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5 Essays on Government, the Military and Big Business

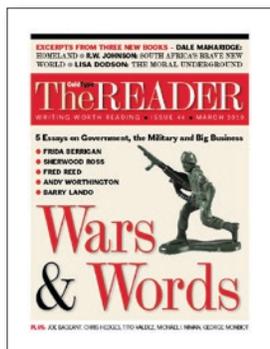
- **FRIDA BERRIGAN**
- **SHERWOOD ROSS**
- **FRED REED**
- **ANDY WORTHINGTON**
- **BARRY LANDO**



Wars & Words

PLUS: JOE BAGEANT, CHRIS HEDGES, TITO VALDEZ, MICHAEL I. NIMAN, GEORGE MONBIOT

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Don't call it the *global* arms trade

Frida Berrigan gives the facts about America's weapons monopoly

On the relatively rare occasions when the media turns its attention to US weapons sales abroad and shines its not-so-bright spotlight on the latest set of facts and figures, it invariably speaks of “the global arms trade.”

Let's consider that label for a moment, word by word:

* It is *global*, since there are few places on the planet that lie beyond the reach of the weapons industry.

* *Arms* sounds so old-fashioned and anodyne when what we're talking about is advanced technology designed to kill and maim.

* And *trade* suggests a give and take among many parties when, if we're looking at the figures for that “trade” in a clear-eyed way, there is really just one seller and so many buyers.

How about updating it this way: “the global weapons monopoly.”

In 2008, according to an authoritative report from the Congressional Research Service (CRS), \$55.2 billion in weapons deals were concluded worldwide. Of that total, the United States was responsible for \$37.8 billion in weapons sales agreements, or 68.4% of the total “trade.” Some of these

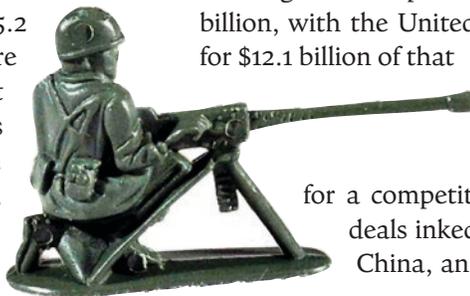
agreements were long-term ones and did not result in 2008 deliveries of weapons systems, but these latest figures are a good gauge of the global appetite for weapons. It doesn't take a PhD in economics to recognize that, when one nation accounts for nearly 70% of weapons sales, the term “global arms trade” doesn't quite cut it.

Consider the “competition” and reality comes into focus. Take a guess on which country is the number two weapons exporter on the planet: China? Russia? No, Italy, with a relatively paltry \$3.7 billion in agreements with other countries or just 9% of the US market share. Russia, that former Cold War superpower in the “trade,” was close behind Italy, with only \$3.5 billion in arms agreements.

US weapons manufacturers have come a long way, baby, since those Cold War days when the United States really did have a major competitor. For instance, the Congressional Research Service's data for 1990, the last year of the Soviet Union's existence, shows global weapons sales totaling \$32.7 billion, with the United States accounting for \$12.1 billion of that

or 37% of the market. For its part, the Soviet Union was responsible for a competitive \$10.7 billion in deals inked that year. France, China, and the United King-

Take a guess on which country is the number two weapons exporter on the planet: China? Russia? No, Italy, with a relatively paltry \$3.7 billion in agreements with other countries or just 9% of the US market share



In one area, the US is manufacturing products that are distinctly wanted – things that go boom in the night

dom accounted for most of the rest.

Since then, the global appetite for weapons has only grown more voracious, while the number of purveyors has shrunk to the point where the Pentagon could hang out a sign: “We arm the world.” No kidding, it’s true.

Cambodia (\$304,000), Comoros (\$895,000), Colombia (\$256 million), Guinea (\$200,000), Greece (\$225 million), Great Britain (\$1.1 billion), the Philippines (\$72.9 million), Poland (\$79.8 million), and Peru (\$16.4 million) all buy US arms, as does almost every country not in that list. US weapons, and only US weapons, are coveted by presidents and prime ministers, generals and strongmen.

From the Pentagon’s own data (which differs from that in the CRS report), here are the top ten nations which made Foreign Military Sales agreements with the Pentagon, and so with US weapons makers, in 2008:

Saudi Arabia \$6.06 billion

Iraq \$2.50 billion

Morocco \$2.41 billion

Egypt \$2.31 billion

Israel \$1.32 billion

Australia \$1.13 billion

South Korea \$1.12 billion

Great Britain \$1.10 billion

India \$1 billion

Japan \$840 million

That’s more than \$17 billion in weapons right there. Some of these countries are consistently eager buyers, and some are not. Morocco, for example, is only in that top-ten list because it was green-lighted to buy 24 of Lockheed Martin’s F-16 fighter planes at \$360 million (or so) for each aircraft, an expensive one-shot deal. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia (which inked \$14.71 billion in weapons agreements between 2001 and 2008), Egypt (\$13.25 billion) and Israel (\$11.27 billion) are such regular customers that they should have the equivalent of one of those “buy 10, get the 11th free” punch cards doled out by your favorite coffee shop.

To sum up, the US has a virtual global monopoly on exporting tools of force and destruction. Call it market saturation. Call it anything you like, just not the “global arms trade.”

Getting even more competitive?

It used to be that the United States exported goods, products, and machinery of all sorts in prodigious quantities: cars and trucks, steel and computers, and high-tech gizmos. But those days are largely over.

The Obama administration now wants to launch a green manufacturing revolution in the US, and in February, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke announced a new “National Export Initiative” with the aim of doubling American exports, a move he said would support the creation of two million new jobs.

The US could, of course, lose the renewable-energy race to China and that new exports program may never get off the ground. In one area, however, the US is manufacturing products that are distinctly wanted – things that go boom in the night – and there the Pentagon is working hard to increase market share.

Don’t for a second think that the American global monopoly on weapons sales is accidental or unintentional. The constant and lucrative growth of this market for US weapons makers has been ensured by shrewd strategic planning. Washington is constantly thinking of new and inventive ways to flog its deadly wares throughout the world.

How do you improve on near perfection? In the interest of enhancing that “competitive” edge in weapons sales, the Obama administration is investigating the possibility of revising export laws to make it even easier to sell military technology abroad. As Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morell explained in January, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wants to see “wholesale changes to the rules and regulations on government technology exports” in the name of “competitiveness.”

When he says “government technology exports,” Morell of course means weapons and other military technologies. “Tinkering with our antiquated, bureaucratic, overly cumbersome system is not enough to maintain our competitiveness in the global economy and also help our friends and allies buy the equipment they need to contribute to global security,” he continued, “[Gates] strongly supports the administration’s efforts to completely reform our export control regime, starting ideally with a blank sheet of paper.”

The laws that regulate US weapons exports are a jumbled mess, but in essence they delineate what the United States can sell to whom and through what bureaucratic mechanisms. According to US law, for example, there are actually a few countries that cannot receive US weapons. Myanmar under the military junta and Venezuela while led by Hugo Chavez are two examples. There are also some weapons systems that are not intended for export. Lockheed Martin’s F-22 Raptor jet fighter was – until the Pentagon recently stopped buying the plane – deemed too sophisticated or sensitive to sell abroad. And there are reporting requirements that give members of Congress a window of opportunity within which they can question or oppose proposed weapons exports.

Given what’s being sold, these export controls are remarkably minimal in nature and are constantly under assault by the weapons industry. Bans on weapons sales to particular countries are regularly lifted through aggressive lobbying. (Indonesia, for example, was offered \$50 million in weapons from 2006 to 2008 after an almost decade long congressional arms embargo.) The industry also works to relax controls on new technology exports to allies. Japan and Australia have mounted campaigns to win the ability to buy F-22 Raptors, potential sales that Lockheed Martin is now especially happy to entertain. The reporting window to Congress remains an important export control, but the time frame is

shrinking as more countries are being “fast tracked,” making it harder for distracted representatives to react when a controversial sale comes up.

In addition to revising these export controls, the administration is looking at the issue of “dual-use” technologies. These are not weapons. They do not shoot or explode. Included are high-speed computer processors, surveillance and detection networks, and a host of other complex and evolving technologies that could have military as well as civilian applications. This category might also include intangible items like cyber-entities or access to controlled web environments.

Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and other major weapons manufacturers have invested billions of dollars from the Pentagon’s research and development budgets in exploring and perfecting such technologies, and now they are eager to sell them to foreign buyers along with the usual fighter planes, combat ships, and guided missiles. But the rules as they stand make this something less than a slam dunk. So the weapons industry and the Pentagon are arguing for “updating” the rules. If you translate updating as “loosening” the rules, then the United States would indeed be more “competitive,” but who exactly are we trying to beat?

Weapons sales are red hot

“What’s Hot?” is the title of Vice Admiral Jeffrey Wieranga’s blog entry for January 4, 2010. Wieranga is the Director of the Pentagon’s Defense Security Cooperation Agency, which is charged with overseeing weapons exports, and such pillow talk is evidently more than acceptable – at least when it’s about weapons sales. In fact, Wieranga could barely restrain himself that day, adding: “Afghanistan is really HOT!” Admittedly, on that day the temperature in Kabul was just above freezing, but not at the Pentagon, where arms sales to Afghanistan evidently create a lot of heat.

As Wieranga went on to write, the

According to US law, for example, there are actually a few countries that cannot receive US weapons. Myanmar under the military junta and Venezuela while led by Hugo Chavez are two examples

India, once a major arms buyer from the Soviet Union, is now another big buy-American customer, with Boeing and Lockheed Martin vying to equip its air force with new fighter planes in deals that Boeing estimates may reach \$11 billion

Obama administration's new 2010/2011 budget allocates \$6 billion in weaponry for Afghan Security Forces. The Afghans will actually get those weapons for free, but US weapons makers will make real money delivering them at taxpayers' expense and, as the Vice Admiral pointed out, that "means there is a staggering amount of acquisition work to do."

It's not just Afghanistan that's now in the torrid zone. Weapons sales all over the world will be smoking in 2010 and beyond.

The year began with a bang when Wieranga's Agency announced that the Obama administration had decided to sell a nifty \$6 billion in weapons to Taiwan. Even as the United States leans heavily on China for debt servicing, Washington is giving the Mainland a big raspberry by offering the island of 22 million off its coast (which Washington does not formally recognize as an independent nation), a lethal cocktail of weaponry that includes \$3 billion in Black Hawk helicopters. This deal comes on top of more than \$11 billion in US weapons exports to Taiwan over the last decade, and is certain to set Chinese-US relations back a step or two.

Other bonanzas on the horizon? Brazil wants new fighter planes and Boeing is battling a French company for the contract in a deal that could be worth a whopping \$7 billion. India, once a major arms buyer

from the Soviet Union, is now another big buy-American customer, with Boeing and Lockheed Martin vying to equip its air force with new fighter planes in deals that Boeing estimates may reach \$11 billion.

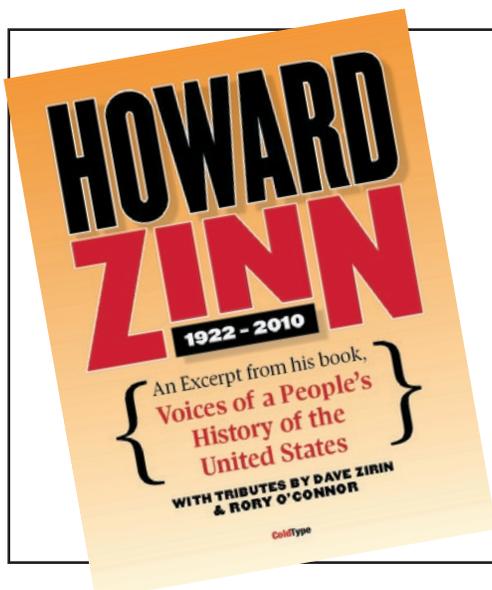
Such deals are staggering. They contribute more bang and blast to a world already bristling with particularly lethal weaponry. They are a striking American success story in a time filled with failures. Put in the lurid but everyday terms of a nation weaned on reality television, the Pentagon is pimping for the US weapons industry. The weapons industry, for its part, is a pusher for every kind of lethal technology. The two of them together are working to ensure that more of the same will flow out of the US in ever easier and more lucrative ways.

Global arms trade? Send that one back to the Department of Euphemisms. Pimps and pushers with a lucrative global monopoly on a killing drug – maybe that's the language we need. And maybe, just maybe, it's time to launch a "war on weapons." **CT**

Frida Berrigan is a Senior Program Associate with the New America

Foundation's Arms and Security Initiative.

"Weapons at War 2008," a report she co-authored with William D. Hartung, goes into much more detail about the politics and pratfalls of weapons exports.



PAYING TRIBUTE TO HOWARD ZINN

Download an excerpt from Zinn's book, **Voices of a People's History Of the United States**, together with tributes from Dave Zirin and Rory O'Connor at

www.coldtype.net/index.mar10.html

Military dictatorships; Theirs and ours

Sherwood Ross thinks Hillary Clinton should compare Iran's 'aggression' with that of her own country

Well may Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warn students in Qatar that "Iran is moving toward a military dictatorship." She is, after all, an authority on the subject, representing a country where the Pentagon has long been ascendant. Her comment was followed up by Robert Gibbs, President Obama's press secretary, who, at a February 16th news conference refused to deny the possibility of the US taking military action against Iran, stating, "I wouldn't rule out anything." As anti-war activist David Swanson of AfterDowningStreet.com points out, this is "a public threat to engage in aggressive war..." The Charter of the United Nations forbids such threats, of course.

Writing for "Truthout," Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, of Washington, D.C., believes Ms. Clinton's intent "is to promote conflict and to convince Americans that Iran is an actual threat to their security." This has long been Clinton's policy. During her presidential bid in 2008 she said she would be willing to use nuclear weapons against Iran if that country launched a nuclear attack on Israel.

Ms. Clinton finds it conve-

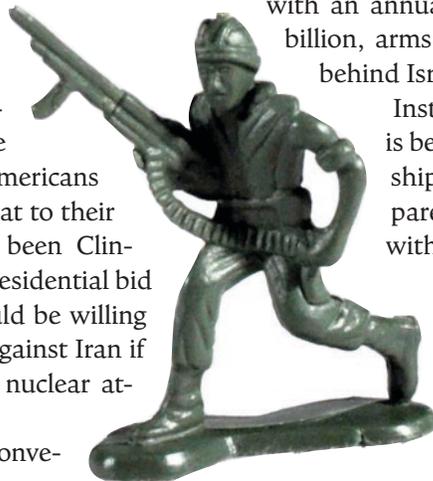
nient to ring the fire bell warning that Iran is developing its first nuclear device when the US is sitting on a stockpile of 12,000 such bombs, and ally Israel – which has rejected international monitoring and controls of its atomic arsenal – has an estimated 200 nukes. Former President Jimmy Carter writes "the United States has become the prime culprit in global nuclear proliferation" – yet, incredibly, Ms. Clinton is threatening Iran on this very issue.

Does Ms. Clinton expect gullible Americans to believe Iran might commit national suicide if it actually did make a nuclear weapon (Iran claims the development is for peaceful purposes) and then launched it in a war against Israel? Not only does Israel's military power dwarf Iran, which has a military budget of \$18 billion, but USA with an annual warfare budget of \$700 billion, arms, equips, and stands right behind Israel.

Instead of worrying that Iran is becoming a military dictatorship, Ms. Clinton might compare Iran's "aggressive" policies with those of her own country.

First off, Iran's army has not invaded Mexico on the lie that Mexico had WMD that threatened Iran, half way across the world. Nor has Iran

Does Ms. Clinton expect gullible Americans to believe Iran might commit national suicide if it actually did make a nuclear weapon



As if its roughly 1,000 military bases in the United States aren't enough, the Pentagon has established 800 bases in 130 nations to project its power around the world

invaded Canada on grounds Canada allowed terrorists there to train to attack Iran. However, the US has invaded two of Iran's neighbors, Afghanistan to the East and Iraq to the West on just such flimsy excuses. The Pentagon has also pressured a third Iranian neighbor, Pakistan, to allow it to operate in that country. Iranians might be pardoned for suspecting the US deployment represents a geographic pincer operation.

Secondly, while Iran is not known to have infiltrated any Imperial Guards into the USA, the Pentagon's Special Forces have been "on the ground" in Iran since at least the Summer of 2004, investigative reporter Seymour Hersh wrote in the *New Yorker*. Hersh said then President Bush's Pentagon scouts were marking down the location of military installations and quoted one Pentagon consultant as telling him, "The civilians in the Pentagon want to go into Iran and destroy as much of the military infrastructure as possible." It might also be recalled the CIA overthrew the elected government of Iran in 1953 and installed a dictatorship.

As if its roughly 1,000 military bases in the United States aren't enough, the Pentagon has established 800 bases in 130 nations to project its power around the world. Very revealing is its refusal to return to their native populations the islands of Okinawa in the Pacific and Diego Garcia in Indian ocean.

The Pentagon operates 11 giant aircraft carriers and 11 amphibious assault ships as part of its nearly 300-ship fleet. These intimidating floating bases are armed with tactical nuclear weapons that can be delivered by some of its 3,700 warplanes to any point in the globe. It also operates 70 attack submarines to project its power globally. With its 500,000 personnel, the US Navy is larger than that of the next 13 countries combined.

The Pentagon continues its risky, germ warfare research program. Since October, 2001, a compliant Congress has voted

roughly \$50 billion for this purpose in the absence of any threat from a foreign country. The only significant anthrax attack on the US – against two liberal US Senators and some media personnel – was found to originate from the Ft. Detrick, Md., a Pentagon installation. No trials ever resulted.

The Pentagon not only operates spy satellites to provide it with universal real-time information, it is also in violation of US treaty obligations against militarizing space with a variety of schemes in the works, including deadly laser beams and the so-called "Rods From God" that can hurl non-nuclear devastation down upon any location on the planet. The Pentagon plays a prominent role among the nation's 16 intelligence agencies, which employ an estimated 200,000 workers at a cost of \$75 billion a year.

Death science

The Pentagon commonly has about \$1 trillion in new death weapons' research underway at any given time. Much of the best scientific talent in the country is being devoted to death science that is offensive, not defensive. Imagine how this money might be spent devoted to medical science!

The Pentagon is training security forces in scores of nations. Through its infamous School of the Americas it taught torture techniques to Latin military personnel. It has worked actively with numerous dictatorships that suppress the liberties of their people, such as the Kopassus Red Berets of Indonesia, the unit that ravaged East Timor.

The Pentagon is the world leading arms exporter. It authorizes tens of billions of dollars in weapons sales annually to India, Pakistan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Taiwan, and Poland, among others. By one estimate, the US is responsible for about 70 per cent of the world's \$55 billion in weapons' sales.

In actions that reveal its dark side and disregard for human rights and life, the

Pentagon has been jailing without due process thousands of “terror” suspects around the globe, torturing and murdering many. To date, not one high-level Army officer has been tried and convicted for these crimes. Does it not appear to you that the Pentagon brass are above the law?

To crown it all, the total outlay for all Pentagon and spywar activities this year will be greater than all the funds spent by all 50 state governments for the health, education, and welfare of their 300 million citizens. The Pentagon alone is gobbling up 53 per cent of the nation’s discretionary income. Writes James Carroll in “House of War,” (Houghton Mifflin): “The Pentagon is now the dead center of an open-ended martial enterprise that no longer pretends to be defense...the Pentagon has, more than ever, become a place to fear.”

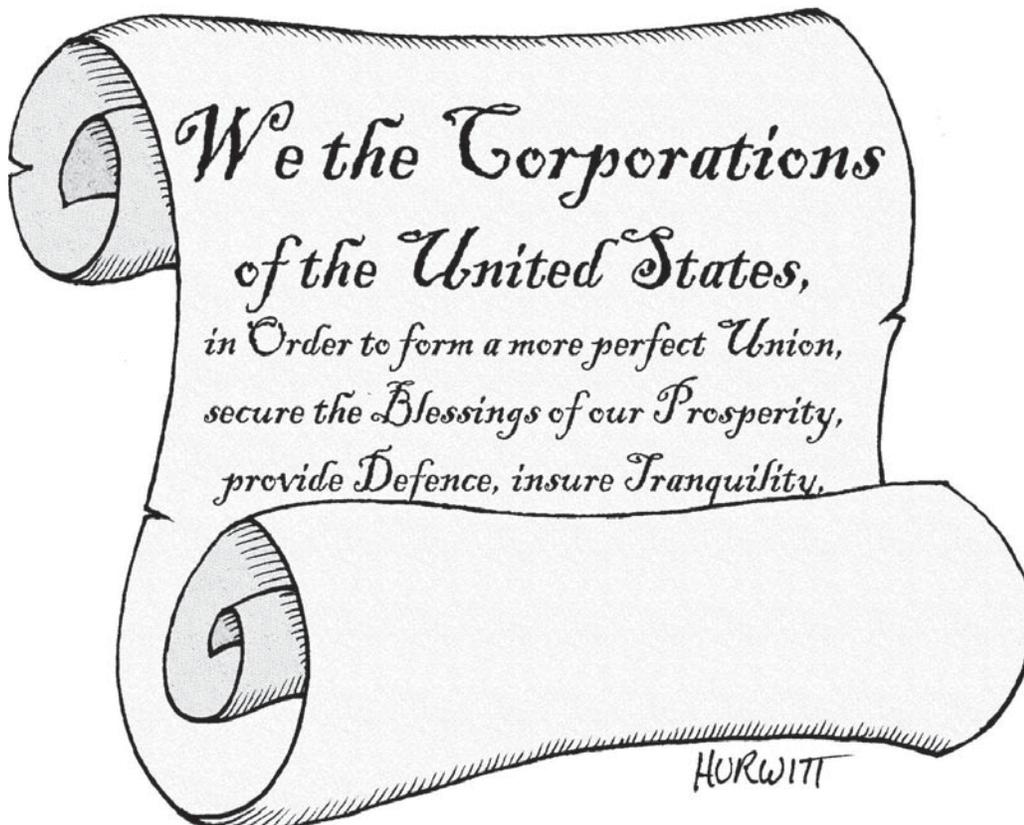
In short, the Pentagon is out to strengthen its commanding military domination over the entire planet, on land, air, sea, and in outer space. Given its history of aggressive warfare and growing influence in America, it is ludicrous for Ms. Clinton to point the finger at Iran! The Secretary of State – who is so divorced from reality she once falsely claimed she came under sniper fire at a peaceful welcome ceremony in Bosnia in 1996 – wouldn’t know an incipient military dictatorship if it was breathing down her neck. It may not be Iran, either. It may be the one headquartered on the banks of the Potomac only a couple of miles from her office at Foggy Bottom. **CT**

Sherwood Ross, who formerly reported for the Chicago Daily News, is a Miami, Fla., public relations executive for good causes.

The total outlay for all Pentagon and spywar activities this year will be greater than all the funds spent by all 50 state governments for the health, education, and welfare of their 300 million citizens

HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



Interview with the general

Fred Reed can't see the light at the end of the tunnel
that General McChrystal keeps talking about

The first thing we did was to blow up a house, killing twelve civilians including the mandatory contingent of children. If that's not a hearts-and-minds move, I can't imagine what could be

Oh lord. Oh lord. I can't stand it. Somebody get me a drink. I saw an interview with General McChrystal, head butcher of the the Pentagon's Democracy Implantation Force in Afghanistan. The General was explaining our ongoing victory. Yes, victory. We were making progress. Only a matter of time. He could see the light at the end of the tunnel. He didn't explain what we were doing in a tunnel in the first place. I guess he forgot.

The man was a superb explainer. He was intelligent, lean and fit, tanned – American Gothic in olive fatigues. Earnestness rolled off him in waves, accompanied by Firmness, Soldierly Determination and, I suspect, utter incomprehension of what he was doing. Thirty years in the military will make the most brilliant officer into a simpleton. Most achieve it by the time they make first lieutenant.

The guy was Westy, I thought. They've dug him up and added animatronics. He had the same statistics, drew the same comforting graphs showing the same progress in pacification, the same decline in Bad Things and rise in Good Things. Yes, he thought, we really should stop killing so many civilians, but we would stop. We were going

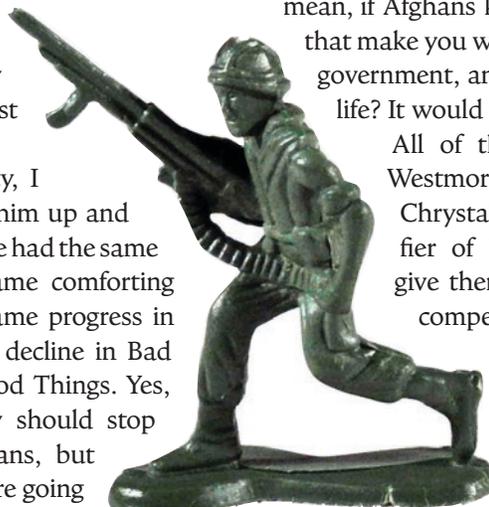
to help the Afghans, as soon as we finished killing most of them. (He didn't say the part about killing most of them but seems to be working on it.) We would win their hearts and minds by beneficent and salubrious bombing. (OK, he didn't say that either. It seems to be what he thinks.)

So now we are invading Marjah, a city, to build schools and hospitals. Schools and hospitals are characteristically built with heavy artillery. As soon as we have destroyed the place, they'll love us and see the virtues of the American Way. (The first thing we did was to blow up a house, killing twelve civilians including the mandatory contingent of children. If that's not a hearts-and-minds move, I can't imagine what could be.)

The strategy makes perfect sense, really. I mean, if Afghans killed your tyke, wouldn't that make you want to adopt their form of government, and let them improve your life? It would me.

All of this is so eerily familiar. Westmoreland, the Ghost of McChrystal Past, was also a pacifier of hamlets. Kill their kids, give them \$500 and a lollipop in compensation. Explain voting. What a plan.

Sez me, officers should not be allowed to try to think. A constitutional amend-



ment would be appropriate. They spend decades steeped like green tea bags in a martial culture that doesn't have a poodle's grasp of how people work. If you want to fight the Red Army in the Fulda Gap (I don't particularly) send McChrystal. He doubtless knows armor, choppers and large guns that say boom. But about people, he ain't got the sense God give a crabapple.

Understand: soldiers are not normal. They live in a bubble world, sealed away on semi-isolated bases with profoundly isolated minds. The usual traits of human behavior don't apply, such as individual thought or mental independence. They believe in God and Country (at least, those who stay in long enough to make policy do). They are clean and neat, feel themselves part of a collective working together, respect authority and believe that others, such as Afghans, would be happier if they only did what they were told and got with the program. The military's notions of Good and Evil are stark and very, very simple. We're good, and wogs who don't want us in their country are bad.

Some of this is not quite as silly as it sounds, as long as you stay on the bases. These typically are pleasant and orderly, authoritarian but not tyrannical, with public pools and gyms and clinics and the kind of welfare-plus-responsibility for which liberals yearn. The soldiers want Afghans to live the same way. It won't fly.

Protestant Reader's Digestism doesn't transfer to Kandahar. "We're here to help you" suggests to most of the world, "run like hell." The sense of righteousness among field-grade officers is strong. They are doing God's work. It doesn't occur to them that devout Moslems don't want any Christians at all in their country, much less Christians who kick in doors and humiliate their women. The colonels think they are trying to extirpate evil, and that six robotic-looking alien troops hand-cuffing a man in front of his family is a small price to pay for democracy. Of course the grunts doing the kicking hate the locals, who dress funny and eat weird shit and shoot at them.

What McMoreland doesn't get is that people just don't like being invaded. Yes, yes, it's for their own good. We, of course, will determine what constitutes their own good.

Such is the ingratitude of these people, and their lack of respect for borders, that we find ourselves forced to expand the war into Cambod ... Pakistan, I meant. Pakistan. And so the Predators fly, Predating, killing the wrong people because that's what there are more of. That doing this might produce animosity is irrelevant to soldiers. The Mision is sacred. Our intentions are good.

It gets so tiresome. We are always saving the world from some dread or other, usually unasked. Recently a friend read me a passage from Robert Bork, the very smart, very conservative intellectual who didn't make the Supreme Court. In it he spoke of the justness and necessity of the war on Vietnam, saying that it was crucial in the effort to stop the spread of communism. Those who opposed the war just didn't understand the danger.

We lost the war. What happened? The Soviet Union peacefully went out of existence. Its component "republics" have joined NATO or want to. "Communist" China is a major trading partner. Vietnam, still communist, hosts a big Intel plant. Cambodia is what it always was, a hot and drab little place of no importance. Laos too is green and hot and full of people who remember their fathers being killed by the Americans.

For this we slaughtered millions, brought Pol Pot to power to kill others, and killed a comparative few of our own citizens. Now, if America wants to kill its own soldiers, that is America's business. It is a matter of national sovereignty with which no other country should have the right to interfere. McChrystal could maybe hold a private war somewhere in the southwestern deserts. You know, McChrystal vs. David Petraeus, with two divisions each, twelve rounds or knockout, no holds barred, but they have to buy their own weapons.

But leave others out of it.

Yes, yes, it's for their own good. We, of course, will determine what constitutes their own good

Fred Reed has worked on staff for *Army Times*, *The Washingtonian*, *Soldier of Fortune*, *Federal Computer Week*, and *The Washington Times*. His web site is www.fredoneverything.net

CT

Where are the CIA's ghost prisoners?

Andy Worthington examines a new human rights report that calls on President Obama to reveal details about missing detainees

The report focuses primarily on secret detention in the last nine years, providing a detailed account of US policies in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and also running through the practice of secret detention in 25 other countries

A major new report on secret detention policies around the world, conducted by four independent UN human rights experts, concludes that, “On a global scale, secret detention in connection with counter-terrorist policies remains a serious problem,” and that, “If resorted to in a widespread and systematic manner, secret detention might reach the threshold of a crime against humanity.”

The 226-page report, published late in January in an advance unedited version, is the culmination of a year-long Joint Study by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. It will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March.

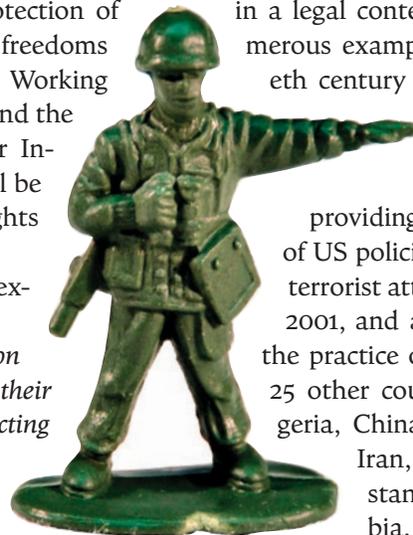
In an introduction, the UN experts established that:

a person is kept in secret detention if State authorities acting in their official capacity, or persons acting under the orders thereof, with the authorization, consent, support or acquiescence of the

State, or in any other situation where the action or omission of the detaining person is attributable to the State, deprive persons of their liberty; where the person is not permitted any contact with the outside world (“incommunicado detention”); and when the detaining or otherwise competent authority denies, refuses to confirm or deny or actively conceals the fact that the person is deprived of his/her liberty, hidden from the outside world, including, for example, family, independent lawyers or non-governmental organizations, or refuses to provide or actively conceals information about the fate or whereabouts of the detainee.

After running through the historical background to secret detention – both in a legal context, and through numerous examples from the twentieth century – the report focuses primarily on secret detention in the last nine years,

providing a detailed account of US policies in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and also running through the practice of secret detention in 25 other countries, including Algeria, China, Egypt, India, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan,



Syria, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

These sections contain valuable summaries, explaining how, in many cases, terrorism is used as a cover for secret detention policies of a political nature. However, the heart of the report is a detailed analysis of the Bush administration's "War on Terror" policies.

Of particular concern to the authors of the Joint Study – beyond the overall illegality of the entire project conceived and executed by the Bush administration – is the fate of dozens of men held in secret prisons run by the CIA, or transferred by the CIA to prisons in other countries. Based on figures disclosed in one of the Office of Legal Counsel's notorious "torture memos", written in May 2005 by Assistant Attorney General Stephen Bradbury, the CIA had, by May 2005, "taken custody of 94 prisoners [redacted] and ha[d] employed enhanced techniques to varying degrees in the interrogations of 28 of these detainees."

The 28 men subjected to "enhanced techniques" are clearly the "high-value detainees" – including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Abu Zubaydah and twelve others – who were transferred to Guantánamo in September 2006, but no official account has ever explained what happened to the other 14 "high-value detainees," or, indeed, to the majority of the other 66 men.

Many dozens rendered

The report also establishes that, at a minimum, many dozens of other prisoners were rendered to prisons in other countries.

In tracking these men, the report traces the development of the US secret detention program, drawing on new research into flight records to demonstrate that rendition flights, carefully disguised in the records, flew to Poland, Romania and Lithuania. The report also touches on the existence of a secret facility within Guantánamo, exposed by Scott Horton for *Harper's* magazine, which prompted the experts to note that they were "very concerned about the

possibility that three Guantánamo detainees (Salah Ahmed Al-Salami, Mani Shaman Al-Utaybi and Yasser Talal Al-Zahrani) might have died during interrogations at this facility, instead of in their own cells, on 9 June 2006."

Also mentioned are two little-reported facilities in the Balkans – Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo and Eagle Base in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina – and a claim that Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean (a British territory leased to the US) was used in 2005-06 to hold Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, a joint Syrian-Spanish national.

Accounting for other prisoners, the report focuses on a number of secret prisons in Afghanistan; in particular, the "Dark Prison," the "Salt Pit," and a secret facility within Bagram airbase.

Of the 94 men mentioned by Stephen Bradbury – minus the 14 transferred to Guantánamo in September 2006 – the report establishes that eight were released, that 23 others were transferred to Guantánamo (mostly in 2004), that four escaped from Bagram in July 2005, that four others are still in Bagram (three of whom are awaiting a US appeals court ruling on their successful habeas corpus petition last March), and that five others were returned to Libya in 2006.

These five include Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, the CIA's most notorious "ghost prisoner," who falsely confessed, under torture in Egypt, that there were connections between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, which were subsequently used to justify the invasion of Iraq. After multiple renditions to other countries (which I exposed last June), al-Libi's return to Libya came to a dark end last May, when he died under mysterious circumstances.

Discussing the other prisoners, whose current whereabouts are unexplained, the experts noted, "It is probable that some of these men have been returned to their home countries, and that others are still held in Bagram." It appears that a handful of these men may indeed be in Bagram, but

The 28 men subjected to "enhanced techniques" are clearly the "high-value detainees" – including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Abu Zubaydah and twelve others

As with the “ghost prisoners” in Afghanistan, many of these men later surfaced in Guantánamo, or were freed, but the whereabouts of others – particularly those in Syria, and, probably, other completely unknown men rendered to Egypt – have never been disclosed

not all of them, and it is, therefore, imperative that the publication of this list leads to pressure on the Obama administration to reveal details of all the “disappeared” detainees.

The report also examines the cases of 35 men rendered by the CIA to Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Morocco, between 2001 and 2004. As with the “ghost prisoners” in Afghanistan, many of these men later surfaced in Guantánamo, or were freed, but the whereabouts of others – particularly those in Syria, and, probably, other completely unknown men rendered to Egypt – have never been disclosed, even though some of the prisoners rendered to Syria were flown there as long ago as 2002, and, in at least two cases, were only teenagers at the time.

There are also sections on secret detention in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uzbekistan, and the experts also criticized other countries, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Kenya and the UK, for their involvement in the program. According to Reuters, 66 countries in total are implicated in one way or another throughout the report in secret detention practices – either independently, or as part of the US-led “War on Terror.”

In concluding their review of US detention policies since 9/11, the experts welcomed President Obama’s commitment to revoke and repudiate many of the Bush administration’s policies, including the closure of all CIA black sites, but requested clarification “as to whether detainees were held in CIA ‘black sites’ in Iraq and Afghanistan or elsewhere when President Obama took office, and, if so, what happened to the detainees who were held at that time.” They were also “concerned that the Executive Order which instructed the CIA ‘to close any detention facilities that it currently operates’ does not extend to the facilities where the CIA detains individuals on ‘a short-term transitory basis,’” and, in the light of suggestions by Scott Horton that the secret facility at Guantánamo may

have been run by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), noted that the order “does not seem to extend to detention facilities operated by” JSOC.

These were not their only concerns. Although they welcomed the implementation in August 2009 of a new policy whereby the International Committee of the Red Cross must be notified of all prisoners’ names within two weeks of capture, they noted that “there is no legal justification for this two-week period of secret detention,” because the Geneva Conventions allow only a week, and also because of their fears that some prisoners are being held who were not captured on the battlefield, and who may in fact be prisoners who have been rendered to facilities outside of the military’s control (at Bagram in Afghanistan and Camp Nama in Iraq).

The experts explained that they had “noted with concern news reports which quoted current government officials saying that ‘the importance of Bagram as a holding site for terrorism suspects captured outside Afghanistan and Iraq has risen under the Obama administration, which barred the Central Intelligence Agency from using its secret prisons for long-term detention.’”

New system at Bagram

The experts’ final concern was with Bagram’s new review system for prisoners. They noted that the decision to replace the existing system, which the judge in the habeas cases last March described as a process that “falls well short of what the Supreme Court found inadequate at Guantánamo,” was still inadequate. As they explained:

[T]he new review system fails to address the fact that detainees in an active war zone should be held according to the Geneva Conventions, screened close to the time and place of capture if there is any doubt about their status, and not be subjected to reviews at some point after their capture to determine whether they should continue to be held.

They were also “concerned that the sys-

tem appears to specifically aim to prevent US courts from having access to foreign detainees captured in other countries and rendered to Bagram,” and, despite welcoming the release of the names of 645 prisoners at Bagram, urged the US government “to provide information on the citizenship, length of detention and place of capture of all detainees currently held within Bagram Air Base.”

While the report spreads its net wide, the US administration’s response to its findings about the Bush administration’s legacy of “disappeared” prisoners, and its focus on the gray areas of Obama’s current policies, is particularly anticipated. So

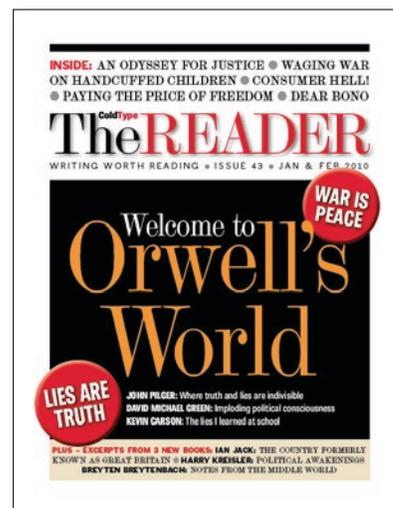
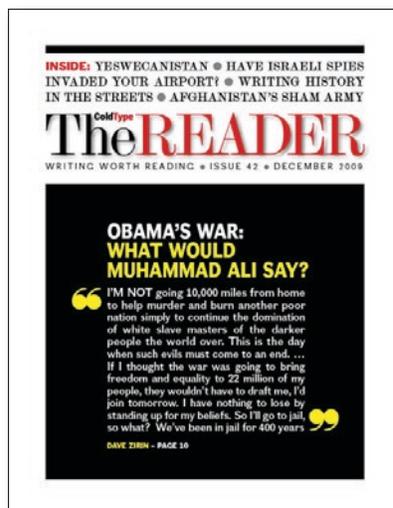
far, however, there has been silence from US officials, and only the British, moaning about “unsubstantiated and irresponsible” claims, have dared to challenge their well-chronicled complicity in the secret detention policies underpinning the whole of the “War on Terror, which do not appear to have been thoroughly banished, one year after Barack Obama took office. **CT**

Andy Worthington is the author of The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison (published by Pluto Press)

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“The system appears to specifically aim to prevent US courts from having access to foreign detainees captured in other countries and rendered to Bagram”

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America's complicity with Chemical Ali

Iraq's notorious war criminal Chemical Ali has finally been hanged, but we seem to have forgotten America's role in his crimes against humanity, says **Barry Lando**

The most horrific crime that Chemical Ali was charged with was his role in the slaughter of tens of thousands of Shiites following the abortive uprising or Intifada of 1991. Too bad the Special Iraqi Tribunal couldn't also subpoena George H.W. Bush and some of his top officials

Saddam Hussein's cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majeed, known as Chemical Ali, was finally hanged in Baghdad on January 25, for committing crimes against humanity committed during Saddam's reign. If not also joining Chemical Ali on the scaffold, some American leaders should have at least been charged along with him.

The fact is that the US and several of its allies were themselves complicit in many of Chemical Ali's (and Saddam's) most savage acts – acts which set the stage for the bloody, trillion dollar quagmire that Iraq has become. (I wrote at length about that history in my book *Web of Deceit*.)

But good luck to anyone searching the Western mainstream media for details on that unholy alliance. Ever since the fall of Saddam, the whole sordid story has been consigned to the black hole of history.

But when Saddam and Chemical Ali and the rest of Saddam's killers were doing their worst, the US governments of Ronald Reagan and later George Bush Senior were their de facto allies, providing them with vital satellite intelligence, weapons and financing, while shielding them from U.N. investigations or efforts by the US Congress to impose trade sanctions for their depredations.

But you have to hand it to the US (and Iraqi) officials who set up and then manipulated the Special Iraqi Tribunal so that the complicity of the US and other Western countries with Saddam and his crimes was never discussed.

For some reason I've never been able to fathom, virtually none of the American reporters covering the Tribunal and its aftermath have ever chosen to write about that shameful tale either.

So here's a sampling. In the light of where we're at in Iraq today, it's worth combing through.

The most horrific crime that Chemical Ali was charged with was his role in the slaughter of tens of thousands of Shiites following the abortive uprising or Intifada of 1991. Too bad the Special Iraqi Tribunal couldn't also subpoena George H.W. Bush and some of his top officials.

It was H.W. who in February 1991, as American forces were driving Saddam's troops out of Kuwait, called for the people of Iraq to rise up and overthrow the dictator. That message was repeatedly broadcast across Iraq. It was also contained in millions of leaflets dropped by the US Air Force. Eager to end decades of



repression, the Shiites arose. Their revolt spread like wildfire; in the north, the Kurds also rose up. Key Iraqi army units joined in. It looked as if Saddam's days were over.

But then George H. W. Bush blew the whistle. Things had got out of hand. What Bush had wanted was not a messy popular uprising but a neat military coup – another strongman more amenable to Western interests. The White House feared that turmoil would give the Iranians increased influence, upset the Turks, wreak havoc throughout the region.

But the Bush administration didn't just turn its back; it actually aided Saddam to suppress the Intifada.

The uprising smashed

When Saddam's brutal counter-attack against the rebellions began, the order was given to American troops already deep inside Iraq and armed to the teeth not to assist the rebellion in any way – though everyone knew that they were condemning the Intifada to an awful defeat. Thanks to their high-flying reconnaissance planes, US commanders would observe the brutal process as it occurred.

At the time, Rocky Gonzalez was a Special Forces warrant officer serving with US troops in southern Iraq. Because he spoke Arabic, he was detached to serve with the Third Brigade of the 101st Infantry when the ground war began. There were about 140 men in his unit, which was stationed at Al Khadir on the Euphrates, just a few kilometers from Kerbala and Najaf.

Rocky was one of the few Americans who could actually communicate with the Iraqis. When the Intifada erupted, the Americans prompted the rebels to raid the local prison in Kerbala and free the Kuwaitis who were being held there. "We didn't think there was going to be a lot of bloodshed," said Gonzalez, "but they executed the guards in the prison." Prior to the uprising, the rebels had also been feeding intelligence to the Americans on what Saddam's local supporters were up to.

From their base, Rocky and his units watched as Saddam's forces launched their counterattack against the rebel-held city. Thousands of people fled toward the American lines, said Gonzalez. "All of a sudden, as far as the eye could see on Highway Five, there was just a long line of vehicles, dump trucks, tractors – any vehicle they could get – coming to us in streams."

"The rebels wanted aid, they wanted medical treatment, and some of the individuals wanted us to give them weapons and ammunition so they could go and fight. One of the refugees was waving a leaflet that had been dropped by US planes over Iraq. Those leaflets told them to rise up against the regime and free themselves.

"They weren't asking us to fight. They felt they could do that themselves. Basically they were just saying 'we rose up like you asked us, now give us some weapons and arms to fight.'"

The American forces had huge stocks of weapons they had captured from the Iraqis. But they were ordered to blow them up rather than turn them over to the rebels. "It was gut-wrenching to me," said Gonzalez. "Here we were sitting on the Euphrates River and we were ordered to stop. As a human being, I wanted to help, but as a soldier I had my orders."

Ironically, according to a former US diplomat, some of the arms that were not destroyed by American forces were collected by the CIA and shipped to anti-Soviet rebels in Afghanistan, who at the time were being clandestinely backed by the US

A Shiite survivor of the uprising later said he had seen other American forces at the river town of Nassiriya destroy a huge cache of weapons that the rebels desperately needed. "They blew up an enormous stock of arms," he said. "If we had been able to get hold of them, the course of history would have been changed in favor of the uprising, because Saddam had nothing left at that moment."

Indeed, Saddam's former intelligence chief, General Wafiq al-Samarrai, later re-

The American forces had huge stocks of weapons they had captured from the Iraqis. But they were ordered to blow them up rather than turn them over to the rebels.

The Americans, he charged, disarmed some resistance units and allowed Republican Guard tanks to go through their checkpoints to crush the uprising

counted that the government forces had almost no ammunition left when they finally squelched the revolt. “By the last week of the intifada,” he said, “the army was down to two hundred and seventy thousand Kalashnikov bullets.” That would have lasted for just two more days of fighting.

In his autobiography, General Schwarzkopf, without giving details, alludes to the fact that the American-led coalition aided Saddam to crush the uprising. According to his curious reasoning, expressed in another interview, the Iraqi people were not innocent in the whole affair because “they supported the invasion of Kuwait and accepted Saddam Hussein.”

Iraqi survivors of the Intifada also claimed that US forces actually prevented them from marching on Baghdad. “American helicopters landed on the road to block our way and stopped us from continuing,” they said. “One of the American soldiers threatened to kill us if we didn’t turn back.” Another Shiite leader, Dr. Hamid al-Bayatti, claimed that the US even provided Saddam’s Republican Guards with fuel. The Americans, he charged, disarmed some resistance units and allowed Republican Guard tanks to go through their checkpoints to crush the uprising. “We let one Iraqi division go through our lines to get to Basra because the United States did not want the regime to collapse,” said Middle East expert William Quandt.

The US officials declined even to meet with the Shiites to hear their case. As Peter Galbraith said, “These were desperate people, desperate for US help. But the US refused to talk to any of the Shiite leaders: the US Embassy, Schwarzkopf, nobody would see them, nor even give them an explanation.”

The stonewalling continued even when evidence that Saddam was using chemical weapons against the rebels emerged. “You could see there were helicopters crisscrossing the skies, going back and forth,” Rocky Gonzalez said. “Within a few hours people started showing up at our perimeter with

chemical burns. They were saying, ‘We are fighting the Iraqi military and the Baath Party and they sprayed us with chemicals.’ We were guessing mustard gas. They had blisters and burns on their face and on their hands, on places where the skin was exposed,” he said. “As the hours passed, more and more people were coming. And I asked them, ‘Why don’t you go to the hospital in Kerbala,’ and the response was that all the doctors and nurses had been executed by the Iraqi soldiers, ‘so we come to you for aid.’”

Weapons holstered

One of the greatest concerns of coalition forces during Desert Storm had been that Saddam would unleash his WMD. US officials repeatedly warned Iraq that America’s response would be immediate and devastating. Facing such threats, Saddam kept his weapons holstered – or so the Bush administration led the world to believe.

Rocky’s suspicion that Saddam did resort to them in 1991 was later confirmed by the report of the US Government’s Iraq Survey Group, which investigated Saddam’s WMD after the US-led invasion in 2003 and concluded that Saddam no longer had any WMD.

Almost universally ignored by the media, however, was the finding that Saddam had resorted to his WMD during the 1991 uprising. The “regime was shaking and wanted something ‘very quick and effective’ to put down the revolt.”

They considered then rejected using mustard gas, as it would be too perceptible with US troops close by. Instead, on March 7th, 1991 the Iraqi military filled R-400 aerial bombs with sarin, a binary nerve agent. “Dozens of sorties were flown against Shiite rebels in Kerbala and the surrounding areas,” the ISG report said.

But apparently the R-400 bombs were not very effective, having been designed for high-speed delivery from planes, not slow-moving helicopters. So the Iraqi military switched to dropping CS, a very potent tear

gas, in large aerial bombs.

Because of previous US warnings against resorting to chemical weapons, Saddam and his generals knew they were taking a serious risk, but the Coalition never reacted. The lingering question is why? It's impossible to believe they didn't know about it at the time. There were repeated charges from Shiite survivors that the Iraqi dictator had used chemical weapons. Rocky Gonzalez said he heard from refugees that nerve gas was being used. He had also observed French-made Iraqi helicopters – one of which was outfitted as a crop sprayer – making repeated bomb runs over Najaf. Gonzalez maintained that, contrary to what the ISG report said, many of the refugees who fled to US lines were indeed victims of mustard gas. “Their tongues were swollen,” he said, “and they had severe burns on the mucous tissue on the inside of their mouths and nasal passages. Our chemical officer also said it looked like mustard gas.” Gonzalez suggested that local Iraqi officials, desperate to put down the uprising, may have used mustard gas without permission from on high. “A lot of that was kept quiet,” he said, “because we didn't want to panic the troops. We stepped up our training with gas masks, because we were naturally concerned.”

Gonzalez's unit also passed their information on to their superiors. “There was no way that officers higher didn't know what was happening,” Gonzalez said. “Whether those reports went above our division, I have no idea.” (Gonzalez's former commander turned down my request for an interview.) At the time, few subjects were more sensitive than Saddam's potential use of WMD. It's difficult to believe that reports from Gonzalez's unit weren't flashed immediately up the chain of command in the Gulf and Washington.

There were other American witnesses to what happened. US helicopters and planes flew overhead, patrolling as Saddam's helicopters decimated the rebels. Some of those aircraft provided real-time video of

the occurrences below. A reliable US intelligence source confirmed that such evidence does indeed exist.

On March 7th, Secretary of State James Baker warned Saddam not to resort to chemical weapons to repress the uprising. But why, when the US was notified that the Iraqi dictator actually had resorted to chemical weapons, was there no forceful reaction from the administration of the elder Bush? One plausible explanation – denouncing Saddam for using chemical weapons would have greatly increased pressure on the US President to come to the aid of the Shiites.

Green light for Saddam

Instead, the American decision to turn their backs on the Intifada gave a green light to Saddam Hussein's ruthless counterattack. General Wafiq al-Samarrai learned of the decision after Iraqi units intercepted frantic conversations between two Islamic rebels near Nassariya. One told the other that he had gone to the Americans to ask for support, and twice was rebuffed. “They say, ‘We are not going to support you because you are Shiites and are collaborating with Iran.’” After hearing that message, al-Samarrai recalled, “The position of the regime immediately became more confident. Now [Saddam] began to attack the Intifada.”

The repression when it came was as horrendous as everyone knew it would be.

“Women were being raped. People were being shot in the streets and just left to rot there.” Zainab al-Suwaij recounted. “The citizens were forbidden to bury the bodies. Many of them were eaten by the dogs. The government ordered people out of Kerbala to take the road to Najaf. They were slaughtered and executed along the roadway. Many of those killed were teenagers.”

As an object lesson to his people, Saddam Hussein himself ordered Iraqi television to record and broadcast scenes of the repression: appalling scenes of captured Shiites, some with ropes around their necks, being kicked and beaten and insulted, threatened

Rocky Gonzalez said he heard from refugees that nerve gas was being used. He had also observed French-made Iraqi helicopters – one of which was outfitted as a crop sprayer – making repeated bomb runs over Najaf

Because of Saddam's savage repression of the uprising, the ensuing U.N. sanctions, and the carnage unleashed by the 2003 invasion, at least one million Iraqis have probably lost their lives since 1991

with pistols and machine guns, a few pleading for mercy. Most of them, eyes downcast, are eventually dragged away to execution.

The Bush administration attempted to disengage itself from any responsibility. They were helped by the fact that there were no graphic news reports in the West of the slaughter that was taking place. US intelligence agencies had their own accounts and explicit images, but they weren't sharing them with the press or the public. Anonymous government figures, wise in the ways of Realpolitik, were making statements such as, "It is far easier to deal with a tame Saddam Hussein than with an unknown quantity."

Because of Saddam's savage repression of the uprising, the ensuing U.N. sanctions, and the carnage unleashed by the 2003 invasion, at least one million Iraqis have probably lost their lives since 1991.

Imagine if, instead of blocking the Intifada, George H.W. Bush had given a green

light – without even sending American troops to Baghdad – just sent the needed signals: met with rebel leaders, ordered Saddam to stop flying his helicopter gunships.

Granted there would have been a period of tumult. The Kurds might have achieved an autonomous or semi autonomous state, which is probably what they will wind up with. The Iranians would have certainly increased their influence through their Shi-ite allies, but probably no more than they have today.

Indeed, some in the Bush I administration were recommending that he do just that: support the revolt he had called for. They were overruled. **CT**

Barry Lando is the author of "Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq, from Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush" (Other Press, N.Y., Doubleday, Toronto.)

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In the beginning ...

An excerpt – Chapter 1 – from *South Africa's Brave New World*, by **R.W. Johnson**, published by Penguin

It's Spring outside, blossoming trees and sunshine. The world could be beautiful for all men. Such infinite possibilities exist to make them contented and happy. There is so much that could be done – especially here in Africa with its wide-open spaces. – Letter to his wife, Lucie-Marie, from General Erwin Rommel, North Africa, March 1943

We wholly conquer only what we assimilate.
– Andre Gide

It was 10 May 1994. The whole world had come to Pretoria to see the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected South African President. It was the greatest assemblage of heads of state since John F. Kennedy's funeral. Mandela spoke in ringing words:

The moment to bridge the chasm that divides us has come ... We enter into a covenant that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation which is at last at peace with itself and the world at large ... We must therefore act together as a united people for national recovery ... Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will experience the



It was the flight of nine SAAF Mirages overhead, dipping their wings in salute, which brought tears to many eyes

oppression of one by another.

The march past was led by the army which had played its full part in in trying to prevent the African National Congress from taking power that is, in trying to avert a day like this. But it was the flight of nine SAAF Mirages overhead, dipping their wings in salute, which brought tears to many eyes.

In 1994 the ANC had swept to power on two slogans – ‘A Better Life for All’ and ‘Jobs, jobs, jobs’. The reality was that for many years after 1994 formal-sector jobs shrank at a rate of well over 100,000 a year, with unemployment climbing inexorably

It said so many things: the acceptance of, indeed, the deference to, Mandela by the white establishment, the acknowledgment that he was fully President, able to command all the levers of power – and, for many black people in the crowd, it meant that for the first time the Mirages’ awesome power and white pilots were on their side, part of the same nation.

There were other meanings too. The whole white security establishment, despite many fears that it would stage a last-minute revolt against black rule, had acted in exemplary fashion. The Mirages and the resplendent army were also testimony to the fact that the ANC’s thirty-year guerrilla war against apartheid had never seriously dented white power. As a result, all the products of that white power, including South Africa’s sophisticated economy and infrastructure, were being handed over intact. None of the foreign visitors at the inauguration – they ranged from the leaders of the Western world to Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat and Muammar Qaddafi – could miss the fact that South Africa was anything but a war-torn country. Many African states let it be known that now would be a good time for South Africa to dispense aid in their direction. Similarly, many foreign activists such as Jesse Jackson wished to claim that they had played a pre-eminent role in ending apartheid and that a good time to have that recognised would be now.

Such doubtful notes were drowned out by the world’s elation that the South African problem, so long-standing and apparently so, intractable, had been brought to a peaceful conclusion. Indeed the country was immediately adopted as an international model for problem-solving.

The new ANC ruling elite enthusiastically accepted this evaluation, travelling the world endlessly to take a bow as representatives of ‘the miracle nation’. But the real miracle lay not in their being willing to enjoy the fruits of victory but in the way that the National Party leader, F. W. De

Klerk, had led the white minority to surrender its power peacefully.

There was a great flow of famous visitors to South Africa in the early post-apartheid years. For years boycotts and sanctions had meant that celebrities had had to think twice before visiting the country. Now they flooded in, many wanting to befriend the new regime, or win acclaim as a freedom fighter by posing with Mandela, or simply offer South Africans the celebrities they had long been starved of. The photo opportunity with Mandela was of critical importance to such visitors and many made it plain that their whole visit was dependent on having that moment. The endlessly amiable Mandela was willing to indulge a remarkable number of them, posing with singers, boxers, politicians and rap artists. Later such photo opportunities were frequently linked to large donations.

South Africa’s media loved this ‘Madiba magic’ (Madiba being Mandela’s familiar name). This mood – hugely amplified when South Africa won the rugby World Cup in 1995 – led to all manner of unreasonable expectations. South Africa would win the right to stage the Olympics in 2004. South Africa would win a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. South Africa would be asked to use its powers as miracle-arbiter to settle the Irish problem and the Arab-Israeli dispute. South Africa would instruct the rest of the world in how to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And so on.

This euphoria and ambition was completely overblown and, inevitably, when reality turned out differently the sense of anti-climax was correspondingly deep. (When South Africa failed in its bid to win the 2006 football World Cup President Thabo Mbeki bitterly termed the result ‘the globalization of apartheid’.) In 1994 the ANC had swept to power on two slogans – ‘A Better Life for All’ and ‘Jobs, jobs, jobs’. The reality was that for many years after 1994 formal-sector jobs shrank at a rate of well over 100,000 a year, with unemploy-

ment climbing inexorably as huge cohorts of young job-seekers flooded onto the glutted labour market. By 2001, moreover, 5,000 people a week were dying of Aids, a number which soon increased to 1,000 a day. Life was not only not 'better for all'; for all too many it was both shorter and poorer. Signs of social distress proliferated. The crime rate soared. Begging at traffic lights – by beggars of all races – soon became a general phenomenon. House prices fell steadily in real terms, year after year until 2000, and it became clear that in effect the market was discounting the value of many properties to zero over a fairly short time span, clearly anticipating complete social collapse.

The ANC government had comprehensively lost the confidence of foreign and local investors. Worse, in the country with the world's worst Aids problem, President Mbeki was soon chiefly famous for attempting to deny that HIV causes Aids. The statements of many government ministers evinced a complete disregard for the basic rationale of democratic capitalism. Many of the wealthier and better educated were leaving the country as fast as they could and there were many forced sellers of the rand at almost any rate. By October 2001 the country was reduced to celebrating National Be Positive Day, in itself a testament to how low morale had sunk.

And yet nothing was simple. The temptation was strong to write off South Africa as just another African country ruined by African nationalism. But there were other straws in the wind. South Africa had become a major car-exporter for the first time. The rand dived from R3-50 to the US dollar in 1994 to R10 to the dollar in 2001, but then recovered to R6.40 in 2004. Insatiable Chinese needs pushed up demand for South Africa's bulk minerals, while its strategic minerals, especially platinum, palladium and vanadium, bid fair to make up for its declining gold output. Foreign firms began to locate call centres there. From 2000 on house prices began to soar and by

2004 a full-scale consumer boom was in progress. The index of business confidence compiled by the South African Chamber of Business reached an all-time record level in August 2004.

One visitor who slipped into South Africa in 1991 was the political scientist Francis Fukuyama. He was impressed by the country's advantages over the ex-Communist world, for it 'already possesses three things that the former [is] desperately seeking: a functioning market economy, a democratic tradition (albeit limited to whites and much abused by them in the past), and a civil society, highly developed for the whites but still forming among blacks'. He was, however, worried by the ANC's *etatiste* economic thinking which 'appears to have been placed in a deep freeze for several decades' and its 'instinctive Leninism on economic and political issues'. Not surprisingly, the ANC was preoccupied with redistribution but 'the liberal economic revolution now sweeping Eastern Europe and Latin America, which maintains that wealth must be created before it is redistributed ... has passed the ANC by.

Fukuyama wondered if reunified Germany could provide a model for South Africa – 'that is, the developed part of the country will peacefully absorb the less developed part and, while suffering a temporary drop in living standards, will ultimately bring it up to its level'. The other possible models, he thought, were national disintegration along Lebanese lines or a slide towards a Latin American solution.

ANC leaders who cited the German model typically dwelt on the fact that South Africa (like West Germany) was a rich country: its problems could be largely solved if only the whites were willing to share their wealth. Those who criticized the ANC were invariably said to be merely 'protecting white privilege', the assumption being that the task in hand was sharing and that those who dissented simply did not want to share.

But Fukuyama pointed out that

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of these different futures, the one most clearly out of the question is the German model ... It is a widespread misconception, fostered for many years by the apartheid regime but believed by many blacks, that South Africa is a relatively rich First World country that has simply failed to share its wealth adequately with its black population. It is in fact a middle-income developing country with a per capita income on the level of Mexico or Poland ... Clearly, no amount of redistribution away from the country’s 5 million whites will be sufficient to bring so large a population up to First World standards, quite apart from the effect that massive redistribution itself and the consequent undermining of property rights would have on the country’s ability to create wealth.

Fukuyama thought a Latin American future was the most likely. South Africa could avoid Lebanon’s fate but

it is hard to see how it can avoid a long-term economic deterioration. The starting point for this deterioration is the evident need for the redistribution of wealth within the country. To a much greater degree than in other developed countries the rich in South Africa got their wealth at the expense of the poor and it is important to remedy the situation. The problem is that any large-scale attempt to right these wrongs over a short period of time would be self-defeating in that it would wreck the economy, and thereby undermine the basis for wealth creation that is the only hope for black South Africa itself.

Fukuyama was most alarmed by the possibility that the ANC might adopt policies which had the effect of causing whites to emigrate.

While the state can prevent the exodus of capital ... it cannot prevent the exodus of skills. And it is this which presents the greatest dilemma for the ANC ...

However unfair the current degree of white property ownership, and however ... injured the black population has been by the apartheid system, the future economic prospects of South Africa will depend to a very large extent on whether the whites can be persuaded to stay on in a nonracial, post-apartheid democracy.

Mass white emigration, Fukuyama warned, was the greatest danger.

It is hard to overstate the potential economic disaster that would await South Africa were this to happen. The rest of sub-Saharan Africa has been moving backward economically at a breathtaking pace ... many parts of Africa are poorer than when they gained independence. Sadly, it would appear that colonialism, far from having been responsible for Africa’s poverty, was in fact a major source of skills and infrastructure, and that the region has become worse off economically the further from colonialism it gets. This is not meant to justify either colonialism or apartheid, but only to be realistic about the economic dangers facing this part of Africa.

Fukuyama was much concerned by the ANC’s ‘socialism’, its ‘instinctive Leninism’ and the fact that ‘much of this thinking does not reflect knowledge of economics so much as the moral conviction, quite understandable in South Africa’s case, that property is unjustly distributed’. This moralistic Leninism made the ANC ‘the main obstacle to black social modernization’, for socialism, though always presenting itself as ‘progressive’, had actually ‘been revealed to be an obstacle to social and economic modernization – the hallmark of a certain kind of backwardness ... Let us hope that South Africa, as it makes the necessary transition to democracy, does not move forward into the past.’

Fukuyama’s assessment, by far the most far-sighted of the myriad analyses deliv-

ered in this period, was completely ignored. For the truth about the new South Africa was monstrously politically incorrect. Any who dared say that something less than a 'miracle nation' was being built immediately attracted abuse as a racist. In effect, Fukuyama had been the little boy who said the emperor had no clothes.

This has always been a necessary role in South Africa. At the age of 14 I got into a furious argument with my schoolboy peers in Durban, one of them later a National Party minister. On the blackboard I attempted to graph the predicted future growth of South Africa's white and black population groups, then reckoned to stand at three million and thirteen million respectively. My contention was that apartheid could not possibly work. Three million whites might hold down thirteen million blacks and, who knows, four million might hold down twenty million, but would five million hold down thirty million – and so on? At some point numbers alone would make majority rule utterly inevitable. So it would be better to prepare for that future. I claim no particular merit for this. The truth, unspeakable in public life, was so simple that any schoolboy could grasp it.

In 1960 I crowded into Durban City Hall to hear Hendrik Verwoerd. He pushed right by me in the throng, and I remember his large bulk, his fixed smile right in my face, his kiss-curl not unlike Bill Haley's. It was like a brush with Goering or Goebbels, a historical monster right up close, at once scary and mundane. He was hailed as Afrikanerdom's supreme intellectual, yet he spoke confident nonsense for hours. Not long afterwards I was one of just three whites (one of whom turned out to be a police spy) in a crowd assembled to hear Nelson Mandela speak, also in Durban. The security police broke up the meeting. I cheered Mandela on, but he too spoke not of realities but in lofty abstractions.

Later I realized this was normal. South Africa was a brutally practical country in which most people lived high on fan-

tasy, often denying what was in front of them. Sometimes they called it religion, sometimes just their principles. There was something about living here amidst Africa's extremities – and at Africa's extremity – which engendered these wilful denials of reality, the somehow safer realm of self-cultivated fantasy. You could see it then in Verwoerd's rhapsodic but irrational affirmation of separate development just as surely as you could descry it in Mbeki's mystical evocation of the African renaissance. Anyone who has lived in South Africa knows that it might take many years and thousands of lives to kill off such phantoms. The simple realities of South Africa might seem enough to deal with. But for those who rule us reality seems never to have been quite enough. We had Cecil Rhodes with his vast imperial dreams, Jan Smuts with his plans to incorporate everything up to Kenya into one vast Southern Africa, Verwoerd and the apartheid nightmare and then Mbeki, with his strange mix of Leninism, paranoia and Aids denialism.

Just outside Luderitz, in southern Namibia, stands the ghost town of Kolmanskop. Once it was the centre of the diamond industry in the whole of South West Africa, a town of fine two-storey houses imported from Wilhelmine Germany. Today no single soul lives there, nor has done for fifty years, and the town stands knee-deep amidst the desert sands but beautifully preserved. You struggle through the sand from the pub and its magnificent bowling alley, the antique machinery for returning the bowls to the bowler still intact, to the old schoolhouse with its photos of smiling teachers and happy children. Not a few of those mustachioed teachers, one realizes, probably died in Flanders while those gleeful, grinning, sunburnt children will often have died while serving the Third Reich in one capacity or another. After all, there is still a Hermann Goering Strasse in Luderitz – commemorating a former governor, not his son, the Luftwaffe boss.

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HEADER

Lying there amidst the packing cases, the rummage of whole lives, the thought occurred to me: perhaps all whites who stay in Africa long enough will leave as refugees. And black Africans will follow them

For anyone who lives in southern Africa – not just the members of racial minorities – Kolmanskop asks the unavoidable question: is this our future? We all know the stirring stories of colonial exploration and settlement, how America, Canada and Australia grew from small beginnings to become the world's strongest and most prosperous societies, but colonization did not always work like that. Even in New England there were some settlements that failed, later arrivals scanning the shore in vain for any trace of the pioneers. Thabo Mbeki frequently spoke of the need to 'eradicate the 350-year-long legacy of colonialism and apartheid' as if the eradication of colonialism is unproblematic, an unambiguous good.

Yet South Africa, over the last half-century, has played host to any number of whites fleeing from the disastrous advent of African nationalist rule, from Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe. For the coming of African nationalism (I cheered it on in 1960) has turned out to mean the arrival of a locust plague, of leaders who, in most cases, plundered their countries, abused their people and led their societies backwards, just as Fukuyama says. Generally speaking, the whites fled first but were followed by much greater waves of blacks, which is why, in today's South Africa, Congolese jostle against Nigerians, Mozambicans and Zimbabweans in their millions. All the countries these people fled from were once colonies where order prevailed and where life expectancy and prosperity tended to increase year by year. Look at their condition today and you have to say they were failed colonizations, places where the ethic of order and development failed to 'take'.

Much of Africa south of the Sahara falls under the rubric of 'failed colonization' in this sense. This is not just about white flight. White settlers were not important in Africa's two most successful economies, Mauritius and Botswana. And as one watches, say, Malaysia or India push

powerfully ahead no one believes that successful development there has for a long time now depended on white planters or administrators. The fact is that colonialism brought order, unity and modernity to these countries and that these gains have been preserved and built on in the era of independence, whereas in African countries as different as Somalia and the Congo the order, unity and even the modernity of colonial times has been lost. In today's Zimbabwe, once one of Africa's most developed states with its best-educated populace, the question is often asked, 'what did we have before candles?': the answer is, 'electricity'. In the Congo what were good roads at independence are at best cart-tracks now.

This is what I mean by failed colonization. Some may wish to see this as a justification of colonialism or apartheid or even a nostalgia for them, but that is not what is meant. The question is simply whether the innovative, indeed what Marx rightly saw as the revolutionary spirit of colonialism 'took' or not.' Put more crudely, it is simply the difference between going forward and going backwards: the key measures are whether life expectancy and GDP per capita improve, as they did under colonialism and apartheid. These two measures largely define the population's welfare and there cannot be too much argument about them. If these figures improve then speeches about 'a better life for all' and empowerment have some meaning. If these figures decline then such speeches are deceitful nonsense.

Staying with friends in Zimbabwe a few years ago I found myself sleeping in their spare room as they prepared to emigrate. After more than forty years of fighting the good fight against racism they were off to Australia. Lying there amidst the packing cases, the rummage of whole lives, the thought occurred to me: perhaps all whites who stay in Africa long enough will leave as refugees. And black Africans will follow them. In fact, put in racial terms, it is worse than that. Today's black leaders denounce the slave trade which saw

ten to twelve million Africans transported against their will to Europe and the Americas, yet the fact is that millions more have, of their own free will, left for those same shores since Africa was independent – and far more would if they could. Whites may flee the locust plague of African nationalism (among whites the old joke is that ‘the time to emigrate is after the Jews but before the Asians’), but the larger historical fact is that when whites flee an African country it is a sure sign of a ‘failed colonization’ in the sense alluded to above. The failure of modernity means that far greater streams of Africans always accompany the whites.

South Africa throughout its modern period was, despite apartheid, not only the most successful African state in developmental terms but was also a multi-racial, multi-cultural rainbow nation. Even apartheid, though it limited its fruitful growth into a truly Creole society, could not entirely stop it. But if this society were to start moving backwards in GDP per capita and in life expectancy, if it were to lose its developmental dynamic, then its already huge losses of the most skilled and educated would accelerate and Fukuyama’s worst forebodings would be fulfilled. Moreover, should the minorities flee in sufficient numbers this defining polyglot richness would be lost for ever and with it the country’s essential character. Were this to happen nothing is more certain than that more and more Africans would want to flee too and then we would indeed face another failed colonization. Another Kolmanskop. Except that it would not be just ‘yet another’ example; it would be the last and final case, defining independent Africa as a whole as a colossal human failure. The ANC was bitterly upset when, in May 2000, *The Economist* used the headline: ‘Africa: The Hopeless Continent’, but the plain fact is that the question of whether the continent as a whole is written off as hopeless sits squarely in the ANC’s lap.

These are the highest of high stakes.

Should South Africa become another example of failed colonization then the implications for the continent for decades, even centuries ahead would be dire. For Asia and Latin America are developing fast. There would be no Third World community: Africa would stand increasingly alone in its poverty, its failure and its psychological defeat. Mbeki spoke of the twenty-first century being ‘the African century’. This is already untrue: the rapid growth of China, India, Korea and Vietnam more or less guarantee that it will be Asia’s century. There is no disgrace for Africa in that. But if South Africa fails, and thus Africa fails, long before the end of this century Africa will face a situation infinitely worse than it does now. Such a defeat would doom Africans to an indefinite further period of serving as a source of raw materials – human as well as mineral – for a world leaving it further and further behind, and in which its erstwhile Third World allies would increasingly regard it with scorn or pity. Japan and China have long given aid to Africa and in 2004 their ranks were joined by India. But if Africa ends the century as the only area still begging from all the rest – and that risk clearly exists – this will not only doom all hopes of African self-assertion but render them risible. The damage would inevitably affect relations between black and white around the world. So great is the defensiveness aroused by this question that those who raise it are frequently accused of ‘wanting South Africa to fail’ but nobody who thinks about it for long can possibly want this to happen. **CT**

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If South Africa fails, and thus Africa fails, long before the end of this century Africa will face a situation infinitely worse than it does now

Employing parents who can't make a living

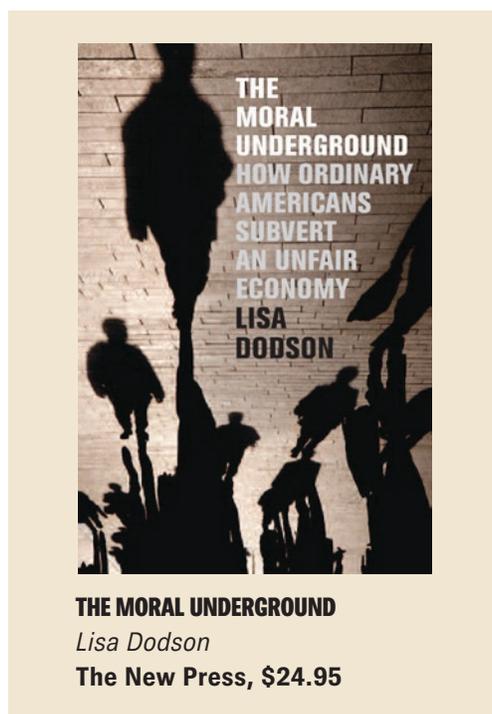
An excerpt – Chapter 1 – from *The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert An Unfair Economy*, by Lisa Dodson, published by The New Press

Members of this group acknowledged that if you make \$18,000 – even \$30,000 – a year and have kids, “family life is going to create a problem” for those who employ you

Do we have any responsibility for what happens to them? – Ellen, a manager in a company that employed many low-wage workers, 2002

Ellen raised this question during a community conversation with other employers from a variety of businesses in the Milwaukee area. They had been talking about common problems they faced with “entry-level” employees. Together they came up with a list of inconveniences and disruptions that come with people “who are disorganized” and bring that disarray to the workplace. They are absent too much, come to work late, get calls that distract them, or leave early, and they are often just “not focused on the job.” They said that there always seems to be some problem going on that complicates getting work done; their lives “just aren’t organized” or “they don’t have that work ethic.”

Most of the employers at this meeting supervised workers who were mothers, and they spoke at length about “family problems.” Eventually, their description of these troubles turned into a discussion about how inconvenient it was that these workers had families at all, because raising children is so time demanding. With some honesty, members of this group acknowledged that if you make \$18,000 – even



\$30,000 – a year and have kids, “family life is going to create a problem” for those who employ you. Frequently, employers who discussed such issues were raising families themselves and had intimate knowledge of how much time – or in lieu of time, money – it takes to keep kids on a schedule; manage all their schooling, extracurricular, and emotional needs; and just keep a stable family routine. If you can’t be home to make sure all this is taken care of and you

can't buy substitute care, well, "it's just a mess," said one young manager, herself a mother of two.

On this day, the five men and two women started examining an idea that reemerged in employer conversations over the years that followed. They raised the notion that if you pay people wages that guarantee they can't really "keep things organized at home" and then, because of that, the flow of work is disrupted, well, is that only the employee's problem? Or is it just built into this labor market? And if it is wired into America's jobs, as Ellen, a middleaged white woman, asked the others, "do we have any responsibility for what happens to them?" Over the course of hundreds of interviews and discussions this question was often at the center.

Inequality at work

During the 1990s and into the first part of the first decade of the millennium, the United States saw a surge in wealth among the richest Americans. But that decade of economic gain was largely limited to those at the very top. Today, one in four US workers earns less than \$9 an hour – about \$19,000 per year; 39 percent of the nation's children live in low-income households. The Economic Policy Institute reported that in 2005, minimum-wage workers earned only 32 percent of the average hourly wage. And African American and Latino families are much more likely to be poor or low-income and are less likely to have assets or home equity to offset low wages. Furthermore, the living standards for households in the middle relative to the previous decade have seen a decline, particularly "working-age households," those headed by at least one adult of working age. Thus the nation increasingly became divided into acutely different ways of life: millions of working families – the economic bottom third – that cannot make a living, millions in the middle clinging to their standard of living, and the very top economic tier of ever-greater wealth.

This America is not lost on ordinary people. As a Midwestern father of two who drives a "big rig" across states for a living said, "*That* money [gained by the richest people] came from somewhere, didn't it? It came out of my pocket and my kids' mouths." While most busy working people don't sit down to study the macro economy, many understand the rippling effects that shake their world.

At the university where I teach about poverty issues, I always ask students if they think that it *matters* if wealth increases for a few while others lose ground. For example, does it matter if that dad, driving his truck eighteen hours a day and seldom seeing his family, is able to buy less now than he could five years ago, when his days were shorter? Yes, of course it matters to him, his spouse, and his children. But does it matter beyond their private world? And always students point out that "maybe he's not driving as well" after eighteen hours. Thus, certainly with many jobs, there is a danger effect of low wages and overwork, causing damage that can spread. But a fair number of other students ponder harm beyond self-interest and even our public interest in avoiding a forty-ton truck slamming down the highway with a sleepy driver. Do losses to a family, probably an extended family, maybe even a community eroded by mounting poverty-induced problems – does all that matter in a larger way? Even assuming that we can avoid all those trucks, is *America* harmed when our workers and their families are ground down by an economy that has been funneling wealth to only a few?

There is always a range of responses to this challenge to the way the economy distributes its resources. Many young people particularly believe that we can do better, and they are ready to get on board. In every class that I have ever taught some students speak of wanting the chance to devote real time – years, not just term breaks – to working for another kind of democracy. They are part of a deep, still untapped well of commitment to an economically

Does it matter if that dad, driving his truck eighteen hours a day and seldom seeing his family, is able to buy less now than he could five years ago, when his days were shorter?

Do we have some responsibility for people to whom we are connected through our jobs and economic role in their daily lives, and indirectly, the families that count on them? Do we have some obligation to others

just society – not the only source by any means, but a very valuable one. As young people have pointed out, this is the world they will take on and they should make it a more equitable one.

Alongside that sentiment, some young people point out that there is also a sound business management argument that doing better by our lower-wage workers means that we all gain, because both the society and businesses do better. This “high road” argument counsels investing in better wages, decent schedules, and benefits for low-wage workers because, ultimately, this pays off for companies and the nation. Others also point out that investing in lower-income families will mean that millions of children are better prepared for school, are healthier, and have more stable families, all of which build the nation. Essentially, this is the argument that other nations use to invest public funding in families raising children and guarantee a minimum family income. So there is a defensible set of arguments – albeit not a winning one in the United States, but a compelling one – that we ought to pay people a decent income because it takes care of our people, serves productivity, and upholds the nation as a whole.

Yet, talking with employers, students, and many others, I found another public impulse largely left outside most economic debate. Sometimes middle-class people talked about a sense of obligation – a social obligation – at the core of their individual identity and their understanding of being part of this country. And many talked about their jobs – the work they do each day – as key to fulfilling the sense of being part of something bigger.

This idea of work was almost always explained to me personally, not as a philosophical stand. Middle-income people would describe relationships with others at work whose earnings were so low that if you decided to think about it, you knew there was no way they could support a family. Managers, business owners, and

other professionals told me about getting to know certain people who seemed to be doing everything they possibly could, but that wasn’t enough. And so all kinds of personal and family troubles would mount up, spill over, and eventually turn up at work. I heard about how when you hire, supervise, or even just work next to working-poor people – and, like it or not, get close to them – the harms they live with can start leaking into your world too.

A question would be raised: do we have some responsibility for people to whom we are connected through our jobs and economic role in their daily lives, and indirectly, the families that count on them? Do we have some obligation to others – not just our family, but those who are co-workers, neighbors, part of our society, and who are being diminished? I found nothing near a consensus. But a wide array of people diverse in background, religion, profession, race, ethnicity, and geography spoke of this reflection as part of their workaday lives, where they are connected to those who are working hard but living poor.

As a young mother who was a sales clerk in Denver in 2001 put it, “This took everything ... just to keep this job. You know, you’re a single mother, you’re not born with a silver spoon in your mouth... My child keeps calling me [while the child is home alone] and begging me to quit... This is my responsibility.”

“I couldn’t help feeling like I was almost to blame”

Bea was a fortyish white woman in a flowery blouse and pink slacks; she wore a square plastic badge that read BEA, FLOOR MANAGER. In 2004 she agreed to talk to me over a cup of coffee near the store where she was a manager of “about thirty-five” employees. It was a well-known low-end retail chain, a “big box.” She had worked there for five years. She described the workforce as largely local people, and that meant “almost all white, mostly women, and with maybe high school diplomas, for

the most part.” Bea herself had lived in that general area of Maine all her life.

After many interviews, my questions had been honed for gathering information about how it is to manage a workforce and what if any conflicts arise. Bea quickly focused on the dilemma of “knowing too much” about the personal lives of the people who worked for her and how that contrasted poorly with what she understood as the model of how a professional manager behaves.

“Some of what they teach you in this business is to learn to think of them as part of the job ... the way to try to get the job done. That means being friendly [to the workers], learning everybody’s name; that’s very important. But you keep people ... it’s important to keep a distance. You do that to keep it professional. But I think ... it is also how to keep it clean.”

“What does that mean?”

“It can get messy quickly if you start encouraging people to tell you what is going on, because they all have these problems. They have child care problems, problems with someone is sick ... there’s domestic abuse. They have a lot of crises. It’s better not to ask because it opens the door to all that and then you have to tell them they have to stay late or you have to cut hours or someone wants a raise ... all of that other comes up in your mind.”

“And that makes it hard to ... ?”

“That makes it hard to flip back into the business mode. I have to keep in mind my job is to serve the business, which is serving the public. We serve the public.” This phrase, often repeated among the managers I met, seemed like a mooring, something to grab on to when human matters started to rock the boat.

“And ... these people ... aren’t really ... the public?”

“No, in business the public is the people who pay... . It isn’t the public, really, it is the customer, the paying public.”

“So ... how does this work, for you?”

Bea’s capitulation was immediate. “Not very well really. I actually break my rules all the time. I know a lot more about a lot of people than I should. I get involved more than I should. I am that kind of person; my husband is always telling me that. Not that he really blames me; he does the same thing at [a local lumber business]. But, like before ... when we were talking about what they pay ... ?” Bea and I had discussed the company wages of \$6–8 an hour. “I know that when someone asks for a raise, *they really need it.*” At that point Bea started reciting the needs of many of these workers. Clearly she had annihilated her dictate to “keep it clean.”

Here is just one of the stories that she told.

“Nancy’ has two kids, her husband’s on disability, and she couldn’t buy her daughter a prom dress. This kid has worked very, very hard to graduate.” Apparently Nancy’s daughter had been employed throughout most of her high school years to help the family. “I’m like, ‘How is it fair that this family can’t buy her a prom dress?’”

Bea looked away, out the window. She disconnected from me for a few seconds as though recalling and applying manager rules. But it didn’t work. When she looked back at me, she was teary. And she seemed a little angry too.

“I remember how much my prom meant to me. I don’t know about where you live, but around here, it’s a big deal. The girls ... we all hope for a big wedding someday but your high school graduation, that’s something you have earned. You want to look glamorous – not just good, but runway good. No way was Edy going to have the dress, the hair, the manicure. And I couldn’t help but feeling that I was almost to blame, or partly. Nancy doesn’t make what she deserves... . I am not saying they all work that hard, but ... really, many do.”

Bea was quiet for a while, and I began to think that was the end of the story. I tried to think of how to draw out what was being said, to hear more about this balance

At that point Bea started reciting the needs of many of these workers. Clearly she had annihilated her dictate to “keep it clean”

She found small ways to help out, to subsidize poor wages and try to make jobs move workers an inch closer to a decent life

of roles and rules and Bea's conflict. She had started with her manager badge. But then she moved along a spectrum of moral thinking that I was to hear about many times. Bea put it simply. "Actually we sell prom dresses in this store... Did you see them?" I had not.

Again Bea was silent and she looked at my tape recorder. I asked, "You want me to turn it off?"

Bea said, "No, that's okay... Well, let's just say ... we made some mistakes with our prom dress orders last year. Too many were ordered, some went back. It got pretty confusing."

When Bea looked me in the eye this time, there were no tears and no apology. I thought I knew my line.

"So ... Edy looked good at her prom?" Bea laughed, with a touch of gratitude I thought. "She knocked them dead," she said.

Over this and another conversation, Bea talked about how she could not make up for even a small part of what the workforce was lacking, because their wages meant they could not make their bills, never mind buy prom dresses, a fan for hot days, a child's plastic pool. So she found small ways to help out, to subsidize poor wages and try to make jobs move workers an inch closer to a decent life.

I thought a lot about Bea's story as I reread other employer interviews over the years that followed. In the short time I spent with her, she had quickly traveled the length of a moral domain I was trying to map out. I sat down with a woman who struck me as cautious and proud of her success as a manager, and who would offer me the straight and narrow supervisor line. She set it out and then trespassed all over it, trampled on the idea of "keeping her distance."

But more came out. She had been engaging in subtle acts of resistance from inside her small corner of the economy by subsidizing its extremely low wages. Bea told me that she wouldn't pass along cash to aug-

ment low wages. But she took advantage of everyday moments of abundant commerce – mixed-up orders, unsold goods, end-of-season returns, layaways that sometimes lay away forever. Bea was making her own little market adjustments to keep from feeling complicit with what she saw as unfair compensation. Sometimes, as she said, "you just have to level the playing field a little."

But what does that make Bea?

I didn't ask her if she was a thief. I would have loved to hear her words on that question, but it didn't feel right to ask. I knew that other people would say that her actions made her one. And they have when I have presented Bea's story in public talks. But I am glad to say others in the audiences have countered that idea, calling that pretense of moral simplicity "a sham." In community discussions, people have argued that all taking is not equal. It's one thing to steal for yourself when you don't need it; that most people view as morally illegitimate and corrupt. But most say it's something else to steal when your children are in real need, for example. Just about everyone I've ever talked with over the years – working- or middle-class – says that when it comes to a hungry child, there is no such thing as stealing.

Yet breaking the rules as Bea did, for someone who has a hungry child or hungers for a moment of triumph after years of work, like a prom dress for their daughter – this is a morally complicated place. Rule breaking in these cases was not seen merely as an act of survival. Rather, these transgressions were discussed as acts of conscience and finally acts of solidarity. And they mark what is usually kept invisible, how people will step out of a culture of utter self-interest, the market culture, and then intentionally turn against it.

Resigning conscience to those in power

The tension between obedience to the rule of law and obedience to deeply held beliefs about justice and fairness is as old as

America. Long before tea was dumped in Boston Harbor, people were weighing the necessity of disobedience in the face of tyranny. Long before an active underground railroad gave passage out of hell, Americans were reflecting on their moral identity in a nation in which slavery was legal, whether or not they were slave owners. In 1849, in his essay on civil disobedience, Henry David Thoreau asks, “Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then?”

Why do we possess our own moral response to circumstances if we should remain unquestionably bound by the current rules and rulers? I heard Bea answer Thoreau’s challenge. But Bea wasn’t focused on the local or even larger legislative bodies; rather, Bea’s act of conscience was directed at the center of power in American society today, corporate power.

The massive shift of the nation’s wealth and power to an inestimably wealthy few is the American social landscape. But Bea thinks it’s ugly. She sees the economy down in the small cracks of social life amid long hours and tiny paychecks and children left to languish, in the sense that they are not worth a dress or a chance. And she has rejected the idea that business should be free to treat workers as disposable and their families as collateral damage. More, she refused to resign her conscience to others’ rules no matter how powerful they are. Rule by market interest, others like Bea have told me, requires that matters of conscience are supposed to be “left at the door” of the company, of the market system, regardless of the human harm you see. But I have heard it said, “I need to be able to sleep at night” or “I have to look at myself in the mirror.” When the apparatus of business and voices of institutions are silent, sometimes looking into the face of a rule breaker lets you sleep at night.

Bea was one of the first of a wide spectrum of middle-income people who explained to me that being asked to collude

with rules that are immoral and treat people unfairly eventually will lead to acts of disobedience.

Others agreed.

Andrew, the manager of a Midwestern fast food restaurant, had given more detail: “I don’t think [the workers] are paid enough. They don’t make enough to live. Yeah, so I do try to do what I can.”

With a little nudging he continued. “Okay, I’ll tell you that I add to their paychecks. I actually put them in for more hours, or what I can do more easily is put them in as working overtime and they get paid a higher rate. And sometimes I just pad them; that’s all there is to it. I pad their paychecks because you can’t live on what they make. I punch them out after they have left for a doctor’s appointment or to take care [of a family member]. And I give them food to take home... I actually order extra and send some home with them.” Andy referred to himself as a “Robin Hood” with a chuckle, but he meant it.

Margaret, a business owner in the Midwest, said, “I would like to share a story, where I decided it was a turning point in my life, being involved in management with single parents... You can’t go on about this being business as usual. I have changed how I supervise people.”

Margaret described being geared up to confront a young mother who was absent from work, again, as she had been several times in recent weeks. But when she looked at the young woman who came into the store carrying two sick children despite the bitter cold, Margaret suddenly imagined what that young mother had to do each day just to come to work. She called it a turning point in her life.

Joaquin, a food company manager in the West, confessed, “I basically try to feed them most of the time. I let them make meals for after their shifts. And the truth is that some of the women, some of them are single moms, and when their kids come in after school, I feed them ... pretty regularly, really. I don’t think they can feed their

“I pad their paychecks because you can’t live on what they make. I punch them out after they have left for a doctor’s appointment or to take care [of a family member]. And I give them food to take home... I actually order extra and send some home with them”

To Joaquin, watching parents working hard and going home without enough money to buy food for their kids is far worse than breaking the rules

families on what they make here... I think part of my issue is that, how would I feel if my kids weren't getting enough to eat? I can't imagine that idea that I can't afford to feed them, so you know, here are these people and they don't make enough money to really feed their kids."

Joaquin seemed a little embarrassed because his voice got tight when he spoke of the idea of being unable to feed children. To Joaquin, watching parents working hard and going home without enough money to buy food for their kids is far worse than breaking the rules, funneling some food their way, and risking the consequences.

Judy, a health care business manager in the East, said quietly, "I have to say that most of these parents are doing everything ... to be there [for their children] and at the same time do this job. They are doing everything, but, honestly, I don't see how they are supposed to... I couldn't. So sometimes I just look the other way ... when, you know, there's an issue about ... something." She did not want to elaborate but repeated, "Sometimes you just look the other way."

Lisa Dodson worked as a union activist, obstetrical nurse and director of the Division of Women's Health for the state of Massachusetts before becoming a professor of sociology at Boston College

If these four people found themselves sitting in a room together, they might have assumed that they had little in common. While they were all middle-class, their earnings ranged widely from the median to a high income. They were racially, culturally, and geographically diverse; one was in his early twenties while another was in her late fifties. I didn't ask about their religious or political views but heard opinions that suggested a wide range. They would seem truly different by any ordinary opinion poll measures. But I found that they have something profound in common. They all think that working people should earn a livelihood and be able to keep their families safe. That's the kind of society they want to live in. While they did not go into an elaborate discussion about fairness, each acted upon the idea of economic justice, even at some personal risk. And though these gestures are small, they are also disruptive; they send tiny shivers through a market system that relies on obedience to the rule of self-interest regardless of harm to others. **CT**

THE MORAL UNDERGROUND

HOW ORDINARY AMERICANS SUBVERT AN UNFAIR ECONOMY

by Lisa Dodson

The untold story of a silent movement for economic justice – led by ordinary middle-class Americans who bend the rules to help the working poor.

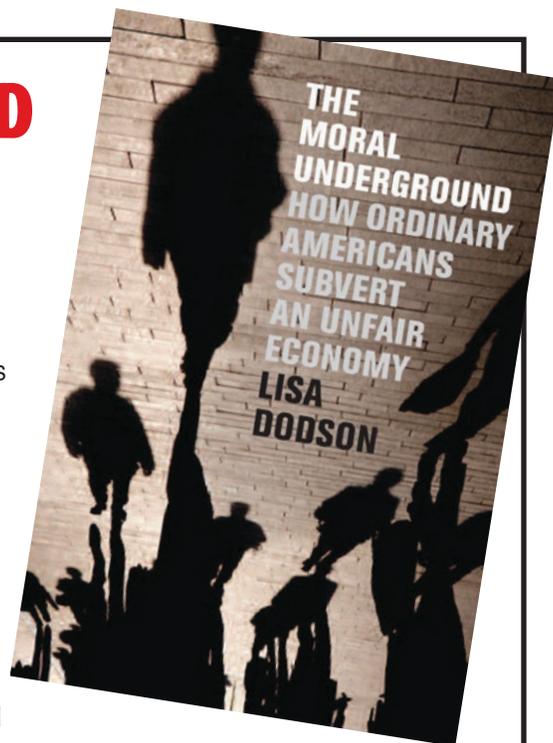
"Important, encouraging reporting." – *Kirkus Review*

"Dodson's study is gripping and her argument is persuasive." – *Publisher's Weekly*



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Katie, the teenage anarchist ...

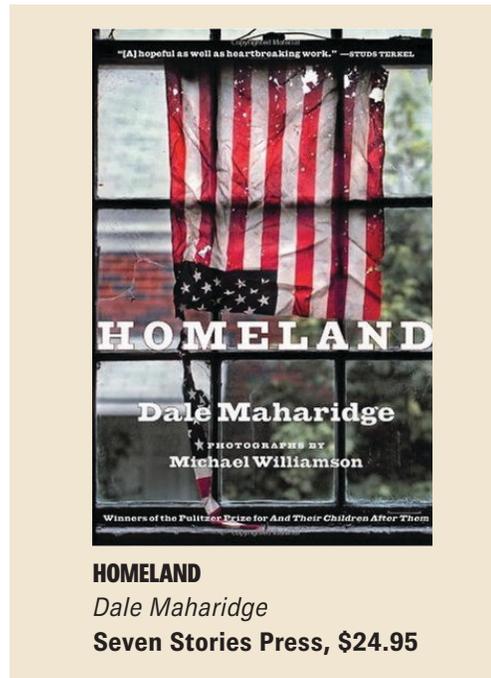
An excerpt – Chapters 1 and 2 – from *Homeland*, by **Dale Maharidge**, published by Seven Stories Press

CHAPTER 1

It's a perfect replica of a Shaker house, lost deep in a West Virginia hollow—where a creek named Eden's Fork runs. The house is at the back of the hollow, at the cessation of a narrow mountain road lined with modest dwellings and one church. For Mr. Kale, this home and the land around it is something of an Eden. The three-bedroom, three-bath clapboard structure is square and tall, surrounded by a vast, untreed lawn. The forested hills wrap around the lawn like a cove.

Mr. Kale built the house by hand, carefully following original Shaker plans, and then he furnished it entirely with Shaker-style furniture that he crafted in his shop—beds, end tables, the kitchen table, sofa, and chairs—all made of solid cherry and walnut and oak, perfectly fitted with wooden pegs instead of nails. The furniture, each piece a work of art, makes the home a museum to a prim past.

The thirty or so wooded acres around the Shaker house were all that remained of what had once been a much larger piece of Kale property. The Kale deed to this land dates to 1783, when Patrick Henry, the governor of Virginia, granted the area to settlers. John Kale was a ranger at Fort Lee on the Kanawha River. The town is called Sissonville, named for another ranger, James



This was not desirable country. The fertile flat country of Ohio to the north drew the most settlers, and only the hardest or hardestup came to buy the cheap, steep hardshale land

Sisson. This was not desirable country. The fertile flat country of Ohio to the north drew the most settlers, and only the hardest or hardestup came to buy the cheap, steep hardshale land. The Native Americans called these hills the “land of plenty fat doe.” Yet much of West Virginia had been shunned by the pre-Columbian peoples. They considered it a territory of bad spirits, to be used as hunting grounds.

Many Sissonville families are like the Kales—they trace their roots to pioneer times. Few newcomers ever show up,

Katie instantly doubled the minority demographics at the school. She is half Latina, as her father is Panamanian. One other student was half black, the daughter of a white teacher. All the rest of the seven hundred students were white

though Sissonville is not far from the present-day capital city of Charleston, just a few miles to the south down Interstate 77, or old US Route 21.

That June before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, neighbors took notice when Mr. Kale brought an outside woman with two children to the Shaker house, where he had dwelled alone for so long. Mr. Kale, a white-collar worker with a salt-and-pepper beard and imposing manner, was in his mid-fifties, and for weekend sport he rode a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. He was quite taken by Amy Sierra, a blond and attractive woman in her mid-thirties. Amy had been a single mother for thirteen years, and had known Mr. Kale for a year and a half. A nurse who worked long hours, Amy wanted some stability for her children – Katie, fifteen, and Levi, eight. Katie immediately raised some eyebrows. It was hard not to notice her; she had spiked hair that she dyed bright blue or green.

Not long after the Sierra family moved in, a neighbor invited Amy into her home, where the woman announced, “I don’t approve of your living arrangements.” Amy was befuddled.

“Living in sin,” the neighbor explained.

The neighbor chastised Amy for being with an older man, unmarried, and did everything but call her a jezebel. Amy and Mr. Kale were later married in the state capitol – not because of this neighbor, for the wedding had been their long-standing intention. But the meeting caused Amy to have doubts about the community.

Sissonville was also difficult for Katie, given her punk-bohemian ways. In addition to her colorful hair, she had a habit of writing poetry on her shirts with a black magic marker. Usually, these were odes to boys. She wore these shirts to a school where one out of four students is enrolled in the junior Reserve Office Training Corps (ROTC), and kids fly the Confederate flag at home and sport them on their trucks. Military buzz cuts are the norm for boys. The girls dress conservatively, and many already have the

dowdy manner of the housewives they wish to become. Katie instantly doubled the minority demographics at the school. She is half Latina, as her father is Panamanian. One other student was half black, the daughter of a white teacher. All the rest of the seven hundred students were white.

This was not at all like Sebring, Florida, where the Sierra family had previously lived. Sebring, halfway between Orlando and Lake Okeechobee, wasn’t exactly cosmopolitan. But it was more accepting than Sissonville.

Katie was used to moving. She’d lived in Kentucky and Florida with her mother, as well as in Ohio with her father, Raul. Raul was a computer programmer, and had come to the United States at age sixteen to enroll in Eastern Kentucky University. When Amy entered the school as a freshman, she was taken with the Panamanian who was her age, but two years ahead of her academically. After Katie was born, Amy and Raul were together for a few years, but then separated.

Katie had attended fifteen schools in her fifteen years. Despite this, her grades were good and she was never a discipline problem. In fact, Katie had something one often finds in the children of military families stationed in various locales: the ability to adapt to fresh environments. Katie knew how to deal with new kids, even in a place as mossback as Sissonville, where her classmates were descended from pioneer stock. Katie never yelled at anyone who made fun of her looks. She always spoke quietly. But most kids simply dismissed her as being weird, not worth bothering over.

That August when school started, there were a few other outcasts at Sissonville High School, but none as worldly as Katie. She was friends with them by default, though they were not enough to fill her needs. So Katie turned to the Internet. Earlier she had discovered an anarchy website. She began chatting online with kids in distant places. Katie found a community in which she felt comfortable. She fell in love

with a boy in Lake Arrowhead, California, and had friends in other states.

Anarchy conjures images of bomb-throwers to most Americans, but to Katie, it symbolized a community of kids who didn't fit in with button-down suburban America. After the World Trade Center/Pentagon attacks, it also symbolized peace. Katie abhorred the attacks. But she also didn't like the bombing of Afghanistan.

"I don't know or have an answer for the war, but I do know that killing people is not right," she wrote at the time.

Katie wanted to do something, so she crafted fliers with a manifesto, to start an anarchy club at Sissonville High School. In part, the manifesto said:

This Anarchist Club will not tolerate hate or violence. While we believe in freedom of speech, we do not want to be associated with any group that promotes destructive behavior. We discourage violence and will do our best to help others see the negative effects of hate and how pacifism could cause greater change and will be better understood by non-anarchists. Not only will we discuss and teach anarchist views, but we will also talk about the negative effects of an anarchist society, and of the strengths and weaknesses of anarchist theory ... We hope to give students and teachers an opportunity to see beyond commonly held beliefs to discover the basic freedoms that anarchy presents to the world. — Katie Sierra

The constitution of her proposed club went on to say,

One of the club's purposes is to teach others the importance of peace, equality and respect for other humans as well as animals. The club is anti-militaristic, and will circulate pro-peace literature.

None of this sat well with Amy. Katie had once tried bringing home a boy who wore a spiked collar, and Amy had forbid-

den it. Amy came from a military family. Her father served in Vietnam, and now works in a steel mill in Ashland, Kentucky, where Amy was raised in a tiny house. Her two brothers are also in the military; one served in Desert Storm, and the other is a first lieutenant in the army.

Upstairs in a bedroom closet of the Shaker house, Amy kept a big box filled with hundreds of family photos. She'd often go to this box and reminisce, looking at pictures of her daughter before age twelve — when she had turned so weird-looking — a cute girl with bows in her hair, always smiling for the camera.

Undaunted by her mother's protestations, on October 22, 2001, Katie went to Principal Forest Mann, an administrator with a narrow black mustache and drooping black hair across his forehead that made him look suspiciously like Adolf Hitler — a resemblance not lost on the students at Sissonville High School. Katie stood before Mann, citing the West Virginia State Department of Education's student handbook, policy number 4372, which allowed afterschool clubs. (There was, for example, a Christian Fellowship Club and a Civics Club.) She began to ask Mann about starting the anarchy club, but he cut her off.

"You will not be able to form an anarchy club."

Katie grew frustrated, almost tearful. She didn't know what to say. He prohibited her from distributing any fliers for the club.

"Go back to class," Mann told her.

That night, Katie sat in the Shaker house, watching CNN. Images of children accidentally killed by American bombing in Afghanistan came across the screen.

Katie was horrified. She rushed to a computer and banged off an e-mail to a boy in the anarchist group. She thought: *What can I do? I feel helpless and saddened. I don't like what happened in New York. Everyone*

Katie was horrified. She rushed to a computer and banged off an e-mail to a boy in the anarchist group. She thought: What can I do? I feel helpless and saddened. I don't like what happened in New York. Everyone who kills is wrong. But this, too, is wrong. I have to do something!

BOOK EXCERPT / 3

Jacob Reed, seated behind her, was upset by the shirt. “If you don’t love this country, then fucking leave!” Jacob screamed

who kills is wrong. But this, too, is wrong. I have to do something!

Katie went to her dresser drawer. She pulled out a red T-shirt and scribbled furiously with a black magic marker, writing across the back shoulders,

WHEN I SAW THE DEAD AND DYING
AFGHANI CHILDREN ON TV, I FELT
A NEWLY RECOVERED SENSE OF
NATIONAL SECURITY. GOD BLESS
AMERICA.

She wrote other things on the shirt, against racism and for peace, but this stood out.

The next morning she donned the shirt. It was cold, so she pulled on a “hoodie,” a sweatshirt with a hood. She boarded the bus that parked at the back end of the hollow in the predawn darkness. The bus went down the hollow five miles to Sissonville High School. Inside, she removed the hoodie.

Students muttered in the halls when they saw the shirt. As usual, Katie never raised her voice, nor was she impolite. She invited students to talk about the war. But in Jean McCutcheon’s third-block English class, the situation came to a head. Sophomore Jacob Reed, seated behind her, was upset by the shirt.

“If you don’t love this country, then fucking leave!” Jacob screamed.

Jacob was sent to the office. He either told or somehow related to Principal Mann that Katie had written on her shirt, “America should burn,” and “I hope Afghanistan wins.”

His punishment for yelling: a lunchtime detention. Mann ordered him to write down what happened. Jacob wrote,

I was in 3rd Block and Katie Siera was in that class her shirt said Stuff about how she thinks America is the dumbest country and how it should burn and she also told the class how She hopes the war against Afganistan we will loose it So I got mad and told her if she doesnt

like this country get the Fuck out ...

People whow herd it was –

Jamie Myers

Daneil Kersey

Todd Shamblin

Jacob Reed

10-23-01

Katie was hauled into Mann’s office. Now chilly, she’d pulled the hoodie back on over the T-shirt. Mann confronted her with what Jacob said, and the fact that she had anarchy fliers. (Katie had the fliers in a folder atop her desk.) Katie told Mann she hadn’t distributed any fliers, that they were with her personal belongings. Then she offered to remove the hoodie and show the T-shirt – insisting that it said nothing like what Jacob described – but Mann said he’d heard enough. She again asked him to look at the shirt.

“Do not take off your sweatshirt, Ms. Siera.”

Mann then said she’d disobeyed him, and disturbed the other students. Her punishment? Three days of suspension. Written on the official form: “disrupted educational process.”

Mann confiscated the anarchy fliers. Katie was sent to a counselor’s office. The counselor scolded Katie, and said her parents had to fight to come to America.

“Why don’t you love this country?” the counselor asked.

“I love this country. I love this world,” Katie said. “If I didn’t, then why would I want to change it?”

The counselor didn’t comprehend this. Amy was called. She angrily drove to the school. When she saw Katie seated in the counselor’s office, she said, “I knew this anarchy shit would get you in trouble!”

Amy put Katie in her SUV, which sported three American flags on the dashboard, and sped home to the house that had an American flag on a porch pole, near a brass plaque announcing the house’s pedigree. School officials would ask that Katie see a psychologist before being readmitted.

Before Amy returned to school after the suspension, David Reaser, an assistant principal in charge of discipline, called her into his office. Reaser said she was not to discuss her political beliefs in school. He then turned the conversation in a surprising direction.

“Don’t you believe in God?” he asked.

“I don’t see, like, how that has anything to do with anything.”

Reaser spoke about a castle made of sand. If she were walking down the beach, would she think it just materialized, or that someone had made it? Did she believe there was a creator?

Katie cried. Katie knew the God talk was out of line. She knew about the Bill of Rights and the US Constitution from her government classes. She assumed these documents meant something. She stewed, and thought: I am being ordered to come back to school as someone else. It’s America, isn’t it? I have a right to free speech. If I can just explain myself, the adults in charge will understand.

The school parliamentarian, Amy Leithhead, suggested that Katie attend the meeting of the Kanawha County School Board. The board was holding a special visiting session in Sissonville that Monday after her suspension. Katie thought it was a good idea. That Monday night when Katie and Amy entered the school auditorium, the place was packed. They took chairs at the back of the room near the wife of the ROTC instructor, sitting through two hours of talk about school roofs and mold. In the public comments period, the parliamentarian introduced Katie.

Katie had spoken barely a word when murmurs and hisses erupted. The mood of dozens of parents was nasty. Before she could get to her shirt or say much of anything about her anarchist club, she was shouted down.

“What in the hell is wrong with a kid like that?” asked board president Bill Raglin,

according to a story written by *Charleston Gazette* reporter Eric Eyre.

“That’s a treasonous act against the government of the United States!” said board member John Luoni.

Board member Pete Thaw said it was as if she were waving the Japanese flag right after Pearl Harbor. “This country is facing one of its darkest hours,” he said. “You must not have enough to do.”

Katie cried. Amy was dumbfounded.

Eyre interviewed principal Mann after the meeting. Mann repeated what he would later claim Jacob told or wrote him, that Katie’s shirt said “America should burn,” and, “I hope Afghanistan wins.” Eyre put this in his story.

The next morning, the community read these mistruths.

The city of Charleston erupted. Katie was the talk of the town – on the radio, on the street, at the nursing home where her mother worked. She became “that anarchy girl.”

Charleston may be the capital of West Virginia, but in many ways it’s a small town. With few exceptions, an entire city had overnight come to despise the anarchy girl.

It was bad. But things were about to turn worse for Katie.

CHAPTER 2

No one saw Sean Miller leave the party. It was a Saturday night that July after he graduated from Sissonville High School. Sean had been drinking. A lot. He jumped into a white 2002 Chevrolet S-10 ZR2, a graduation gift from his parents. He didn’t fasten his seat belt.

He had been popular at Sissonville High in the way jocks are favored, in a pecking order that prizes what boys do with a ball on Friday nights. It’s the theater of high school sports in a small town, and a lot of big towns, too. Up to graduation, Sean played his star role well. He was five feet ten inches, a hundred-and-seventy mus-

Katie had spoken barely a word when murmurs and hisses erupted. The mood of dozens of parents was nasty. Before she could get to her shirt or say much of anything about her anarchist club, she was shouted down

The employment situation in Sissonville mirrors what has happened in greater America over the past three decades: well-paid jobs have been replaced with the kind provided by Wal-Mart

cular pounds. He liked showing off those muscles, wearing a Dale Earnhardt T-shirt with the sleeves cut out.

Sean's brown hair was cut military-style, for he was a member of the ROTC program. In that way he didn't stand out. Often, he wore a Confederate bandanna. His friends called him a "rebel" – no matter that he had no distinct cause.

These Confederate flags were curious. Some explanation perhaps comes from the very birth of West Virginia, which drew together unlikely cohabitants.

The state, a group of counties that broke away from Virginia and the Confederacy, was signed into the union by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. The new state sent 36,000 soldiers to fight with the Union, and 12,000 into the Confederate Army. Families were split.

Yet this only partly explains the Confederate flags of Sissonville, and the Confederate bandanna sometimes worn by Sean Miller. It wasn't that the Civil War had been lost and the townspeople pined for the Old South that West Virginia never was. Rather, Sissonville was a community that relished being redneck in a way even the rough downstate coal-mining towns didn't.

I've walked into public places in those terribly remote coal towns, or what's left of the coal camps, and never have been treated with anything other than friendly openness. Yet in Sissonville, so near to Charleston, any time I walked into a store or restaurant, the place stopped – forks midair, coffee pouring halted – all eyes icily on me, like in one of those cheap B movie Westerns when *The Stranger Comes to Town*.

Why? I came to believe that the explanation was economic, peculiar to the town's pioneer origins. Even in boom times, Sissonville has never shaken the memory of its hardscrabble roots, of the pioneer founders who tried to wrest a living from these hard shale hills. Even when Sissonville residents were able to purchase motor homes and boats for weekend pleasure, they seemed to nurse a deep inferiority complex beside

their Charleston neighbors. The Confederate flags were a manifestation of unity in defiance of a hostile world.

And now jobs in the area were shrinking. Some measure of the job hemorrhage comes from the state Bureau of Employment Programs, which began keeping data in 1939. That year, the state had 95,500 manufacturing jobs, not including those in coal mining. In 1970, there were 126,500. Today, there are 78,500. In 1940, there were 81,700 trade and service jobs; today, 392,400. That's nearly a fivefold increase in service jobs across the state, to be sure, but many of these are "junk jobs" that pay vastly less than those in manufacturing.

The employment situation in Sissonville mirrors what has happened in greater America over the past three decades: well-paid jobs have been replaced with the kind provided by Wal-Mart. For years, Charleston, situated on the banks of the Kanawha River, was a manufacturing dynamo. Its nickname is "Chemical Valley," though perhaps "was" is more apt. The chemical industry has been reeling from back-to-back shutdowns, consolidations, and mergers, leaving Charleston and its environs with a great sense of economic unease, and anger. Union Carbide was the biggest company, with 3,900 workers at its peak. Employment shrunk to 2,600 by the millennium. After the company was bought by Dow Chemical, there was downsizing. In 2003, the company had 1,222 workers in the Kanawha Valley.

The 2,700 jobs that were lost in the preceding twenty-five years were high-end. While an average manufacturing job pays \$38,000, a chemical industry job pays \$53,000.

I found no one in Sissonville who put it as succinctly as did a man I met in Welch, a hundred-and-fifty-year-old redbrick downstate coal town. Deep mines were being closed in favor of "mountaintop removal" by corporations with distant headquarters. Huge shovels leveled whole mountains. These hard flattened mountains increase

runoff, and floods like never before blow down the hollows, walls of water and shale mud that destroy towns. Welch had just been through such a flood. The despondent man stood on the main drag amid the mudstains, talking to me about how they were always taken advantage of, by the coal companies and now by the federal government, which on a minor technicality did not give him disaster assistance.

“We always get fucked,” he said. And by “we” he meant just about everyone in West Virginia.

In Sissonville that attitude finds its expression in the Confederate flag, which has morphed into a talismanic symbol that guards the town and announces: no minorities. No gays. No pinkos. No “other” of any kind.

Nothing that ever changes the way we are or the way we think, and that’s always to obey God, our commander in chief, to go to work, perhaps in the chemical factories, and never to question anything that goes on there, either. It’s a brittle little world, stressed by outside social forces and outside industrial forces.

Sissonville is one of countless thousands of small-town worlds across America, self-protecting and self-reliant.

This was the town Katie Sierra came to, where her life intersected with that of Sean Miller. It would have been bad enough if 9/11 had never happened, if Katie had kept absolutely quiet, had worn black and skulked with the four or five outcast kids who during the lunch hour hung out at the north end of the high school, quarantined at a picnic table while jocks like Sean held court near the crowded main entrance. Sean could have hated her just for being different, and not felt compelled to act.

But when Katie wore her shirt to school and questioned the war on terrorism, to Sean it was as if Katie were a turban-headed disciple of Osama bin Laden. He couldn’t hit Osama. So he hit Katie, from behind, on the upper left shoulder, a hard and painful strike that left a large bruise.

This happened in the hallway, and no one saw it. That was the school’s official line. The hallway was crowded.

Then Sean bragged.

“I hit the anarchy girl!” Sean exclaimed. The act elevated him to hero status, above all the other jocks at Sissonville High School.

Thus Sean came riding off that senior high school year, a champion of a school united (save for a few exceptions) in hating Katie Sierra, and it was with all this behind him that he left that Saturday night party and was driving south on the Cicerone Star Route in Sissonville near the Jackson County line.

In his drunken state he lost control, went over a hill. The truck flipped, and he was thrown from it. He was discovered at 5:30 AM by a driver who saw lights on the roadside. Sean Miller was declared dead at the scene. Sean had a huge wake in the gymnasium at Sissonville High School.

Hundreds came, according to the account by reporter Jacob Messer of the *Charleston Daily Mail*. Ten of Sean’s friends flew Confederate flags from their trucks, the story related, and outside the school students raised a Confederate flag and an American flag half-mast on the pole. But they were made to take down the rebel flag.

Inside, Sean lay in a silver coffin. Garth Brooks played on the speakers as eulogies rang out. Sean’s friends dedicated a Confederate flag and gave it to his parents, Ralph and Jill. When it was time to go to the cemetery, engines revved and rubber burned as Sean’s friends pulled out to join the procession, led by a Sissonville police cruiser and two fire engines. The back of the hearse was covered by a Confederate flag.

Students had admired Sean for punching Katie, but with his death they elevated his outburst of rage into an act of greater meaning; he was a rebel now with a cause, a tragic idol to these students who felt their high school year had been ruined by Katie Sierra.

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“We’re gonna take her behind the school and give her some West Virginia justice,” kids, usually girls, repeated

It had been difficult when Katie went back to school after serving the three-day suspension. In addition to being struck by Sean, she was pushed hard into a locker.

“We’re gonna take her behind the school and give her some West Virginia justice,” kids, usually girls, repeated.

Two days after Katie’s return, Principal Mann asked students to write down their thoughts about Katie. Student Lynnett McClanahan wrote,

The statements and actions of Katie Serra offend me greatly. I am a member of the ROTC, my dad was in the Army for twenty years and my brother is enlisted in the National Guard. The fact that there is someone walking around the school with anarchy statements on their clothing are very offensive to me. In my eyes to be an Anarchy believer it means to over throw the government and for there not to be one. In that case she is Antigovernment.

Our government is what makes America. She is against American ways. Therefore she is anti-American. I don’t think it is right, and I think it is very immoral and rude for her to do these things especially at such a sensitive time in America. I don’t think she should be able to attend schools while having actions such as these.

– Lynnett McClanahan

Student Meggan Stutler wrote, in part,

I watched as a young lady was permitted to walk down the hallways of Sissonville High School wearing a T-shirt that spoke against American patriotism, and being told by that young lady that we never cared about our country until the September 11th attacks. That is totally untrue. We have always shown that we cared, we’re now just coming closer together.

Maybe if this young lady were to travel to Afghanistan, for example, and be beaten to death, or maybe in another case be shot or stoned for showing any skin on her body, she would come to appreciate our country.

I was very offended by this girl having the audacity to write things on her shirt that is purposely offending my country, my family, my friends, my flag, and my God. This country was founded on a belief in God, and the American flag is a symbol of it. By wearing and promoting all of these things, she is disrespecting this country and its founders. I’m sure that if I were sitting in a class that she was in, and she had on this type of clothing, as upset as I am, I would not be able to concentrate on my education while my country and everything else that I love is being verbally torn apart.

– Meggan Stutler, 10-30-01

Did Mann have these students write down their thoughts as protection in the event of a lawsuit?

Katie had called the American Civil Liberties Union. She had reached Roger D. Forman, a local attorney who specialized in cases that didn’t make him a lot of money – he sued rural police departments that were harassing citizens, and took on a lot of black lung cases, the affliction from breathing coal dust in underground mines. He especially liked the old miners.

Roger had represented one downstate miner who suffered from black lung in the time of apartheid, when Nelson Mandela was jailed in South Africa. The old miner told Roger: “We have to help Mandela and those folks over there. That’s not right!” The old man was white. As Roger explained it, working deep in the earth, skin color didn’t matter as much. Men who worked with danger on a daily basis were often a lot more community-minded and concerned for those who were oppressed in the world.

But the old miners were dying off. There

were fewer of those cases. When Katie came to Forman, it was exactly the kind of case the middleaged attorney gravitated to: lots of hard work and no pay. He didn't like the rollback of civil rights in post-9/11 America, and he saw Katie as exemplifying what America could not tolerate – speech and ideas that differed from the mainstream.

Forman called Jim Withrow, the attorney for the Kanawha County Board of Education. They talked. Forman believed he had an understanding with Withrow, who asked him to fax a copy of what it would take to avoid a lawsuit. In part, Forman's fax read,

Dear Jim:

Pursuant to our discussions of today, I believe we have reached an agreement which no longer requires litigation. The agreement is as follows:

1.) Ms. Sierra is to be admitted to Sissonville High School on Monday, October 29, 2001, without being required to produce a medical authorization or to submit herself to a psychologist ...

2.) Mr. Mann will return Ms. Sierra's leaflets to her.

3.) It is your understanding which was conveyed to me that all school clubs require adult sponsors. If this is the case and Ms. Sierra can find a sponsor that she can have her anarchist club ...

4.) Ms. Sierra may wear her anarchist shirt and freely express her opinion in a manner which does not cause disruption in the classroom ...

Withrow never responded. So the deal was off. Forman moved forward to sue. But his client was having huge troubles at school. The kids were harassing Katie without mercy. Amy Sierra worried about her daughter's safety; she stopped letting her ride on the bus. Amy now drove Katie to school.

One day, when Amy pulled her vehicle sporting the three American flags into the school lot, it was surrounded by teenagers.

They spat on Amy's car. Amy drove home. She took the flags out of the SUV, took the flag off the house.

"If this is what the flag means, I don't need their fucking flag," she said.

The flags would not go back up.

But there was great tension at home. Amy's husband, Mr. Kale, didn't at all like what was going on. It was as if he'd brought a pox to the community.

There were not-so-veiled threats from some in town to burn down his Shaker house. Katie didn't like Mr. Kale, eating her dinners away from the handmade Shaker kitchen table and spending a lot of time in her room on the second floor of the house, or on the Internet with her anarchy friends.

Increasingly, Katie hung out in downtown Charleston, where she made friends with Holly, a twenty-two-year-old woman who wasn't homeless, but who ate at the Sojourner's Shelter for Homeless Women and Families.

Katie soon preferred to eat at the shelter with Holly.

Suddenly, going to school seemed intolerable. At first Katie transferred to a distant school. But she was now a public figure in Charleston, and eyes of hate were always on her. One day in April, 2002, she sold her belongings – a television and stereo, including some videotapes and other things she took from Mr. Kale – at the Trading Post, a Charleston pawnshop. Then Katie vanished with her new friend.

"This is a freaking nightmare," Amy told reporter Eric Eyre. "She's severely depressed. Katie's running and wants to get out of here. She hates Charleston, West Virginia, for everything that's happened. Her friends have turned their backs on her."

The pressure of being pilloried by an entire community had gotten to Katie. She had a list of anarchists throughout the country, and she hoped to disappear into the anarchist underground.

Amy was worried sick. Police searched for Katie. Amy also hired a private investigator.

Katie's running away only emphasized

One day, when Amy pulled her vehicle sporting the three American flags into the school lot, it was surrounded by teenagers. They spat on Amy's car. Amy drove home. She took the flags out of the SUV, took the flag off the house

BOOK EXCERPT / 3

*Dale Maharidge has written four books with photographer Michael Williamson, the second of which, **And Their Children After Them**, won a Pulitzer Prize for Non-Fiction in 1990. Maharidge is now writing a book about a small Iowa town*

to Roger Forman the importance of helping her win her rights. Through it all, he continued to work on the case along with his partner, thirty-one-year-old attorney Jason Huber.

If Katie returned, she would face a jury representing a community that seethed with resentment. To Forman and Huber, Katie stood for everything wrong in post-9/11 America. In their view, it was easy to defend free speech in times of peace, but now more than ever, it was vital to stand up for unpopular views.

No one, even Forman in secret, expected to win with a jury selected from a place

where many hated the girl who simply wanted to wear her shirt. It would be a jury of people like so many Americans, who are afraid of terrorism, unsure of what is right in this new America.

Forman and Huber began what would turn into one thousand hours of legal work in the sleepless weeks leading up to the trial they hoped would start that summer. They needed their client to enter the courtroom. To them, it would not only be a fight for Katie, or against the small minds of Sissonville and Charleston, but for America and the freedom it is supposed to represent.

If only Katie would come home. **CT**



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Bleak havens

George Monbiot tells how the ultra-rich enslave themselves

It's a bitter blow. When the government proposed a windfall tax on bonuses and a 50p top rate of income tax, thousands of bankers and corporate executives promised to leave the country and move to Switzerland^{1 2}. Now we discover that the policy has failed: the number of financiers applying for a Swiss work permit fell by 7% last year³. The government must try harder to rid this country of its antisocial elements.

Executive flight is the corporate world's only effective form of self-regulation: those who are too selfish to pay what they owe to society send themselves into voluntary exile. It's an act of self-sacrifice for which we should all be grateful. It's hard on the Swiss, but there's a kind of mortal justice here too: if you sustain a crooked system of banking secrecy and tax avoidance, you end up with a country full of crooks and tax avoiders.

Sadly, most promises of self-imposed exile are empty. They seem to be intended, like Boris Johnson's warning last year that the City of London would be reduced to a ghost town by the new taxes⁴, to dissuade the government from taking action. The universal public response, as Tracey Emin found when she announced that she couldn't possibly survive here on her scanty millions⁵, is "Go on then, jump."

But self-awareness is yet to become the

bankers' dominant trait. Last week the president of Barclays insisted that Britain should be "immensely proud" of the bank's enormous profits⁶, while the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that it would give its staff bonuses of £1.3bn – 84% of which belongs to taxpayers – despite making another massive loss⁷. The new taxes are being imposed because of the crisis caused by bankers' greed. Yet the bankers seem to believe that we'll agree that they are the last people who should have to pay them.

Staying away

There's something else that the threats tell us: some people appear willing to do almost anything for money. In court papers made public at the beginning of this month, Guy Hands, the owner of the private equity company Terra Firma and the record label EMI, sought to explain why the case he is fighting against Citigroup should not be heard in London. He moved to Guernsey last April to avoid UK taxes. Since then, he says, he has "never visited" his wife and children, who still live in his former home in Kent, for fear of compromising his tax status. For the same reason, "I do not visit my parents in the United Kingdom and would not do so except in an emergency."⁸

Hands, according to the *Sunday Times* rich list, is worth £100m⁹. Were he to allow the Exchequer to reclaim a few of his un-

Executive flight is the corporate world's only effective form of self-regulation: those who are too selfish to pay what they owe to society send themselves into voluntary exile

HANDS OFF!

For some of the ultra-wealthy, tax avoidance seems to be a matter of principle: they'll be damned if they give a penny to the people, whether they would miss it or not

necessary millions, he would face neither ruin nor starvation. He's reported to work 18 hours a day¹⁰, which means he is unlikely to find much time to enjoy his wealth. It's hard to see how the fraction he has saved through becoming an economic refugee could bring him any discernible benefit, let alone happiness that could compensate for the life he has lost.

Extreme wealth invariably leads to captivity. Its victims live in an open prison. In Mexico and Colombia, they and their families face the constant threat of kidnap: they must scurry around, screened and shrouded, as if they were coppers' narks. In Russia they can never be free from the fear of assassination. Everywhere on earth they live behind walls and razor wire, guarded by cameras, dogs, watch towers and sensors. The walls that shut the world out also shut them in.

They must, if they wish to maintain their place on the rich lists, also live in fear of their rivals. Despite their lobbying power, they cannot permanently shake off the authorities, not least because of the irregular tax and accounting methods which helped many of them to become so rich: the remark attributed to Balzac ("behind every great fortune lies a great crime") is at least half right. Who in his right mind would volunteer for this life?

Chairman's tax status

The Conservative Party's most persistent embarrassment is the hazy tax status of its deputy chairman, Lord Ashcroft. Ashcroft received his peerage in 2000 after promising that he would become a UK taxpayer. Since then a succession of senior Tories has been quizzed by the media about whether he has redeemed this promise or is still registered in Belize, and they have writhed like hooked eels^{11 12 13}. Though this issue could explode as the election approaches, neither Ashcroft nor the party have yet produced an answer. This gives us a pretty good idea of what it must be, and of where the party's priorities lie.

For some of the ultra-wealthy, tax avoidance seems to be a matter of principle: they'll be damned if they give a penny to the people, whether they would miss it or not. On the few occasions on which I've met members of this class, I've been struck by their dissidence: they appear to see themselves as lonely rebels engaged in a perpetual fight against authority, even as they strive to get so rich that their own authority becomes impregnable. In fighting the taxman, they draw on a heroic tradition of resistance. In the New Testament, or to the Sons of Liberty seeking American independence, taxation was an instrument of colonial oppression. The context has changed: today the tax avoiders are the oppressors. But they still regard themselves as insurrectionaries.

Now, at last, the net is starting to close. Far too late, the British government has begun to abandon its mystifying tolerance of the loss of its funds. Last year HM Revenue and Customs retrieved three times as much unpaid tax from the very rich as it did five years before¹⁴. In December the government announced that it would impose 200% penalties on people who fail to declare their bank accounts in uncooperative tax havens¹⁵. Last month the appeal court ruled that the British multimillionaire Robert Gaines-Cooper must pay £30 million in back tax, as he retains too many interests in this country to qualify as a resident of the Seychelles¹⁶. The government is considering a new law on British residency, which it will introduce next year, in the unlikely event that it wins the election¹⁷. Why has it left this so long?

These efforts scarcely scratch the problem. International attempts to close down tax havens remain half-hearted. But if by some miracle these measures were to succeed, one haven – let's say St Helena – should be kept open. It should be furnished only with rudimentary homes. All who chose to could live there in peace. Every penny they possessed would remain safe from the taxman, as long as they never set

foot in another land. They could sit in their cells and count their money for the rest of their lives. Parties of schoolchildren would be brought to the island to goggle at these hermits, and learn some lessons about the follies of wealth. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is "Bring On The Apocalypse".

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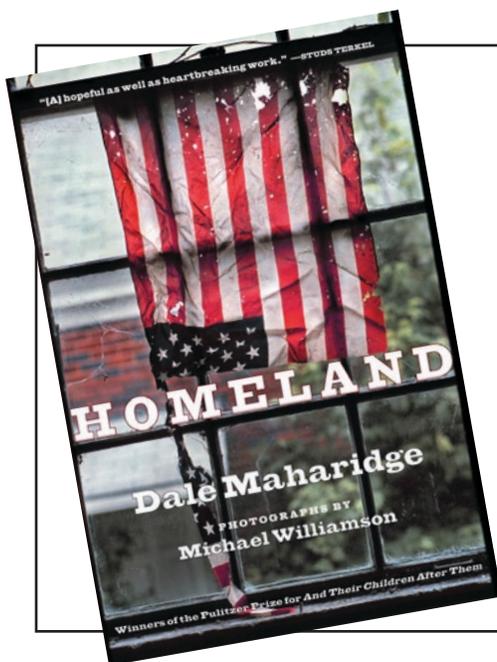
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Parties of schoolchildren would be brought to the island to goggle at these hermits, and learn some lessons about the follies of wealth



HOMELAND

Dale Maharidge

Photographs by Michael Williamson

Homeland is Pulitzer Prize winning author Maharidge's most ambitious book yet, weaving together the disparate and contradictory strands of contemporary American society—common decency alongside race rage, the range of dissenting voices, and the roots of discontent that defy political affiliation.



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A visit to the teledoctor

A trip to the prison doctor becomes an international affair when **Tito Valdez** has his rear-end examined over the Internet

I figured they were both nuts, probably on psych meds, waiting to see the prison psychologist

At 8:45 a.m., I arrived to the first-floor infirmary for my scheduled 9 a.m. appointment to see a prison doctor. I headed into a rectangular chainlink cage, an overcrowded waiting area resembling a dog kennel.

I sat on benches along with about 40 other inmates – most were complaining about their medical situation.

“Look at my face. This mole has gots to be cancerous,” complained a young inmate. Speaking with his hands, his body animated, he continued: “Shee-it, been up here four times; I gets the same old Chinaman doctor. He don’t want to refer me to a skin specialist. Keeps giving me skin cream... that shit P. Diddy and Jessica Simpson be endorsing on television, Proactiv®.”

“I hear you. I gots a foot problem, need orthopedic shoes, and all the doc keeps giving me is foot soles to place in my shoes,” said another inmate in his 60s.

I brought the latest *Sacramento Bee* to read while I waited. Normally it takes a whole day to see a doctor because of prison overcrowding. I flipped through the pages and noticed the headline, “Prison Medical System Under Federal Receivership.” A related item added, “State Looks for Ways to Cut Soaring Medical Costs for Aging Population.”

As I flipped through the comic section, a couple of inmates chatted.

“Hey brotha, you won’t believe this, man. I saw a specialist yesterday. The guy was on a television screen, looked like one of those terrorists from Al Qaeda,” said an older, white inmate nicknamed Ziggy.

“Really? How does that work?” asked a young inmate nicknamed Cap.

“It’s like the program, ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?’ where a contestant picks an expert to help solve a question, a live Skype video feed in real time.”

“So you talk to the doctor, live on a television screen, even though he is somewhere else?”

“Yeah. I bet the guy is in Iraq somewhere, probably not even a licensed doctor in California,” answered Ziggy, smiling.

I chuckled, thinking they were full of shit. I figured they were both nuts, probably on psych meds, waiting to see the prison psychologist. I continued to read, occasionally looking up to check out a hot-looking nurse passing by. At 8:56 a.m., a Filipina nurse in her mid-50s, with short brown hair and trendy glasses, called my name.

“Mr. Baldez, last two, six-zero, you are next,” she said with a very thick accent. She stood about 5 feet tall, walked with attitude, seemed bossy.

I followed her into a room that resembled the familiar ordinary surroundings of the family doctor I saw as a kid: Medical cabinets, a table, and posters of the human

anatomy. I sat down in a chair as she turned on two color television monitors, each had about a 25-inch screen. She dimmed the lights, saying, “Mr. Baldez, the doctor will be with you shortly.”

Each monitor displayed video images of white puffy clouds merging into spectacular views of the Grand Canyon, then sparkling streams. The speakers broadcasted meditation music, which sounded like it came from India.

Minutes later, at 9 a.m. exactly, the monitor on the left side began transmitting the image of a dark-skinned man, sitting sideways, wearing a turban. He reminded me of the clerk at the register of the local 7-Eleven convenience store when I was free. Or he could have been a guy at an hourly rate motel. At the bottom of the screen, words in another language (Hindi, I presume) were moving from left to right like updates of stock prices on Wall Street.

He turned towards the monitor, removing the turban, holding up a clipboard, looking right at me. The Hindi script was replaced with a graphic of his full name, displayed in English on the screen, along with the words “Bakersfield Group.” The nurse walked back in.

“Mr. Baldez? Baldez?” said the doctor in a thick Hindi accent. He had dark thick eyebrows that almost connected into a uni-brow, and a full head of dark hair. He wore a white doctor’s jacket, a tie and stethoscope around his neck. His image suddenly started to fade off, flicker, became choppy like a live streaming video feed using technology from ten years ago. The nurse reached over, smacking the monitor with her hand, fixing the problem. The feed came in crystal clear.

“Mr. Baldez?” he asked.

The nurse, standing in front of the monitor, said: “Yes, doctor, Mr. Baldez is right here, present.”

I was shocked, baffled. I looked around the room, thinking that maybe I was on Candid Camera. This had to be a joke.

“Mr. Baldez, this is the new system un-

der the federal receivership, to offer quality, timely and efficient medical care. I am here today to diagnose your problem. My name is Dr. Deepak Mumbai.”

“Dr. what?” I asked, not really understanding what he said.

“Just call me by my nickname – Pak.”

Going along with the program, amused, I told him my problem. “Okay, Pak. I got this pimple on my right butt cheek; it is getting larger each day, and it hurts when I sit down. I don’t know if it’s a hemorrhoid, a fistula, or a boil. I’m eager to find out what is wrong.”

“Mr. Baldez, how long have you had this bump?” he asked, looking concerned as he wrote some things down on a clipboard.

“For the last week. It just came from nowhere.”

“Mr. Baldez, I need you to lie down on the table there, slide off your pants, let me see this bump.”

Feeling embarrassed since a woman nurse was in the room, I was uncomfortable, hesitant. She offered me encouraging words.

“Go ahead. Lie down,” she said. “This is not the first time I have seen someone in this position.” She rolled out a fresh section of white paper, the kind used as toilet seat covers, thin and brittle, spreading it out on the table.

Boom mic

I lay down on the table, slowly pulling my prison blues down, exposing my butt cheeks. I looked back towards the monitor and the nurse was angling what looked like a boom mic down towards my right cheek. It had a camera on the end of it. On the right monitor, my butt cheeks were on the screen, displayed in full color.

The doctor’s face got larger on the screen as he looked closer. “Mr. Baldez, I see the bump. Let me see if I can zoom in a little closer.”

On the right monitor, the entire screen displayed the large bump, which clearly showed discoloration.

I was shocked, baffled. I looked around the room, thinking that maybe I was on Candid Camera. This had to be a joke

PRISON DIARY

I looked at the right monitor with disgust, horrified by the sight of my hairy cheeks and their cellulite. In prison, we don't have full body mirrors, so the last time I looked at my cheeks was fifteen years ago at home

"Uh huh. Mr. Baldez, this has been a common problem with many inmates. I've seen this before."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Looks like a bite from a brown recluse spider. But I'm still not sure, could be a boil. Tell me, do you use proper hygiene, shower daily?"

"Yes, I shower daily. Why?"

"Sometimes the pores around that area can get clogged if not washed regularly."

"Well, Pak, we got these new timers on the toilets, which allow for only two flushes every five minutes. I've sometimes had to take a dump, leaving a turd in the toilet, while sitting down, waiting another two and a half minutes to flush, or else the toilet will lock up for one hour."

"What do you mean? Do you flush while you are still sitting on the toilet? Do you leave the turd floating beneath you while flushing?"

"Yes. I drop, while sitting on the toilet, then flush. The water sometimes splashes my cheeks."

"Oh no. This is not good, Mr. Baldez. When you flush, the blast radius is about six to ten feet high. Microbes, bacteria and germs spread everywhere. The proper way to flush is to finish defecating, wipe, get up, pull up your pants, step away from the toilet, then flush."

"But Pak, I have a cellmate who doesn't want to smell it, so I have no choice but to flush while sitting down."

His facial expressions showed anger; he became irate. "This is not sanitary. Very, very bad. I will have to look into this further," he said, writing on his clipboard. "This kind of condition can spread hepatitis. Is this the only bump you have?"

He started to zoom in and out, scanning both cheeks, a close and long view. I looked at the right monitor with disgust, horrified by the sight of my hairy cheeks and their cellulite. In prison, we don't have full body mirrors, so the last time I looked at my cheeks was fifteen years ago at home. Didn't realize my ass was no longer firm at age 38.

"Mr. Baldez, I am going to write you a prescription for Proactiv®, a topical cream you can put on right after our appointment. This may be a zit, a large pimple. I am not sure. Try this cream. If it doesn't work in one week, I will see you again and refer you to a dermatologist who can take a closer look at it. You can pull up your pants now."

A printer, next to the monitor, suddenly ejected a paper. The nurse grabbed it, got up off her seat and exited the room.

Baby's cry

I heard the cry of a baby in the background coming from the monitor speakers. I looked toward the left monitor and saw an attractive young dark woman with a dot on her forehead holding a baby as the doctor waved at her to go away. I had a full view of his surroundings. He was dressed in thermal sweatpants, sitting behind a console, in front of it, different monitors. I could hear a dog barking, parakeets chirping.

His face suddenly appeared large on the screen. "Mr. Baldez, sometimes these bumps can be caused by stress, anxiety. I am sure you feel these types of emotions, being in prison."

"Sure, but I've never had this kind of problem before."

"Our time is almost up. I want to leave you with some encouraging words. In life, most of our choices stem from three categories," he said. At that moment, the left screen became like a white chalkboard, and, using an electronic marker, he drew three circles, labeling them with the numbers 1, 2, and 3. "First, we always focus on what we have. We always want more cars, more money, more women. I am sure you can relate, right?" he said, writing down the words 'What We Have.'

"Well, in here Pak, we can't get any of that."

"I am speaking metaphorically. Maybe you still desire to have these things, since you don't have access to them, right?"

"Okay, I see what you mean."

"Second, we always focus on what we

do daily, to give us purpose. We define ourselves by how efficiently we work or study,” he said, writing down the words ‘What We Do.’

“Okay.”

“And lastly, we forget sometimes to focus on just being. Sometimes we need to balance our experiences, pay attention to who we are,” he said, writing down the words “Just Be.”

“Pak, I am lost. What does this have to do with my medical problem?”

“It has everything to do with it. The mind always affects the body.”

Troubled, I asked, “Are you a psychologist or a medical doctor?”

Avoiding answering the question, he said, “Just listen, my friend ... the reality of just being is profound and subtle. Very difficult to express in words, but I will explain as best as I can.”

Having some enthusiasm, I said, “I’m listening.”

“Jesus talked about being when he asked his followers to love God with all their heart, soul and mind.”

“I don’t believe in Jesus though.”

“Well maybe you can relate to this. An ancient Hindu text touches on the subject of being. You are what your deep driving desire is.”

“Are you related to Deepak Chopra?” I asked, feeling indifferent.

“No, but I am aware of his teachings.”

“Are you even in California? Are you licensed to practice medicine in California?” I asked.

“Mr. Baldez, don’t worry. I am a qualified doctor.” He pushed a button. His name came up again on the monitor, Deepak Mumbai, above the caption The Bakersfield Group.

The nurse came in, handing me the Proactiv® topical cream. Dr. Mumbai said, “Ms. Gambito, thank you for involving me in the care of this patient.”

She replied, “Yes doctor, thank you. Mr. Baldez, the appointment is over. Fifteen minutes are up. I need to call in the next

appointment, please go back to the cage.”

I looked toward the monitors, the doctor no longer there. The monitors both displayed images of puffy clouds, mountain ranges, canyons. The music from India played. “So your name is Gambito,” I asked her.

“Just call me Ito,” she said.

I went back to the cage to await an unlock so I could go back to my cell. I needed to apply the topical cream, give it a try. I could hear complaints of inmates again.

“Dog, I got some weird Iranian doctor today, talking to him on a television screen,” said a tall, buff white inmate nicknamed Cornhole.

“Really? I got some Korean guy,” said another white inmate, nicknamed Irish. “I couldn’t understand him. He spoke little English.”

Comment of the day

In prison, it’s rare to see an American Caucasian doctor, unheard of to see a Hispanic or black doctor. Perhaps if there were such doctors working in California’s prisons inmates could communicate with them better and feel trustworthy of the medical care they receive.

As I was walking out the door of the infirmary, I overheard a comment, which was the best I had heard all day. It made sense.

“You know how we don’t get conjugal visits anymore, right?” said Cornhole.

“Yeah, totally sucks. Men can’t even get porn mags sent in anymore,” said Irish.

“Hey, dog. Wouldn’t it be cool if the state provided a beat-off room, like at the sperm donor clinics, where a hot chick was on the other end of the television monitor, talking dirty? Now that would be great therapy to relieve stress!” said Cornhole.

“Yeah, dog. I’d pay for that kind of medical care. It would be a great way for the State to raise money,” said Irish. **CT**

Tito Valdez writes from the minimum security Correctional Facility in Soledad, California. This essay originally appeared in Rogue Voice magazine

I went back to the cage to await an unlock so I could go back to my cell. I needed to apply the topical cream, give it a try. I could hear complaints of inmates again.

The politics of snow

‘Snowpocalypse’ isn’t an act of god; it’s a combination of anti-tax southerners and a changing climate, says **Michael I. Niman**

Those of us living in the half of the continent that takes snowstorms in stride are always mildly amused at the paralysis suffered by cities like Washington, DC every time they get two inches of snow

We Buffalonians can’t help reveling in amusement watching disoriented Mid-Atlantic cities struggle under a beautiful, fluffy blanket of snow. It started early this winter with a Washington, DC police officer pulling a gun at a snowball fight – not really clear on the concept. As the winter progressed, Bulb-tanned newscasters took to terming incidents of blowing, drifting snow as “blizzards,” but then the snow gods tossed them a curveball in the form of real, albeit mild, blizzards. Escalating their habitually panicked rhetoric, East Coast media wonks came up with terms like “snowmageddon” and “snowpocalypse” to describe their snowstorms.

Those of us living in the half of the continent that takes snowstorms in stride are always mildly amused at the paralysis suffered by cities like Washington, DC every time they get two inches of snow. Give them two feet and they get downright silly, hoarding toilet paper and shutting schools for weeks on end – hunkering down, presumably, with houses full of defecating children. One Whole Foods Market had to close its doors and limit entry to small groups in order to protect itself from a panicked mob and a possible Black Friday style trampling, presumably in the toiletries isle.

Slow to come up with their own work-

ing definitions for the new Mid-Atlantic terminologies for snowstorms, linguists have passed the ball to the wiki nation, with the online Urban Dictionary defining “snowpocalypse” as “When weathermen [sic] predict large amounts of snowfall in a short period of time.” The dictionary goes on to clarify: “In cases of a Snowpocalypse it is really the panicked reaction of said citizens and NOT the actual snow that makes the situation worthy of the title.”

On-air freakout

One case in point would be the on-air freakout of Baltimore AccuWeather forecaster Jim Kosek, who predicted a “paralyzing, crippling, record-breaking storm,” replete with “blowing and drifting” snow. In Kosek’s defense, I think we were seeing a stab at humor – from a weather forecaster.

The competing term, “snowmageddon,” according to most media reports, is the brainchild of President Obama, who, like Kosek, doesn’t normally do much standup comedy. While it’s nice to see a jovial president, you’ve got to be a little concerned with heads of state using any word ending in “-mageddon,” though I was always more concerned when the last guy used the term.

The best comedy, however tragic, is coming from the climate-change deniers, who like their teabagger and birther cous-

ins, always prove a more embarrassing representation of America than our throngs of toilet paper hoarders ever could. As best as I can follow the logic in their seven second arguments, they go like this: “I’m cold today, so global warming can’t be real, so let’s take the Escalade for a joyride.”

Of course climatologists have been predicting this moment for 20-plus years, with global warming altering weather patterns and causing hotter and colder extremes on a warming planet. But hey, who listens to Democrap-girly-egghead god-hating liberal science-loving scientists? So what if the winter Olympics get rained out. The Braves and the Orioles get rained out all the time and you don’t see us whining.

Back on earth, there are other political issues surrounding snow as well. We in Buffalo, like our neighbors in Cleveland, Syracuse, Rochester and Chicago, can deal with it, because we pay taxes to support the socialism of snow plowing. It’s not like snow, even in the snow-paralyzed Mid-Atlantic, is an entirely unforeseen event. Hell, images of Washington, DC slushed to a standstill grace our newscasts annually. It regularly snows in western North Carolina and Virginia. Even Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and northern Florida get sporadic frosts.

Stuck in the snow

The story here is that when the few snowplows in the region took to the streets, many of them either got stuck or broke down. Furthermore, when the snow got heavy, many municipalities pulled their inexperienced plow operators off the roads.

Had they bought better plows, or regularly sent their operators to snow country for training, perhaps they’d have been better prepared for the task of keeping their roads clear.

This is a political decision, and in the anti-tax South, you don’t let creeping socialism get the better of you. Why spend money on education, healthcare, and snowplowing when you can instead leave it in the hands of the undertaxed rich – snowed into their McMansions.

Snow doesn’t faze us much in upstate New York because our infrastructure is built for it. Our roads are poured a bit thicker, our highway shoulders are a bit wider, each one of our cities begins each winter with enough salt to salt every pretzel in the world for generations, and we own a fleet of snow-clearing machines that are beefier than some of the Humvees the Bush administration initially sent to war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of this costs money, and we’ve made a decision to put our winter survival and mobility above our own anti-taxation greed. The result of this is that we can go to work, our kids can go to school, and sick folks can make it to the doctor. We’ll even go skiing if we feel like it.

Snowpocalypse isn’t an “act of god.” It’s a social disease. It’s the collision of a changing political climate and a changing geoclimate. It’s gonna snow. Get used to it and buy some damn shovels. **CT**

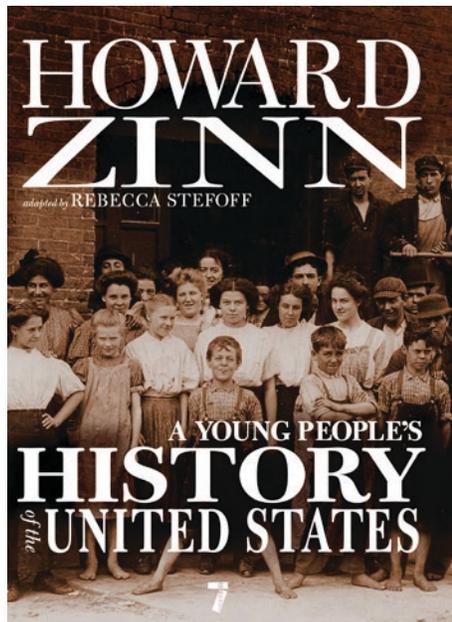
Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York.

Why spend money on education, healthcare, and snowplowing when you can instead leave it in the hands of the undertaxed rich – snowed into their McMansions?

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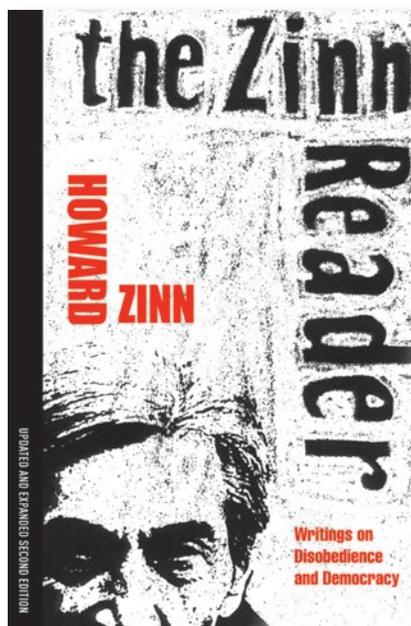
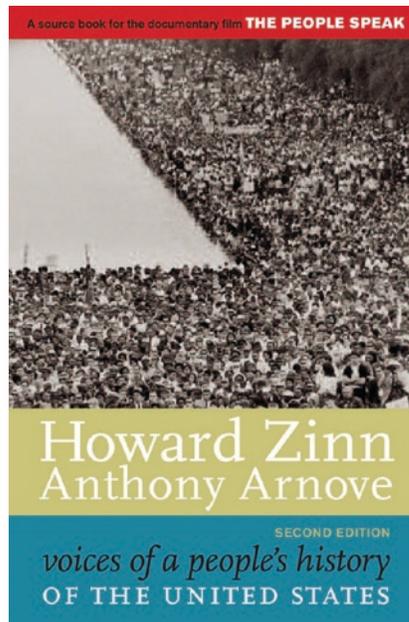
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The creed of objectivity killed the news

The desire for balance in news gathering banishes empathy, passion and a quest for justice, argues **Chris Hedges**

Reporters who witness the worst of human suffering and return to newsrooms angry see their compassion washed out or severely muted by the layers of editors who stand between the reporter and the reader. The creed of objectivity and balance, formulated at the beginning of the 19th century by newspaper owners to generate greater profits from advertisers, disarms and cripples the press.

And the creed of objectivity becomes a convenient and profitable vehicle to avoid confronting unpleasant truths or angering a power structure on which news organizations depend for access and profits. This creed transforms reporters into neutral observers or voyeurs. It banishes empathy, passion and a quest for justice. Reporters are permitted to watch but not to feel or to speak in their own voices. They function as “professionals” and see themselves as dispassionate and disinterested social scientists. This vaunted lack of bias, enforced by bloodless hierarchies of bureaucrats, is the disease of American journalism.

“The very notion that on any given story all you have to do is report what both sides say and you’ve done a fine job of objective journalism debilitates the press,” the late columnist Molly Ivins once wrote. “There is no such thing as objectivity, and the truth, that slippery little bugger, has the oddest

habit of being way to hell off on one side or the other: it seldom nestles neatly halfway between any two opposing points of view. The smug complacency of much of the press – I have heard many an editor say, ‘Well, we’re being attacked by both sides so we must be right’ – stems from the curious notion that if you get a quote from both sides, preferably in an official position, you’ve done the job. In the first place, most stories aren’t two-sided, they’re 17-sided at least. In the second place, it’s of no help to either the readers or the truth to quote one side saying, ‘Cat,’ and the other side saying ‘Dog,’ while the truth is there’s an elephant crashing around out there in the bushes.”

Ivins went on to write that “the press’s most serious failures are not its sins of commission, but its sins of omission – the stories we miss, the stories we don’t see, the stories that don’t hold press conferences, the stories that don’t come from ‘reliable sources.’ ”

Shunted aside

This abject moral failing has left the growing numbers of Americans shunted aside and left without a voice by our corporate state. It has also, with the rise of a ruthless American oligarchy, left the traditional press on the wrong side of our growing class divide. The elitism, distrust and lack of credibility of the press – and here I speak

The creed of objectivity becomes a convenient and profitable vehicle to avoid confronting unpleasant truths or angering a power structure on which news organizations depend for access and profits

TRUTH, NOT BALANCE

As long as one viewpoint is balanced by another, usually no more than what Sigmund Freud would term “the narcissism of minor difference,” the job of a reporter is deemed complete. But this is more often a way to obscure rather than expose truth

of the dwindling institutions that attempt to report news – come directly from this steady and willful disintegration of the media’s moral core.

This moral void has been effectively exploited by the 24-hour cable news shows and trash talk radio programs. The failure of the fact-based press to express empathy or outrage for our growing underclass has permitted the disastrous rise of “faith-based” reporting. The bloodless and soulless journalism of the traditional media has bolstered the popularity of partisan outlets that present a view of the world that often has no relation to the real, but responds very effectively to the emotional needs of viewers. Fox News is, in some sense, no more objective than the *New York Times*, but there is one crucial and vital difference. Fox News and most of the other cable outlets do not feel constrained by verifiable facts. Within the traditional news establishment, facts may have been self-selected or skillfully stage-managed by public relations specialists, but what was not verifiable was not publishable.

The cable news channels have seized on the creed of objectivity and redefined it in populist terms. They attack news based on verifiable fact for its liberal bias, for, in essence, failing to be objective, and promise a return to “genuine” objectivity. Fox’s Bill O’Reilly argues, “If Fox News is a conservative channel – and I’m going to use the word ‘if’ – so what? ... You’ve got 50 other media that are blatantly left. Now, I don’t think Fox is a conservative channel. I think it’s a traditional channel. There’s a difference. We are willing to hear points of view that you’ll never hear on ABC, CBS or NBC.”

O’Reilly is not wrong in suggesting that the objectivity of the traditional media has an inherent political bias. But it is a bias that caters to the power elite and it is a bias that is confined by fact. The traditional quest for “objectivity” is, as James Carey wrote, also based on an ethnocentric conceit: “It pretended to discover Universal Truth, to proclaim Universal Laws, and to describe a Uni-

versal Man. Upon inspection it appeared, however, that its Universal Man resembled a type found around Cambridge, Massachusetts, or Cambridge, England; its Universal Laws resembled those felt to be useful by Congress and Parliament; and its Universal Truth bore English and American accents.”

Objectivity creates the formula of quoting Establishment specialists or experts within the narrow confines of the power elite who debate policy nuance like medieval theologians. As long as one viewpoint is balanced by another, usually no more than what Sigmund Freud would term “the narcissism of minor difference,” the job of a reporter is deemed complete. But this is more often a way to obscure rather than expose truth.

Constraints on reporting

Reporting, while it is presented to the public as neutral, objective and unbiased, is always highly interpretive. It is defined by rigid stylistic parameters. I have written, like most other reporters, hundreds of news stories. Reporters begin with a collection of facts, statements, positions and anecdotes and then select those that create the “balance” permitted by the formula of daily journalism. The closer reporters get to official sources, for example those covering Wall Street, Congress, the White House or the State Department, the more constraints they endure. When reporting depends heavily on access it becomes very difficult to challenge those who grant or deny that access.

This craven desire for access has turned huge sections of the Washington press, along with most business reporters, into courtiers. The need to be included in press briefings and background interviews with government or business officials, as well as the desire for leaks and early access to official documents, obliterates journalistic autonomy.

“Record the fury of a Palestinian whose land has been taken from him by Israeli settlers – but always refer to Israel’s ‘security needs’ and its ‘war on terror,’ ” Rob-

ert Fisk writes. “If Americans are accused of ‘torture’, call it ‘abuse’. If Israel assassinates a Palestinian, call it a ‘targeted killing’. If Armenians lament their Holocaust of 1,500,000 souls in 1915, remind readers that Turkey denies this all too real and fully documented genocide. If Iraq has become a hell on earth for its people, recall how awful Saddam was. If a dictator is on our side, call him a ‘strongman’. If he’s our enemy, call him a tyrant, or part of the ‘axis of evil’. And above all else, use the word ‘terrorist.’ Terror, terror, terror, terror, terror, terror, terror. Seven days a week.”

“Ask ‘how’ and ‘who’ – but not ‘why,’” Fisk adds. “Source everything to officials: ‘American officials’, ‘intelligence officials’, ‘official sources’, anonymous policemen or army officers. And if these institutions charged with our protection abuse their power, then remind readers and listeners and viewers of the dangerous age in which we now live, the age of terror – which means that we must live in the Age of the Warrior, someone whose business and profession and vocation and mere existence is to destroy our enemies.”

“In the classic example, a refugee from Nazi Germany who appears on television saying monstrous things are happening in his homeland must be followed by a Nazi spokesman saying Adolf Hitler is the greatest boon to humanity since pasteurized milk,” the former *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker wrote. “Real objectivity would require not only hard work by news people to determine which report was accurate, but also a willingness to put up with the abuse certain to follow publication of an objectively formed judgment.

To escape the hard work or the abuse, if one man says Hitler is an ogre, we instantly give you another to say Hitler is a prince. A man says the rockets won’t work? We give you another who says they will. The public may not learn much about these fairly sensitive matters, but neither does it get another excuse to denounce the media for unfairness and lack of objectivity. In brief,

society is teeming with people who become furious if told what the score is.”

Journalists, because of their training and distaste for shattering their own exalted notion of themselves, lack the inclination and vocabulary to discuss ethics. They will, when pressed, mumble something about telling the truth and serving the public. They prefer not to face the fact that my truth is not your truth. News is a signal, a “blip,” an alarm that something is happening beyond our small circle of existence, as Walter Lippmann noted in his book “Public Opinion.” Journalism does not point us toward truth since, as Lippmann understood, there is always a vast divide between truth and news. Ethical questions open journalism to the nebulous world of interpretation and philosophy, and for this reason journalists flee from ethical inquiry like a herd of frightened sheep.

Nameless, faceless mass

Journalists, while they like to promote the image of themselves as fierce individualists, are in the end another species of corporate employees. They claim as their clients an amorphous public. They seek their moral justification in the service of this nameless, faceless mass and speak little about the vast influence of the power elite to shape and determine reporting. Does a public even exist in a society as fragmented and divided as ours? Or is the public, as Walter Lippmann wrote, now so deeply uninformed and divorced from the inner workings of power and diplomacy as to make it a clean slate on which our armies of skilled propagandists can, often through the press, leave a message?

The symbiotic relationship between the press and the power elite worked for nearly a century. It worked as long as our power elite, no matter how ruthless or insensitive, was competent. But once our power elite became incompetent and morally bankrupt, the press, along with the power elite, lost its final vestige of credibility. The press became, as seen in the Iraq war and

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the aftermath of the financial upheavals, a class of courtiers. The press, which has always written and spoken from presuppositions and principles that reflect the elite consensus, now peddles a consensus that is flagrantly artificial. Our elite oversaw the dismantling of the country's manufacturing base and the betrayal of the working class with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the press dutifully trumpeted this as a form of growth. Our elite deregulated the banking industry, leading to nationwide bank collapses, and the press extolled the value of the free market. Our elite corrupted the levers of power to advance the interests of corporations and the press naively conflated freedom with the free market. This reporting may have been "objective" and "impartial" but it defied common sense. The harsh reality of shuttered former steel-producing towns and growing human misery should have, in the hands of any good cop reporter, exposed the fantasies. But the press long ago stopped thinking and lost nearly all its moral autonomy.

Real reporting, grounded in a commitment to justice and empathy, could have informed and empowered the public as we underwent a corporate coup d'état in

slow motion. It could have stimulated a radical debate about structures, laws, privilege, power and justice. But the traditional press, by clinging to an outdated etiquette designed to serve corrupt power structures, lost its social function. Corporations, which once made many of these news outlets very rich, have turned to more effective forms of advertising. Profits have plummeted. And yet these press courtiers, lost in the fantasy of their own righteousness and moral probity, cling to the hollow morality of "objectivity" with comic ferocity.

The world will not be a better place when these fact-based news organizations die. We will be propelled into a culture where facts and opinions will be interchangeable, where lies will become true, and where fantasy will be peddled as news. I will lament the loss of traditional news. It will unmoor us from reality. The tragedy is that the moral void of the news business contributed as much to its own annihilation as the protofascists who feed on its carcass. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent. His latest book is Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle.



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Pondering a siege of leeches

Americans face tough choices, the Tea Party of the damned, or socialism and mandatory sex change surgery, says **Joe Bageant**

Dear Joe,

The Tea Parties started out as Ron Paul supporters in protest of both the neocons and the faux bleeding heart liberals and have been co-opted and corrupted by others, so unfortunately are not what they started out to be.

My view of Dems and Reps has always been the Dems take your money and give it to people that don't deserve it to get votes. The Reps take you money and keep it for themselves. They are learning much from each other and the main difference now are the sound bites.

I don't think socialism hasn't fared well in the past either, though a few horrible examples coming to mind such as several periods in Russia as well as Maoist China. Hell China is much more capitalistic now and they actually put their criminals to death rather than reward them with large bonuses. I've always been technical and not much of a history buff but want to learn so what examples do you have of socialism working well?

I feel that what Obama has been doing could certainly be called socialism since we are bailing out so many individuals, states and companies that have been anything prudent. Actually, I think he's fascist not socialist, given the continued collusion with big business against the American people (my definition of fascism). I feel it was quite socialist/fascist giving future tax money to people for cars and houses rather than to have given

every man, woman and child that was a US citizen \$50,000 equally and fairly.

I'm all for improving one's conditions through hard work and personal efforts and being able to enjoy the results and do not want to be forced to help anyone else but rather want that to be my own personal decision.

Please explain what your views of socialism are as I for one do not have a good image or opinion of it at present after the long history of failed and entrenched welfare ...

I do agree with most of what you rant about, but I just fail to see how socialism is the answer – knowing full well that what we have currently is certainly not.

Thanks,

Dave

Dave,

Your letter exemplifies the quandary of countless Americans these days. So I must make time for another overly wordy, poorly informed, meandering reply of the sort readers have become accustomed.

About the Tea Party movement. Yeah, you're right. It is not what it started out to be. Personally, I believe it has been co-opted by ultra conservative GOP think tanks operating in the background. I've seen it happen before and I believe I am seeing it happen now. With no proof, mind you.

When I smell fresh dog shit in the air, I assume the presence of a dog somewhere about

DEAR JOE

When the GOP is not flogging the iconic “urban single mother,” code for black woman, it is minting new myths to suit the occasion

However, when I smell fresh dog shit in the air, I assume the presence of a dog somewhere about.

I am not alone in this. Many veteran journalists agree with me privately, but cannot say so publicly because they cannot prove it. They supposedly have journalistic standards and public responsibilities to which they adhere (they cannot prove that either). I, on the other hand, am retired from journalism as a vocation, and have a big mouth. In the typical crankiness of aging Southerners given to drink, I have taken to calling things as I see them. Or smell them, as the case may be. And these days with the political climate reeking like a whorehouse after the fleet pulls out, the olfactory bulbs reign triumphant.

A few years from now someone will write a book about the neocon co-opting of the Tea Party. And all six copies sold will be devoured by amateur political junkies, one of whom will then launch the standard internet rattle and buzz about it, to be read and discussed at length on forums by the other five purchasers of the book. And of course, some university pinhead will do a thesis, which will be published as a book by a university press. Three other scholars will read it ten years later while writing their own thesis. And the Tea Party will become some obscure flake of history’s dandruff.

But now is now. The Tea Party is “Now the News,” according to MSNBC. Assuming that a 57-year-old matron in jogging pants and a Minnesota Twins baseball cap leering into the camera and dangling a teabag can be called news (It doesn’t take much). Anyway, when it comes to the Tea Party’s neocon DNA, look at what you’ve got. A bunch of fringy far right libertarians, who by no means represent the typical libertarian, and guys like Ron Paul, who admittedly has some attractive points, but like the fringe libertarians, seems convinced that a nation of 300 million can operate without any sort of government. How different is that from Grover Norquist, who was gonna reduce government to the size of a baby,

then “drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub” (I think I’ve seen that sick fucker on CSI). As far as I am concerned, if it croaks like a frog and bumps its ass on the ground while jumping into a lake, it’s a frog for all intent and purposes.

Regarding your comment, “Dems take your money and give it to people who don’t deserve it to get votes. And the Republicans take you money and keep it for themselves.”

Cute, but not completely correct. I know because, being in the half-truth business myself, I write that sort of stuff every day. Both parties take our money and give it to people who do not deserve it, so they can pile up campaign support dollars and get fat jobs when their terms are over. This was known as bribery before the syndicates bribed Congress and the Supreme Court into sanctioning the practice.

Getting back to the undeserving “leeches” in our society sponging off the rest of us ... I defy you to personally go out there, take names and photos, then send them to me. And I mean personally, not just some cut and paste propaganda off the web. I am not saying you will not find any. I’m just saying pack some extra shoe leather because such citizens represent a very small portion of the national population. I’ll see you in ten years when you are finished.

Flogging the welfare queen

In testimony to the durability of certain strains of bullshit, Republicans and neocons are still successfully flogging the old welfare queen stuff, not to mention claiming that millions of illegal aliens getting free medical services. When the GOP is not flogging the iconic “urban single mother,” code for black woman, it is minting new myths to suit the occasion. Such as, and this is may be my all time favorite: “ObamaCare Likely to Mandate Free Sex Change’ Surgeries for citizens and illegal immigrants” (Liberty Counsel Legal Group; Aug. 4, 2008). By golly that should stop illegal immigration cold, if anything can. “One foot over the

border and it's whack and tuck surgery for you Pedro!"

Hic est verum, Davarino: Neither party does shit for ordinary or poor folks unless they are forced to, unless it is to their campaign or election advantage, or unless it will funnel public money into the private corporations backing them. Like giving ghetto kids fast food chain coupons.

You wrote, "They are learning much from each other and the main difference now are the sound bites."

That's always been the case. And it always will be as long as they can keep the public snookered into believing there are actually two parties in this country.

Understanding socialism

As to: "I don't think socialism hasn't fared well in the past. A few horrible examples come to mind such as several periods in Russia as well as Maoist China. Hell, China is much more capitalistic now and they actually put their criminals to death rather than reward them with large bonuses. I've always been technical and not much of a history buff, but want to learn so what examples do you have of socialism working well?"

I can tell by your letter that understanding socialism is going to be a long slog for you. For starters, the American technical and scientific education usually amputates human insight, if at all possible, and bludgeons the humanistic spirit in order to support its absolute claims to all rightness, logic and reason. From the tiniest sub particle to the magnificent complexity of the human mind ("Why hell son, the brain is just a sack of chemicals! Have some more Prozac."), all things are deemed mechanistic and the world is one big Newtonian clockwork, stars, human emotions ... Everything.

Fortunately for those maimed by an American scientific/technical education, our corporatist government cherishes the technician and the scientist, and rewards them well. They are absolutely necessary for surveillance of the people, the production of bunker bombs, carcinogens, corn syrup, high

tech dissemination of propaganda, and dazzling the proles with phony "technological progress." As in, "Wow! Would you look at that! A car that eats corn. The environment is saved!" And understandably those being rewarded are generally supportive of the capitalist system that values them so highly. That most have never read Rimbaud doesn't bother them one bit.

On the other hand, these people have absolute faith in reading and the benefits of the textual world of information. So I'd suggest reading some real history, absorb some background. Then throw the books away and think for yourself. Historians, like American scientists and the medical establishment, are whores for the empire. Generally speaking they are duly accredited and licensed propagandists and commissars for whatever regime they live under in their time. Unfortunately, one has to consume a lot of their published tripe to grasp how the history or economics rackets work.

Whether by leftist or rightist historians, you'll get the full treatment about Maoist China, Stalinist Russia. Yada yada. Neither of them was socialism any more than what we have here is democracy.

China as the new face of the successful state? China has simply gone to Confucian capitalism, which is the same gangsterism as the old capitalism, but without any civil liberties or human rights. This of course, is seen as an advance in the eyes of the world capitalist syndicates go. This is why the corporations all moved their operations to China. Slaves were cheaper there than in the US. "At last," they smiled, to themselves, "We can now fuck the worker blind, pay them shit and beat the hell out of them for laughs. Sell their second kidney on the medical market if we chose, what the hell."

People being people though, Chinese folks fresh from the farm and working 70 hours a week so they can save up for a microwave or something, declare it to be now the best system in the world. Just like Americans do. And the workers watch the "emergence of China's dynamic new mid-

Neither party does shit for ordinary or poor folks unless they are forced to, unless it is to their campaign or election advantage, or unless it will funnel public money into the private corporations backing them. Like giving ghetto kids fast food chain coupons

DEAR JOE

Various types and degrees of socialism are working well all over the planet, ranging from the communal sharing of certain indigenous peoples, to the adaptations one sees in Scandinavian countries and elsewhere in Europe

dle class,” consisting mostly of state educated city folks trained in newer, more sophisticated ways to work the peasantry to death, so the middle class can buy a three hundred square foot apartments and cars. Janked on nationalism, patriotism takes hold and they all say to one another: “Is this a great country or what?” I would further add that China is by no means more advanced because it executes more “criminals” (Stalin would have loved your definition of advanced Bubba!) than the US. Given that China, has one and a third billion people. I would be curious to see if per capita executions exceed the US. Maybe it does. However, a high execution rate is a curious standard by which to judge the success of a civilization.

Examples of socialism working well? Various types and degrees of socialism are working well all over the planet, ranging from the communal sharing of certain indigenous peoples, to the adaptations one sees in Scandinavian countries and elsewhere in Europe. Toss the political rhetoric and just look. The common citizens are secure, at least until the innumerable world corporatists plotting to blow them out of the water succeed.

And they will. They can't lose. Capitalist corporations have a grip on the world's monetary system, and most importantly, the means of production to supply the world's human needs. Especially in the so-called “advanced countries.” People everywhere salute advancement. And world's corporate cartels get to define advancement. To them advancement is the degree of cheap unnecessary crap you can ram down the people's throats, and how much you can blackmail human beings for such things as health care. Not to mention convince them that the rest of the world is not safe, that it is not made up of ordinary folks who just wanna raise families, screw and sleep well at nights, but rather is full of murderous heathens out to enslave the local Cub Scout Troop and blow up the neighborhood 7-Eleven.

My socialism

To my mind, socialism is this:

A community and national philosophy, a commonly shared and not necessarily politicized way of life wherein the first priority is the fundamental well-being of the people (also known as “the masses,” a term you have probably been programmed to wrinkle your brow in ominous suspicion of). “Fundamental well-being” means that everyone eats well, enjoys safe and adequate homes and a common standard of good health. It means that children are educated to do more than just the rote tasks that serve corporate empires. It means the man actually doing the work negotiates the value of his labor. It means that somewhere in the last third or quarter of his life, that working man, after enjoying his freedom, bacon and common work, and diligently sustaining his fellow men, is released from his toil. Released into security and peace and modest but guaranteed sustenance. He is free to nurse his aches, chase old women or take up Bourbon or Buddhism. Or both, as I have. Whatever he chooses as a free man in a free and benevolent socialist society.

Don't let the ideologues, demagogues and half-assed spoiled middle class jerks who call themselves socialists in this country fool you. Socialism has to do with man's innate longing for justice, the undying heart within us, and all that is generous and good in that heart. That's why so many have so willingly died for it, and will continue to do so in corners of the world we will never see or hear about because we are not allowed to, but which are never the less part of this world, and therefore affective of this world.

You wrote, “I feel it was quite socialist/fascist giving future tax money to people for cars and houses that did not earn it rather than to have given every man, woman and child that was a US citizen \$50,000 equally.”

Nah, it's just your standard mugging of the people, then giving them some part of their own money back to prime the pump for another mugging. Doesn't matter how it

was handed out. A crack addict will score crack, creating prison jobs and payday for lawyers. The mild spirited school teacher and bookkeeper will bank or invest it in some financial institution, where it can again be stolen, once “consumer confidence” and “faith in the economy has been restored.” Under capitalism, everybody’s life turns a profit for the empire. Capitalism’s golden calf, the gross domestic product, makes no distinctions between good and evil. Both are profitable.

Too far gone?

And “socialist/fascist?” That’s right up there with “Islamic fascism.” Ain’t possible. Go look ‘em up. These things are mutually exclusive. However, our national brain stamping machinery has successfully demonized the term socialism, and then neatly welded it onto fascism, to boot. Talk about gilding the lily! Nevertheless, it works in America. And they ask me why I think this country is too far gone to redeem “within the system.” Geesh!

Lastly, then I gotta run, there was:

“[I] do not want to be forced to help anyone else, but rather want that to be my own personal decision ... don’t put them on the installment plan for free, just to secure their votes at the expense of everyone else ... when society gets nothing out of it but a permanent leech ...”

For the sake of space, I cut the crap out of your rambling effort to define who is worthy of help and who is not. We are all brothers and as such are our brother’s keeper. Besides, when I look around me, I do not see a nation of leeches. I see damned few folks getting something for nothing. I see the top dogs, who actually are getting something for nothing, using the bullhorn of media to convince us that one of our brothers and neighbors is getting everything. They would have us believe that the most miserable among us – the poorly educated and those whose souls have been brutalized from birth by the system’s failure to provide the basic security necessary

for the development of whole people – are indeed getting something for nothing. And further believe that the most wretched deprived among us are a causal factor in the upcoming and rightful collapse of the overall meanest economic system ever devised. I see an empire of theft and coercion – both of our own people and others around the world in our name – which names the victim as the perp.

And I see a people who no longer feel the bonds of coursing humanity and their species, the sustaining earth under their feet, and beneath whose carpet their eternity waits. Rather I see a people conditioned to believe in the state and obey the state’s designated bosses. And I see the moving hand of the corporate state active in all things from birth to death – opening the eyes of the newly born and closing those of the newly dead. There’s a profit to be made in both, and every human activity in between.

Even those among us who can see, who can observe the hardening condition induced by the enemies of human liberty and well being, feel powerless in the face of this darkening and omniscient order. Despite the quadrennial claims of our political parties during national election years, no savior has arrived and none is coming. No Obama, no miracle of “green science,” no national genius will emerge to lead us. We have only the simple, direct, undeceived intelligence of ordinary men and women to rely upon. We must regain respect for the seemingly meager and often lonely powers an individual does have, and choose work and a way of living upon which we can all rely.

Acknowledgment of that, and living accordingly, engenders humility, success and the physical and spiritual thrivance of men and women and children everywhere. It is the animating spirit of socialism.

And, oh yeah, Obama ain’t no socialist. I wish the hell he was.

In art and labor,

Joe Bageant, Ajijic, Jalisco, Mexico CT

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Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America’s Class War* (Random House, 2007)

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