocking or at least very unusual.

I've compiled a list of CIA assassination attempts, successful and unsuccessful, against prominent foreign political figures, from 1949 through 2003, which, depending on how you count it, can run into the hundreds (targeting Fidel Castro alone totals 634 according to Cuban intelligence)²; the list can be updated by adding the allegedly al Qaeda leaders among the drone attack victims of recent years. Assassination and

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ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

And the next time you hear that Africa can't produce good leaders, people who are committed to the welfare of the masses of their people, think of Nkrumah and his fate

torture are the two things governments are most loath to admit to, and try their best to cover up. It's thus rare to find a government document or recorded statement mentioning a particular plan to assassinate someone. There is, however, an abundance of compelling circumstantial evidence to work with. (The list can be found at <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/assass.htm>)

For those of you who collect lists about splendid US foreign policy post-World War II, there are a few more that, lacking anything better to do, I've put together: Attempts to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which had been democratically-elected (<http://killinghope.org/bblum6/overthrow.htm>)

After his June 4 Cairo speech, President Obama was much praised for mentioning the 1953 CIA overthrow of Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh. But in his talk in Ghana on July 11 he failed to mention the CIA coup that ousted Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah in 1966³, referring to him only as a "giant" among African leaders. The Mossadegh coup is one of the most we

Il-known CIA covert actions. Obama could not easily get away without mentioning it in a talk in the Middle East looking to mend fences. But the Nkrumah ouster is one of the least known; indeed, not a single print or broadcast news report in the American mainstream media saw fit to mention it at the time of the president's talk. Like it never happened.

And the next time you hear that Africa can't produce good leaders, people who are committed to the welfare of the masses of their people, think of Nkrumah and his fate. And think of Patrice Lumumba, overthrown in the Congo 1960-61 with the help of the United States; Agostinho Neto of Angola, against whom Washington waged war in the 1970s, making it impossible for him to institute progressive changes; Samora Machel of Mozambique against whom the CIA supported a counter-revolution in the 1970s-80s period; and Nelson

Mandela of South Africa (now married to Machel's widow), who spent 28 years in prison thanks to the CIA.⁴

- Gross interference in democratic elections in at least 30 countries⁵
- Waging war/military action, either directly or in conjunction with a proxy army, in some 30 countries
- Dropping bombs on the people of more than 30 countries
- Attempts to suppress dozens of populist/nationalist movements in every corner of the world⁶

The Myths of Afghanistan, past and present

On the Fourth of July, Senator Patrick Leahy declared he was optimistic that, unlike the Soviet forces that were driven from Afghanistan 20 years ago, US forces could succeed there. The Democrat from Vermont stated: "The Russians were sent running as they should have been. We helped send them running. But they were there to conquer the country. We've made it very clear, and everybody I talk to within Afghanistan feels the same way: they know we're there to help and we're going to leave. We've made it very clear we are going to leave. And it's going to be turned back to them. The ones that made the mistakes in the past are those that tried to conquer them."⁷

Leahy is a long-time liberal on foreign-policy issues, a champion of withholding US counter-narcotics assistance to foreign military units guilty of serious human-rights violations, and an outspoken critic of robbing terrorist suspects of their human and legal rights.

Yet he is willing to send countless young Americans to a living hell, or horrible death, or maimed survival.

And for what? Every point he made in his statement is simply wrong. The Russians were not in Afghanistan to conquer it. The Soviet Union had existed next door to the country for more than 60 years without any kind of invasion. It was only when the

United States intervened in Afghanistan to replace a government friendly to Moscow with one militantly anti-communist that the Russians invaded to do battle with the US-supported Islamic jihadists; precisely what the United States would have done to prevent a communist government in Canada or Mexico.

It's also rather difficult for the United States to claim that it's in Afghanistan to help the people there when it's killed tens of thousands of them simply for resisting the American invasion and occupation or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time; not a single one of the victims has been identified as having had any kind of connection to the terrorist attack in the US of September 11, 2001, the event usually cited by Washington as justification for the military intervention.

Moreover, Afghanistan is now permeated with depleted uranium, cluster bombs-cum-landmines, white phosphorous, a witch's brew of other charming chemicals, and a population, after 30 years of almost non-stop warfare, of physically and mentally mutilated human beings, exceedingly susceptible to the promise of paradise, or at least relief, sold by the Taliban.

As to the US leaving ... utterly meaningless propaganda until it happens. Ask the people of South Korea – 56 years of American occupation and still counting; ask the people of Japan – 64 years. And Iraq? Would you want to wager your life's savings on which decade it will be that the last American soldier and military contractor leaves?

It's not even precise to say that the Russians were sent running. That was essentially Russian president Mikhail Gorbachev's decision, and it was more of a political decision than a military one. Gorbachev's fondest ambition was to turn the Soviet Union into a West-European style social democracy, and he fervently wished for the approval of those European leaders, virtually all of whom were cold-war anti-communists and opposed the Soviet inter-

vention into Afghanistan.

There has been as much of the same "causes" for wars that did not happen as for wars that did

Henry Allingham died in Britain on July 18 at age 113, believed to have been the world's oldest man. A veteran of World War I, he spent his final years reminding the British people about their service members killed during the war, which came to about a million: "I want everyone to know," he said during an interview in November. "They died for us."⁸

The whole million? Each one died for Britain? In the most useless imperialist war of the 20th century? No, let me correct that – the most useless imperialist war of any century. The British Empire, the French Empire, the Russian Empire, and the wannabe American Empire joined in battle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire as youthful bodies and spirits sank endlessly into the wretched mud of Belgium and Germany, the pools of blood of Russia and France.

The wondrous nobility of it all is enough to make you swallow hard, fight back the tears, light a few candles, and throw up. Imagine, by the middle of this century Vietnam veterans in their 90s and 100s will be speaking of how each of their 58,000 war buddies died for America. By 2075 we'll be hearing the same stirring message from ancient vets of Iraq and Afghanistan. How many will remember that there was a large protest movement against their glorious, holy crusades, particularly Vietnam and Iraq?

Supreme nonsense

Senate hearings to question a nominee for the Supreme Court are a supreme bore. The *sine qua non* for President Obama choosing Sonia Sotomayor appears to be that she's a woman with a Hispanic background. A LATINA! How often that word was used by her supporters. She would be the first LATINA on the Supreme Court! Dios mio!

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ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

No one dared to question this blatant display of patriotism in the courtroom; neither the defense attorney, nor the prosecutor, nor the judge. How can we continue to pretend that people's legal positions exist independently of their political sentiments?

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*; *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*; *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*. His website is www.killinghope.org

Who gives a damn? All anyone should care about are her social and political opinions. Justice Clarence Thomas is a black man. A BLACK MAN! And he's as conservative as they come. Supreme Court nominees, of all political stripes, typically feel obliged to pretend that their social and political leanings don't enter into their judicial opinions. But everyone knows this is rubbish. During her Senate hearing, Sotomayor declared: "It's not the heart that compels conclusions in cases. It's the law."

The former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Charles Evan Hughes, would not agree with her. "At the constitutional level where we work," he said, "ninety percent of any decision is emotional. The rational part of us supplies the reasons for supporting our predilections."⁹

By Sotomayor's own account, which echos news reports, she was not asked about her position on abortion by either President Obama or his staff. But what if she is actually anti-abortion? What if she turns out to be the swing vote that overturns *Roe vs. Wade*? What if she's a proud admirer of the American Empire and its perpetual wars? American dissidents, civilian and military, may depend on her vote for their freedom from imprisonment.

What does she think about the "War on Terror"? The civil liberties and freedom from torture of various Americans and foreigners may depend on her attitude.

In his 2007 trial, Jose Padilla, an American citizen, was found guilty of aiding terrorists. "The jury did seem to be an oddly cohesive group," the *Washington Post* reported. "On the last day of trial before the Fourth of July holiday, jurors arranged to dress in outfits so that each row in the jury box was its own patriotic color – red, white or blue."¹⁰ No one dared to question this blatant display of patriotism in the courtroom; neither the defense attorney, nor the prosecutor, nor the judge. How can we continue to pretend that people's legal positions exist independently of their political

sentiments?

In the 2000 Supreme Court decision stopping the presidential electoral count in Florida, giving the election to George W. Bush, did the politics of the five most conservative justices play a role in the 5 to 4 decision? Of course. Judges are essentially politicians in black robes. But should we care? Don't ask, don't tell. Sonia Sotomayor is a LATINA!

Given the large Democratic majority in the Senate, Sotomayor was in very little danger of being rejected. She could have openly and proudly expressed her social and political positions – whatever they may be – and the Democratic senators could have done the same.

=How refreshing, maybe even educational if a discussion ensued. Instead it was just another political appointment by a president determined to not offend anyone if he can help it, and another tiresome ritual hearing. The Republican senators were much less shy about revealing how they actually felt about important issues.

It didn't have to be that way. As Rabbi Michael Lerner of Tikkun.org pointed out during the hearings: "Democratic Senators could use their time to ask questions and make statements that explain why a liberal or progressive worldview is precisely what is needed on the Supreme Court." **CT**

Notes

1. The Guardian (London) July 13, 2009
2. Fabian Escalante, "Executive Action: 634 Ways to Kill Fidel Castro" (Ocean Press, 2006)
3. William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 32
4. William Blum, *Rogue State*, chapter 23
5. *Ibid.*, chapter 18
6. *Rogue State*, chapter 17, intermixed with other types of US interventions
7. Vermont TV station WCAX, July 4, 2009, WCAX.com
8. *Washington Post*, July 19, 2009
9. William O. Douglas, *The Court Years, 1939-1975* (1980), p.8
10. *Washington Post*, August 17, 2007

The Johnny Procedure

Uri Avnery on how Israel's army chiefs are denying accusations from their own soldiers of war crimes during the recent war on Gaza

Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, the evil spirit of the Gaza War refuses to leave us in peace. Last month it came back to disturb the tranquility of the chiefs of the state and the army.

"Breaking the Silence", a group of courageous former combat soldiers, published a report comprising the testimonies of 30 Gaza War fighters. This hard-hitting report was about actions that may be considered war crimes.

The generals went automatically into denial mode. Why don't the soldiers disclose their identity, they asked innocently. Why do they obscure their faces in the video testimonies? Why do they hide their names and units? How can we be sure that they are not actors reading a text prepared for them by the enemies of Israel? How do we know that this organization is not manipulated by foreigners, who finance their actions? And anyhow, how do we know that they are not lying out of spite?

One can answer with a Hebrew adage: "It has the feel of Truth". Anyone who has ever been a combat soldier in war, whatever war, recognizes at once the truth in these reports. Each of them has met a soldier who is not ready to return home without an X on his gun showing that he killed at least one enemy. (One such person appears in my book *The Other Side of the Coin*, which was written 60 years ago and published in

English last year as the second part of *1948: A Soldier's Tale*.) We have been there.

The testimonies about the use of phosphorus, about massive bombardment of buildings, about "the neighbor procedure" (using civilians as human shields), about killing "everything that moves", about the use of all methods to avoid casualties on our side – all these corroborate earlier testimonies about the Gaza War, there can be no reasonable doubt about their authenticity. I learned from the report that the "neighbor procedure" is now called "Johnny procedure", God knows why Johnny and not Ahmad.

Army investigations?

The height of hypocrisy is reached by the generals with their demand that the soldiers come forward and lodge their complaints with their commanders, so that the army can investigate them through the proper channels.

First of all, we have already seen the farce of the army investigating itself.

Second, and this is the main point: only a person intent on becoming a martyr would do so. A soldier in a combat unit is a part of a tightly knit group whose highest principle is loyalty to comrades and whose commandment is "Thou shalt not squeal!" If he discloses questionable acts he has witnessed, he will be considered a traitor

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QUESTIONING THE KILLINGS

the decision to start the War on Gaza, with a civilian population of a million and a half, was unjustified even according to the criteria of Kasher himself. “All the alternative courses” had not been exhausted, or even attempted.

and ostracized. His life will become hell. He knows that all his superiors, from squad leader right up to division commander, will persecute him.

This call to go through “official channels” is a vile method of the generals – members of the general staff, army spokesmen, army lawyers – to divert the discussion from the accusations themselves to the identity of the witnesses. No less despicable are the tin soldiers called “military correspondents”, who collaborate with them.

But before accusing the soldiers who committed the acts described in the testimonies, one has to ask whether the decision to start the war did not itself lead inevitably to the crimes.

Professor Assa Kasher, the father of the army’s “Code of Ethics” and one of the most ardent supporters of the Gaza War, asserted in an essay on this subject that a state has the right to go to war only in self defense, and only if the war constitutes “a last resort”. “All alternative courses” to attain the rightful aim “must have been exhausted”.

The official cause of the war was the launching from the Gaza Strip of rockets against Southern Israeli towns and villages. It goes without saying that it is the duty of the state to defend its citizens against missiles. But had all the means to achieve this aim without war really been exhausted? Kasher answers with a resounding “yes”. His key argument is that “there is no justification for demanding that Israel negotiate directly with a terrorist organization that does not recognize it and denies its very right to exist.”

This does not pass the test of logic. The aim of the negotiations was not supposed to be the recognition by Hamas of the State of Israel and its right to exist (who needs this anyway?) but getting them to stop launching missiles at Israeli citizens. In such negotiations, the other side would understandably have demanded the lifting of the blockade against the population of the Gaza Strip and the opening of the

supply passages. It is reasonable to assume that it was possible to reach – with Egyptian help – an agreement that would also have included the exchange of prisoners.

No only was this course not exhausted – it was not even tried. The Israeli government has consistently refused to negotiate with a “terrorist organization” and even with the Palestinian Unity Government that was in existence for some time and in which Hamas was represented.

Therefore, the decision to start the war on Gaza, with a civilian population of a million and a half, was unjustified even according to the criteria of Kasher himself. “All the alternative courses” had not been exhausted, or even attempted.

But we all know that, apart from the official reason, there was also an unofficial one: to topple the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. In the course of the war, official spokesmen stated that there was a need to attach a “price tag” – in other words, to cause death and destruction not in order to hurt the “terrorists” themselves (which would have been almost impossible) but to turn the life of the civilian population into hell, so they would rise up and overthrow Hamas.

Hardened resolve

The immorality of this strategy is matched by its inefficacy: our own experience has taught us that such methods only serve to harden the resolve of the population and unite them around their courageous leadership.

Was it at all possible to conduct this war without committing war crimes? When a government decides to hurl its regular armed forces at a guerrilla organization, which by its very nature fights from within the civilian population, it is perfectly clear that terrible suffering will be caused to that population. The argument that the harm caused to the population, and the killing of over a thousand men, women and children was inevitable should, by itself, have led to the conclusion that the decision to

start this was a terrible act right from the beginning.

The defense establishment takes the easy way out. The ministers and generals simply assert that they do not believe the Palestinian and international reports about the death and destruction, stating that they are, again in Kasher's words, "mistaken and false". Just to be sure, they decided to boycott the UN commission that is currently investigating the war, headed by a respected South African judge who is both a Jew and a Zionist.

Assa Kasher is adopting a similar attitude when he says: "Somebody who does not know all the details of an action cannot assess it in a serious, professional and responsible way, and therefore should not do so, in spite of all emotional or political temptations." He demands that we wait until the Israeli army completes its investigations, before we even discuss the matter.

Really? Every organization that investigates itself lacks credibility, not to mention a hierarchical body like the army. Moreover, the army does not – and cannot – obtain testimony from the main eye-witnesses: the inhabitants of Gaza. An investigation based only on the testimony of the perpetrators, but not of the victims, is ridiculous. Now even the testimonies of the soldiers of *Breaking the Silence* are discounted, because they cannot disclose their identity.

Ethical questions

In a war between a mighty army, equipped with the most sophisticated weaponry in the world, and a guerrilla organization, some basic ethical questions arise. How should the soldiers behave when faced with a structure in which there are not only enemy fighters, which they are "allowed" to hit, but also unarmed civilians, which they are "forbidden" to hit?

Kasher cites several such situations. For example: a building in which there are both "terrorists" and non-fighters. Should it be hit by aircraft or artillery fire that will kill everybody, or should soldiers be sent in

who will risk their lives and kill only the fighters? His answer: there is no justification for the risking of the lives of our soldiers in order to save the lives of enemy civilians. An aerial or artillery attack must be preferred.

That does not answer the question about the use of the Air Force to destroy hundreds of houses far enough from our soldiers that there was no danger emanating from them, nor about the killing of scores of recruits of the Palestinian civilian police on parade, nor about the killing of UN personnel in food supply convoys. Nor about the illegal use of white phosphorus against civilians, as described in the soldiers' testimonies gathered by *Breaking the Silence*, and the use of depleted uranium and other carcinogenic substances.

The entire country experienced on live TV how a shell hit the apartment of a doctor and wiped out almost all of his family. According to the testimony of Palestinian civilians and international observers, many such incidents took place.

The Israeli army took great pride in its method of warning the inhabitants by means of leaflets, phone calls and such, so as to induce them to flee. But everyone – and first of all the warners themselves – knew that the civilians had nowhere secure to escape to and that there were no clear and safe escape routes. Indeed, many civilians were shot while trying to flee.

We shall not evade the hardest moral question of all: is it permissible to risk the lives of our soldiers in order to save the old people, women and children of the "enemy"? The answer of Assa Kasher, the ideologue of the "Most Moral Army in the World", is unequivocal: it is absolutely forbidden to risk the lives of the soldiers. The most telling sentence in his entire essay is: "Therefore...the state must give preference to the lives of its soldiers above the lives of the (unarmed) neighbors of a terrorist."

These words should be read twice and three times, in order to grasp their full implications. What is actually being said here

No Bantustan, in fact not even our townships, had been bombed by warplanes, pulverised by tanks

QUESTIONING THE KILLINGS

In retrospect, one can only be glad that the British soldiers, who fought against the Irgun and the Stern Group, did not have an ethical guide like Kasher

is: if necessary to avoid casualties among our soldiers, it is better to kill enemy civilians without any limit.

In retrospect, one can only be glad that the British soldiers, who fought against the Irgun and the Stern Group, did not have an ethical guide like Kasher.

This is the principle that guided the Israeli army in the Gaza War, and, as far as I know, this is a new doctrine: in order to avoid the loss of one single soldier of ours, it is permissible to kill 10, 100 and even 1000 enemy civilians. War without casualties on our side. The numerical result bears witness: more than 1000 people killed in Gaza, a third or two thirds of them (depending on who you ask) civilians, women and children, as against 6 (six) Israeli soldiers killed by enemy fire. (Four more were killed by “friendly” fire.)

Kasher states explicitly that it is justified to kill a Palestinian child who is in the company of a hundred “terrorists”, because the “terrorists” might kill children in Sderot.

But in reality, it was a case of killing a hundred children who were in the company of one “terrorist”.

If we strip this doctrine of all ornaments, what remains is a simple principle: the state must protect the lives of its soldiers at any price, without any limit or law. A war of zero casualties. That leads necessarily to a tactic of killing every person and destroying every building that could represent a danger to the soldiers, creating an empty space in front of the advancing troops.

Only one conclusion can be drawn from this: from now on, any Israeli decision to start a war in a built-up area is a war crime, and the soldiers who rise up against this crime should be honored. May they be blessed. **CT**

Uri Avnery is an Israeli peace activist who has advocated the setting up of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. He served three terms in the Israeli parliament (Knesset), and is the founder of Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc)



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Twitterers paid to spread propaganda

Here's one reason why you shouldn't believe everything you read on the Internet, says **Jonathan Cook**

The passionate support for Israel expressed on talkback sections of websites, internet chat forums, blogs, Twitters and Facebook may not be all that it seems.

Israel's foreign ministry is reported to be establishing a special undercover team of paid workers whose job it will be to surf the internet 24 hours a day spreading positive news about Israel.

Internet-savvy Israeli youngsters, mainly recent graduates and demobilised soldiers with language skills, are being recruited to pose as ordinary surfers while they provide the government's line on the Middle East conflict.

"To all intents and purposes the internet is a theatre in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we must be active in that theatre, otherwise we will lose," said Ilan Shturman, who is responsible for the project.

The existence of an "internet warfare team" came to light when it was included in this year's foreign ministry budget. About \$150,000 has been set aside for the first stage of development, with increased funding expected next year.

The team will fall under the authority of a large department already dealing with what Israelis term "hasbara", officially translated as "public explanation" but more usually meaning propaganda. That includes not only government public

relations work but more secretive dealings the ministry has with a battery of private organisations and initiatives that promote Israel's image in print, on TV and online.

In an interview with the *Calcalist*, an Israeli business newspaper, Mr Shturman, the deputy director of the ministry's hasbara department, admitted his team would be working undercover.

"Our people will not say: 'Hello, I am from the hasbara department of the Israeli foreign ministry and I want to tell you the following.' Nor will they necessarily identify themselves as Israelis," he said. "They will speak as net-surfers and as citizens, and will write responses that will look personal but will be based on a prepared list of messages that the foreign ministry developed."

"Thought-police state"

Rona Kuperboim, a columnist for Ynet, Israel's most popular news website, denounced the initiative, saying it indicated that Israel had become a "thought-police state".

She added that "good PR cannot make the reality in the occupied territories prettier. Children are being killed, homes are being bombed, and families are starved."

Her column was greeted by several talkbackers asking how they could apply for a job with the foreign ministry's team.

Internet-savvy Israeli youngsters, mainly recent graduates and demobilised soldiers with language skills, are being recruited to pose as ordinary surfers while they provide the government's line on the Middle East conflict

HIDING THE TRUTH

Market research persuaded officials that Israel should play up good news about business success, and scientific and medical breakthroughs involving Israelis

The project is a formalisation of public relations practices the ministry developed specifically for Israel's assault on Gaza in December and January.

"During Operation Cast Lead we appealed to Jewish communities abroad and with their help we recruited a few thousand volunteers, who were joined by Israeli volunteers," Mr Shturman said.

"We gave them background material and hasbara material, and we sent them to represent the Israeli point of view on news websites and in polls on the internet."

The Israeli army also had one of the most popular sites on the video-sharing site YouTube and regularly uploaded clips, although it was criticised by human rights groups for misleading viewers about what was shown in its footage. Mr Shturman said that during the war the ministry had concentrated its activities on European websites where audiences were more hostile to Israeli policy. High on its list of target sites for the new project would be BBC Online and Arabic websites, he added.

Elon Gilad, who heads the internet team, told *Calcalist* that many people had contacted the ministry offering their services during the Gaza attack. "People just asked for information, and afterwards we saw that the information was distributed all over the internet."

He suggested that there had been widespread government cooperation, with the ministry of absorption handing over contact details for hundreds of recent immigrants to Israel, who wrote pro-Israel material for websites in their native languages.

The new team is expected to increase the ministry's close coordination with a

private advocacy group, *giyus.org* (Give Israel Your United Support). About 50,000 activists are reported to have downloaded a programme called Megaphone that sends an alert to their computers when an article critical of Israel is published. They are then supposed to bombard the site with comments supporting Israel.

Nasser Rego of Ilam, a group based in Nazareth that monitors the Israeli media, said Arab organisations in Israel were among those regularly targeted by hasbara groups for "character assassination". He was concerned the new team would try to make such work appear more professional and convincing. "If these people are misrepresenting who they are, we can guess they won't worry too much about misrepresenting the groups and individuals they write about. Their aim, it's clear, will be to discredit those who stand for human rights and justice for the Palestinians."

When the Middle Eastern newspaper, *The National* called the foreign ministry, Yigal Palmor, a spokesman, denied the existence of the internet team, though he admitted officials were stepping up exploitation of new media. He declined to say which comments by Mr Shturman or Mr Gilad had been misrepresented by the Hebrew-language media, and said the ministry would not be taking any action over the reports.

Brand Israel

Israel has developed an increasingly sophisticated approach to new media since it launched a "Brand Israel" campaign in 2005. Market research persuaded officials that Israel should play up good news about

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business success, and scientific and medical breakthroughs involving Israelis.

Mr Shturman said his staff would seek to use websites to improve “Israel’s image as a developed state that contributes to the quality of the environment and to humanity”.

David Saranga, head of public relations at Israel’s consulate-general in New York, which has been leading the push for more upbeat messages about Israel, argued that Israel was at a disadvantage against pro-Palestinian advocacy.

“Unlike the Muslim world, which has hundreds of millions of supporters who have adopted the Palestinian narrative in order to slam Israel, the Jewish world numbers only 13 million,” he wrote in Ynet.

Israel has become particularly concerned that support is ebbing among the younger generations in Europe and the United States.

In 2007 it emerged that the foreign ministry was behind a photo-shoot published in *Maxim*, a popular US men’s magazine, in which female Israeli soldiers posed in swimsuits. **CT**

Israel has become particularly concerned that support is ebbing among the younger generations in Europe and the United States

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net



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Blustering Biden bows to Bibi

When will the US vice president take a closer look at the nonsense he's saying, says **Paul Balles**

With the same logic and lack of sensibility, Biden might have said, "Iran can develop nuclear weapons whether we agree or not with their view"

US Vice President Joe Biden told ABC television the US could not "dictate to another sovereign nation what they can and cannot do."

On ABC's current affairs programme This Week, host George Stephanopoulos asked Mr Biden whether the Israeli position was the right approach. The vice-president replied, "Israel can determine for itself – it's a sovereign nation – what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else." Perhaps to please Bibi Netanyahu, Biden added that this was the case, "whether we agree or not" with the Israeli view.

Making thoughtless statements like these utterly defies both logic and sensibility. Using the same logic, he could have said the same thing about Iran. Why doesn't he say "Iran can determine for itself – it's a sovereign nation – what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Israel and anyone else?" With the same logic and lack of sensibility, Biden might have said, "Iran can develop nuclear weapons whether we agree or not with their view."

With this kind of senseless thinking, it's a wonder that Biden ever managed to hold the leading democratic position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, except that he is a self-declared Zionist with a 36-year Senate record of pro-Israel leadership.

While in his non-interference state of mind, Biden recently questioned the legitimacy of Ahmadinejad's victory in Iran's presidential elections. He commented that officials "just don't know enough" about how they were conducted.

What if they were conducted like elections in other countries that have clearly been rigged but have gone unnoticed by Biden? This is a perfect demonstration of America's foreign policy hypocrisy.

There's also the insensibility of maintaining double standards about international issues. "The president will not allow Iran to go nuclear," says Biden.

About North Korea's tests of long-range missiles, Biden says, "If the country is proliferating nuclear weapons or missiles, then it is a serious danger and a threat to the world..."

With North Korea, who withdrew from the non-proliferation treaty, it's a question of how quickly the missiles and nuclear weapons are being developed. Iran, on the other hand, remains a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which seeks to control the spread of nuclear weapons. Iran has made it clear that they want only to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Meanwhile, as Israel and America focus on the potential of Iran to become a nuclear power, Israel carries on with its never-

ending land grab on the West Bank and its terrorist slaughter and mayhem in Gaza.

Commenting on the growing settlements in the West Bank, Sandy Tolan writes, “So dense had the Israeli West Bank presence become by 2009, so fragmented is Palestinian life – both physically and politically – that it now requires death-defying mental gymnastics to imagine how a two-state solution could ever be implemented.”

The “logical” comments by Joe Biden should bring scathing criticism of the way Israel spends American taxpayers’ money to support its continuing ruthless inhumanity to indigenous Palestinians.

Haaretz reports, “Israeli officials told US envoy George Mitchell in recent weeks that Jerusalem is willing to temporarily freeze

settlement construction, but that the move would be conditioned on substantive steps from the Arab side, as well as guarantees from the United States.” What an abomination!

Break into my house with guns. Lock me in a small room; and when a neighbour complains, agree to set me free if I agree to let you keep much of the stolen loot.

This is the twisted logic of Joe Biden’s Israel-American politics, using Iran as a distraction. **CT**

Break into my house with guns. Lock me in a small room; and when a neighbour complains, agree to set me free if I agree to let you keep much of the stolen loot.

Paul J. Balles is a retired American university professor and freelance writer who has lived in the Middle East for many years. For more information, see <http://www.pballes.com>

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The two basic human rights we lack

David Swanson ponders the relationship between health care and a free press

Obama's mention of single-payer, in passing, as something that would be better than anything else, but something that mysteriously lies out of reach, is typical of the very few mentions of single-payer healthcare in the US corporate media

President Obama said in his national TV address on July 22: “Now, the truth is that, unless you have a – what’s called a single-payer system, in which everybody is automatically covered, then you’re probably not going to reach every single individual because there’s always going to be somebody out there who thinks they’re indestructible and doesn’t want to get health care, doesn’t bother getting health care, and then, unfortunately, when they get hit by a bus, end up in the emergency room and the rest of us have to pay for it.”

Another name for “what’s called a single-payer system” would be: healthcare as a human right, not a commodity to be purchased. Many humans have this right. They just aren’t Americans.

Obama’s mention of single-payer, in passing, as something that would be better than anything else, but something that mysteriously lies out of reach, is typical of the very few mentions of single-payer healthcare in the US corporate media.

I just did some searches in the Lexis Nexis databases of major US and world publications, news wire services, and TV and radio broadcast transcripts. Searching for “healthcare” in July 2009 found over 1,000 documents, the maximum number that Lexis Nexis will display. In fact, searching just the past two days found over 1,000

documents. Another search confirmed that this is “Michael Jackson” level coverage. And another search confirmed that virtually none of these documents mentioned single-payer at all, much less told anyone what it was. A search for documents later than July 1st containing single-payer OR “single payer” turned up only 197 documents.

Americans have told pollsters <<http://www.wpasinglepayer.org/PollResults.html>> for decades that they want single-payer. But America’s government refuses to provide it, and therefore America’s state media refuses to discuss it. Of the 197 records of the media mentioning single-payer in July, almost half were congressional records or press releases or otherwise not media reports at all. Others were articles in medical trade publications. Even so, those articles tended to mention single-payer very briefly and dismiss it – in the unfortunate phrase used by *Kaiser Health News* – as “dead on arrival.”

Several others were transcripts of unidentified local shows that mentioned the word in passing. Others were blurbs in local newspapers announcing events. And several were reports and columns in British and Canadian newspapers. The Canadians, by the way, seem to be under the impression that President Obama is seeking to create single-payer healthcare. Sev-

eral more documents – by far the best and most extensive US coverage of single-payer – consisted of letters to the editor.

A *Boston Globe* editorial mentions single-payer in a list but says nothing about it. A four-sentence Associated Press report on an event mentions the word. A *Washington Post* column by Dana Milbank attempts to mock all humanity and somehow mentions single-payer in the process. Several articles report on town hall forums at which people have asked President Obama why he doesn't support single-payer. The *Washington Times* complained that such questions were permitted.

The *Washington Post* praised Obama for appearing ready for such a question and answering it “calmly.” No word on whether his answer made any sense or not. There's a report of an event at which the Secretary of Health and Human Services opposed single-payer. There are several reports of a press conference held by the White House Press Secretary at which someone apparently shouted out “single payer” for a laugh and got it.

Media afraid

There are a number of reports and transcripts that attack single-payer without explaining what it is. Most of them attack the so-called “public option” as leading to single-payer. That is to say, the media is afraid that people will overwhelmingly prefer precisely what the media opposes, and the media opposes it precisely because people would prefer it. The public option could only lead to single-payer if everyone decided they preferred it to the high costs and poor health provided by the for-profit

insurers.

The reports taking this approach include a CNBC interview in which the host makes this claim, a *Washington Times* column by Senator Judd Gregg, an Associated Press story quoting Senator Gregg, a transcript of the Ed Schultz Show on which another Republican senator made the same claim, another MSNBC transcript with Senator Charles Grassley, a Copley News column by Phyllis Schlafly, a Fox News interview by Sean Hannity of Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, a Fox News transcript with Congressman John Fleming, and a transcript of Chris Matthews interviewing Senator Orin Hatch. Other transcripts attack single-payer more directly, if no more substantively. Two of these are from Fox News. One is from CNN. Two are from Bloomberg TV.

There's a short *New York Times* interview of Howard Dean opposing single-payer. There's an NPR Morning Edition transcript of Congressman Jerrold Nadler saying he'd like single-payer but that it's “off the table.” There's an NPR Talk of the Nation transcript that briefly mentions single-payer. There's an NPR Fresh Air transcript in which Terry Gross asks a guest whether he would really prefer single-payer and the guest says “Yes, but . . .”

There's a four-sentence editorial by the *Boston Globe* explaining that “Harry and Louise” advertisements are false because single-payer is not under consideration. There's a *Washington Times* article suggesting that Obama might move away from single-payer. Never mind that Obama has not supported it for years. There's a *Toronto Star* report on Wal-Mart's proposal to solve the US healthcare crisis. There's a Copley

The media is afraid that people will overwhelmingly prefer precisely what the media opposes, and the media opposes it precisely because people would prefer it

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UNHEALTHY MEDIA

For-profit companies best serve the public interest precisely because they are not subject to public control. Why? Because the public wants what is worst for the public

News column complaining that the Bill Moyers' Journal on PBS has covered single-payer. There's a *Washington Post* column by Harold Meyerson complaining, in passing, that citizens will not create a movement for single-payer, even though it was that movement that put single-payer on Bill Moyers' program.

There are five transcripts from the Ed Schultz Show, some of them treating single-payer honestly, including an interview of Dennis Kucinich. There are interviews of Senator Bernie Sanders by Fox News as well as Ed Schultz. And there are reports in print.

One article from McClatchy reports on a poll finding that Canadians prefer their system. A lengthy *St. Petersburg Times* article compares the US and Canadian systems, making Canada appear the winner. One *Boston Globe* column by Jonathan Cohn supports single-payer. And a short op-ed, accompanied by two opposing op-eds, in the *Los Angeles Times*, was written by a Brit who wants to know what in the world is wrong with single-payer. He won't find an answer in the US media, which is barely even willing to explain what single-payer is.

But an excerpt from a recent *Washington Post* article that did not mention single-payer may help make clear where our government and our government media are coming from:

"Private insurers have effectively engaged in rationing, so they're doing the dirty work for everybody else," said Jeff D. Emerson, a former health plan chief executive. "It's a thankless job . . . but somebody has to do it or health care will be even more expensive than it is now." Private insurers might be better situated than the government to do the unpopular work of saying no, said Paul B. Ginsburg, president of the Center for Studying Health System Change, because they are less susceptible to political pressure."

There you have it. For-profit companies best serve the public interest precisely because they are not subject to public control. Why? Because the public wants what is worst for the public. And how does the *Washington Post* know this? It has dinner with all the right people, and charges them for the privilege.

By the way, a similar search in Lexis Nexis' blogs database turned up another 139 reports, with much more substance and honesty. And most blogs are not included in the search engine. **CT**

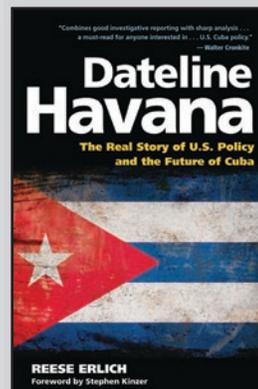
David Swanson is the author of the upcoming book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press. You can pre-order it and find out when tour will be in your town: <http://davidswanson.org/book>.

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Child, man, lover, womanizer, president

Trevor Grundy takes a look at two books covering the life of South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki

A new age has dawned in South Africa following the ANC's victory in the general election – the age of Jacob Zuma. The prancing, dancing, laughing new president and Zulu “boy” (his word, not mine) with the savage song that so delights the crowds and so concerns the opposition – “Bring me my machine gun” – is going to be with us all for a long time to come.

As the post-Nelson Mandela honeymoon ends, historians and journalists are coming to terms with the first 15 years of life in a post-apartheid world, wondering what the next five years and then beyond will bring.

These important books about Thabo Mbeki, the man who steered the ship of state between 1999 and 2008 have been written by two of South Africa's best known and most widely respected journalists. Both go behind the Rainbow that has fascinated – perhaps bamboozled – so many for so long and both reminded me that what William Wordsworth said about growing up – The child is father of the man – is true of new governments, too. They are timely books because people around the world, not just in Africa, are taking fresh critical looks at the men and women (and financial institutions) which rule them. More and more we are reminded of what Arnold Toynbee wrote about the French

A LEGACY OF LIBERATION

Mark Gevisser
Palgrave Macmillan £19.99 (384 pp)
ISBN: 978-0-230-6100-9

SOUTH AFRICA'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

R.W. Johnson
Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books
£25.00 (702 pp)
ISBN: 978-0-713-99538-1

They are timely books because people around the world – not just in Africa – are taking fresh and extremely critical looks at the men and women (and financial institutions) which rule them

Revolution and its consequences in his introduction to *The Gods of Revolution* by the Christian historian Christopher Dobson. He said that while ideologues and terrorists occupied the foreground of the stage in 1789 “the background gave ample room for people whose main concern was neither theories nor massacres but the sly acquisition of real estate on advantageous terms.”

RW Johnson's *South Africa's Brave New World* and Mark Gevisser's *A Legacy of Liberation* are essential reading at a time when great hope is banging against fierce concern in a country riddled with corruption, an AIDS/HIV epidemic, massive unemployment and urban neglect after years of almost non-stop promises made by the ANC elite when the ex-premier, Thabo Mbeki, steered the ship of state under the awesome shadow of the world's best known

BOOK REVIEWS

Johnson's book is an angry, well-researched and cleverly constructed testament of a man who has seen not only his dream deferred but the arrival after 1994 of a contingent from the world's best known liberation movement who appear at times to be hell bent on turning a land of rich promise into a film set for the Godfather trilogy

secular saint, Nelson Mandela.

Mark Gevisser and RW Johnson have very different backgrounds: the former seen in South Africa as a reassuring voice of white liberalism; the latter as a clever and courageous ANC apostate who supported the movement in his youth days but who has turned into one of its most deadly critics.

Both men are white South Africans (Johnson was born in Britain) and they have heeded Alan Bennet's advice in *The History Boys*. "Pass it on boys. That's the game I wanted you to learn. Pass it on!"

Thankfully, what these two writers have passed on will cause influential members of the smug and all-too-corrupt elite in the ANC a collective heart attack.

R.W. Johnson is a dozen or so years older than Mark Gevisser. Johnson's book is an angry, well-researched and cleverly constructed testament of a man who has seen not only his dream deferred but the arrival after 1994 of a contingent from the world's best known liberation movement who appear at times to be hell bent on turning a land of rich promise into a film set for the Godfather trilogy.

A former member of the SACP who was imprisoned for years by the apartheid regime, Paul Trewhela, tells me that no book written so far brings together so much evidence of the political crime network that South Africa inherited with the return of the ANC exiles after 1990.

Johnson's book is no lightweight, weighing in as it does as 702 pages. It is well referenced, amazingly up-to-date (the preface is dated last November) and full of rich texts that introduce the general reader to three of the most appalling themes of South African politics in recent years: South Africa's support for the Zimbabwean dictator, Robert Mugabe; an arms scandal that rocked the nation and in which so many British business leaders are so shamefully involved; and the HIV/AIDS plague which Thabo Mbeki chose to ignore.

As Johnson writes: "A study by the Har-

vard School of Health concluded that Mbeki's decision to declare available anti-Aids drugs to be toxic and dangerous had cost 365,000 unnecessary extra deaths between 1999 and 2005, including 35,000 babies, a judgment which led some to argue that he (Thabo Mbeki) should be put on trial.

There are around four million black Zimbabweans now living in exile (three million in South Africa alone) who would applaud such a trial for different reasons.

Mbeki's unstinting support for the megalomaniac Robert Mugabe is a story well told by RW Johnson whose chapter on "Godfathers and Assassins" goes a long way towards explaining why so many in the ANC have come to respect and admire a mass killer such as the Zimbabwean dictator.

Finest non-fiction

Gevisser's book is also an excellent read, one described by several prominent Africanists as the finest piece of non-fiction to come out of Africa since the end of apartheid and a work that lays bare the psychology behind the development of Mbeki as the child, man, the lover, husband, womanizer, architect of a so-called African Renaissance and politician.

Gevisser, the son of one of South Africa's wealthiest building contractors and a champion of gay rights, started researching his subject in 1999. Painstakingly, he consulted hundreds of Thabo's Mbeki's friends, admirers, acquaintances (including several of his former white girlfriends when he was a student at Sussex University in the 1960s) and enemies and studied thousands of documents dealing with the origins and development of the ANC between 1912 and the present day.

The book traces Mbeki's life from his birth in the Transkei (a child of dysfunctional communist peasant/kulaks who split when he was young and never reunited leaving the boy with a powerful but remote father, Govan, who always referred to Thabo not as his son but as his comrade)

through his 28 years of exile in London, Moscow, Dar es Salaam and Lusaka, to his two terms of office.

It also throws fresh light on the strange mix of economic liberalism that marked the Mbeki years in power following the arrival into power of an erstwhile Marxist-orientated ANC whose wilder members often threatened to drive whites into the sea and which refused to allow non-blacks to join its ranks until 1969.

Mbeki the tragic

In Gevisser's book, Thabo Mbeki emerges as something of a tragic figure. As a brilliant youth, he was isolated from his contemporaries in the Transkei because of his precocious intellect (a bit like Robert Mugabe). Son of Govan Mbeki, he was handpicked by the ANC as one of its future stars and he was sent to the UK to Sussex University where he enjoyed the company and patronage of members of the English upper classes who, for a while, dallied with socialism and the idea of international revolution. "Mbeki's time at Sussex," Gevisser writes, "taught him that young Europeans craved authenticity, anything that gave them the pulse of the anti-colonial revolution rather than its dry theory." And here amongst them was the genuine article, tweed jacket, pipe smoking and whisky drinking Thabo Mbeki who would lead them to the Promised Land in Africa.

At Sussex, Lord Beaumont of Whitley and Nicholas Mosley (son of Sir Oswald and his first wife, Cynthia Mosley who was Lord Curzon's daughter) helped with his tuition fees and provided him with accommodation for a while.

Sussex was followed by Moscow (the Lenin Institute) and from there he learned not only how to handle guns but, more importantly, how to handle political opponents.

"Mbeki" says Gevisser, "played a primary role in the attainment of South Africa's freedom, leading the ANC to understand that because military conquest was out of

the question, a negotiated settlement with the oppressors of black South Africans was the only viable option: and that the holy cows of statism and nationalization needed to be replaced, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with a reckoning with capitalism and an understanding of South Africa's position in the newly globalised economy."

Too much, I feel, is made by Gevisser of Thabo Mbeki's love of poetry and Shakespeare (several times Gevisser likens him to the doomed Shakespearean hero Coriolanus who scorned the masses and their dumbness for rejecting him as leader of Rome) and not enough of Mbeki's relationship with the crooks in the ANC – especially the bully boy Joe Modise who was appointed South Africa's Defence Minister in 1994 and who was the architect of an arms scandal that caught up with and then rolled all over Thabo Mbeki, ending his national leadership in disgrace and humiliation last year. Without a tribal home base, with few powerful friends after his fall from grace Thabo Mbeki today cuts a lonely figure on the South African landscape.

A careful reading of these two works – the best explanatory narratives of South Africa in recent years – helps us understand how Thabo Mbeki must have felt as he saw his once close friend (but now deadly opponent) Jacob Zuma taking over as President of South Africa.

A dream deferred? Abandoned seems more like it. **CT**

Trevor Grundy lived and worked as a journalist in central, eastern and southern Africa from 1966-1996 when he worked as a correspondent for Time, The Financial Times, BBC (Focus on Africa) Deutsche Welle (Voice of Germany), the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Drum, The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday and Beeld. He is the author of two books 'The Farmer at War' (Modern Farming Publications 1979) and Memoir of a Fascist Childhood (William Heinemann, London 1998 and Arrow Books 1999).

Thabo Mbeki emerges as something of a tragic figure. As a brilliant youth, he was isolated from his contemporaries in the Transkei because of his precocious intellect

Politically transmitted disease

Rising rates of teen pregnancy and STDs in the United States are the result of programs intended to stamp them out, writes **George Monbiot**

According to the UN agency Unicef, women who are born poor are twice as likely to stay that way if they have children as teenagers. They are more likely to remain unemployed, to suffer from depression and to become alcoholics or drug addicts

All of us are in denial. Without it we couldn't get through life. Were we to confront the implications of mortality, were we to comprehend all we have done to the world and its people, we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. To engage comprehensively with reality is to succumb to despair. Without denial there is no hope.

But some people make a doctrine of it. American conservatism could be described as a movement of denialogues, people whose ideology is based on disavowing physical realities. This applies to their views on evolution, climate change, foreign affairs and fiscal policy. The Vietnam war would have been won, were it not for the pinko chickens at home. Saddam Hussein was in league with Al Qaida. Everyone has an equal chance of becoming CEO. Universal healthcare is a communist plot. Segregation wasn't that bad. As one of George Bush's aides said, "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."⁽¹⁾

Collective denial has consequences. A new study by the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) shows that during the latter years of the Bush presidency, America's steady progress in reducing teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases was shoved into reverse⁽²⁾.

Between 1990 and 2004, the birthrate

among teenage girls fell sharply: by 46% for 15-17 year olds. The decline was unbroken throughout these years. (The same thing happened in the rest of the western world, though about 20 years earlier). But between 2005 and 2006, something odd happened: the teen birthrate increased by 3%. In 2007 it rose by another 1%. I think most people would agree that this is a tragedy. According to the UN agency Unicef, women who are born poor are twice as likely to stay that way if they have children as teenagers. They are more likely to remain unemployed, to suffer from depression and to become alcoholics or drug addicts⁽³⁾. Similarly, the incidence of gonorrhoea dropped for more than 20 years, then started to rise in 2004. After a long period of decline, syphilis among teenage boys began to increase in 2002; among girls in 2004.

Four clues

The CDC makes no attempt to explain these findings, but the report contains four possible clues. The first is that between 1991 and 2007, the percentage of high school students who had ever had sex declined. So did the number of their sexual partners, and their level of sexual activity. But from 2005 onwards there was a leveling or reversal of all these trends⁽⁴⁾. The second possible clue is that while the use of condoms among high school students

rose steadily from 1991 to 2003, it stagnated then declined between 2003 and 2007(5). Towards the end of the Bush years, school-children began abandoning condoms at the same time as their sexual activity rose.

The third clue is provided by the shocking data from the Hispanic community. Adolescent Hispanic girls have less sex than their non-Hispanic classmates; but they have three times as many children as non-Hispanic whites(6). Why? Because they are less likely to use contraceptives, probably because of the doctrines of the Catholic church.

But perhaps the most interesting clue is this one. The CDC has published a map of trends in the teenage birth rate. I ran it against a political map of the Union and found this: nine of the ten states with the highest increase in teenage births voted Republican in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections(7). (Eight of them voted for McCain in 2008.(8)) Among them are the Christian conservative heartlands of Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Oklahoma. These are the places in which Bush's abstinence campaigns were most enthusiastically promoted.

Sex education without sex

George Bush did not invent sex education without the sex. Clinton's last budget set aside \$80m for abstinence teaching(9). But by 2005 Bush had raised this to \$170m, and engineered a new standard of mendacity and manipulation. A Congressional report in 2004 explained that programmes receiving this money were "not allowed to teach their participants any methods to reduce the risk of pregnancy other than abstaining until marriage. They are allowed to mention contraceptives only to describe their failure rates."(10) The report found that over 80% of the teaching materials "contain false, misleading, or distorted information about reproductive health." They suggested, for example, that condoms do nothing to prevent the spread of STDs, that 41% of sexually active girls and 50% of homosex-

ual boys are infected with HIV and – marvellously – that touching another person's genitals "can result in pregnancy."(11)

While "abstinence-plus" campaigns (teaching contraception while advising against sex) are effective, a long series of scientific papers shows that abstinence-only schooling is worse than useless. A paper published in the British Medical Journal found that abstinence programmes "were associated with an increase in the number of pregnancies among partners of young male participants"(12).

An article in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that although teenagers who have taken a pledge of sexual abstinence and then have fewer sexual partners, they have the same overall rate of infection as the kids who haven't promised anything(13). This is because the pledgers are less likely to use condoms, less likely to take advice and less likely to go to the clinic when they pick something up. Most teenagers (88%) who have taken the pledge end up breaking it(14). But, like the campaigners, they are in denial: they deny that they are having sex, then deny that they have caught the pox. A study published by the American Journal of Public Health found that 86% of the decline in adolescent pregnancies in the US between 1991 and 2003 was caused by better use of contraceptives(15). Reduced sexual activity caused the remainder, but this "ironically ... appears to have preceded recent intensive efforts on the part of the US government to promote abstinence-only policies." Since those recent intensive efforts began, sexual activity has increased.

When Unicef compared teenage pregnancy rates in different parts of the world, it found that the Netherlands had the rich world's lowest incidence – five births per 1000 girls – and the US had the highest: 53 per 1000(16). Unicef explained that the Dutch had "more open attitudes towards sex and sex education, including contraception." There was no "shame or embarrassment" about asking for help. In the

An article in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that although teenagers who have taken a pledge of sexual abstinence are less likely to have sex before marriage and then have fewer sexual partners, they have the same overall rate of infection as the kids who haven't promised anything

SEX EDUCATION

The conservatives have gone ballistic: evidence is the enemy. They still insist that American children should be deprived of sex education, lied to about contraception and maintained in a state of mediaevel ignorance

US, however, “contraceptive advice and services may be formally available, but in a ‘closed’ atmosphere of embarrassment and secrecy.”

Obama’s new budget aims to change all this, by investing in “evidence-based” education programmes(17). The conservatives have gone ballistic: evidence is the enemy. They still insist that American children should be deprived of sex education, lied to about contraception and maintained in a state of mediaevel ignorance. If their own children end up with syphilis or unwanted babies, that, it seems, is a price they will pay for preserving their beliefs. The dialogues are now loudly insisting that STDs and pregnancies have risen because Bush’s programme didn’t go far enough. The further it went, the worse these problems got.

CT

George Monbiot’s latest book is Bring On The Acocalypse, Essays on Self-Destruction.

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NATO, the unwelcome wedding guest

By Linda McQuaig

The downside of holding a wedding in Ontario this summer is that, chances are, you'll be rained on. The upside is that, chances are, you won't be bombed.

That can't be said of Afghanistan, where the sun is more reliable, but the bride has been known to wear blood. Since 2001, dozens of celebrants – including brides and grooms – have been killed when their wedding parties were bombed by NATO planes mistaking them for Taliban operatives.

While Canadian troops haven't been involved in these air strikes, they have been involved in civilian killings on the ground. Just last month, Canadian soldiers fired a warning shot at a motorcyclist speeding toward them. The bullet ricocheted off the ground and entered the body of a young girl nearby, killing her.

Such killings are a big part of the reason the NATO mission appears to have failed to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. One person's collateral damage is another's fiancée.

The attitude of Canada's military authorities toward these civilian killings is disturbing. Maj. Mario Couture simply shifted the blame onto insurgents: "We know that insurgents want to drive a wedge between the coalition force and the population, so if they can make us make mistakes, then it serves their purpose ... If we fire, it works in their favour."

So we kill a young Afghan girl, and it's the fault of the insurgents?

The girl's killing at least got some media attention here. Male deaths are more readily discounted. A week earlier, Canadian soldiers killed an Afghan man and wounded three others after the minivan they were travelling in failed to slow down, according to the Canadian military. Maj. Couture explained that the victims were "all males of fighting age." Enough said, apparently.

Canadian soldiers are understandably keen to pro-

tect themselves from suicide bombers. And the Taliban undoubtedly does want to drive a wedge between us and the population. But that simply underlines why our presence there is so problematic – and wrong.

Left out of Maj. Couture's explanations is the context that we are in Afghanistan as a heavily armed foreign military force. Ottawa says we're there to champion democracy, but many Afghans see us as part of a Western occupying power that has killed, imprisoned and tortured people they love.

We're not much interested in that side of the story. While the Harper government and Canadian media show great interest in dissidents in Iran, China and Burma, they've shown little in Malalai Joya, an elected Afghan MP who was expelled from parliament for calling for the prosecution of war criminals in the Afghan government and parliament.

Hers is a compelling case championed by women's groups around the world – a young female MP in a viciously patriarchal land daring to challenge Afghanistan's powerful warlords. Yet, despite our supposed concern about Afghan women and democracy, the Canadian government and media have paid scant attention to Joya – perhaps because she considers NATO an occupier and calls for its immediate withdrawal from her country.

Although the Canadian media remain largely supportive of our military involvement in Afghanistan, Canadians aren't. An EKOS poll released earlier this month found that support for the mission has fallen from 60 per cent in 2002 to just 34 per cent today. Yet two more years remain in our commitment. Meanwhile, best to avoid weddings in Afghanistan, particularly if the party includes any "males of fighting age." **CT**

*Linda McQuaig's latest book is **Holding The Bully's Cloak: Canada and the US Empire***

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