

TIPPING THE NUCLEAR DOMINOES | *Conn Hallinan*
SLAUGHTER OF THE OTHER INNOCENTS | *Trevor Grundy*
THE VOLCANOES ARE ALIVE ... | *Joe Allen*

ISSUE 209

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July 2020

The Great Purge

The US Presidential Election will be decided in just four months. But the fix is already in, and millions of young, poor, and minorities will be robbed of their votes

An excerpt from Greg Palast's new book,
HOW TRUMP STOLE 2020





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Insights

Jonathan Cook

Assault on diplomat in Israel is no surprise

An Israeli diplomat filed a police complaint last month after being pulled to the ground in Jerusalem by four security guards, who knelt on his neck for five minutes as he cried out: “I can’t breathe”.

There are immediate echoes of the treatment of George Floyd, an African-American killed by police in Minneapolis on May 25. His death triggered mass protests against police brutality and reinvigorated the Black Lives Matter movement. The incident in Jerusalem, by contrast, attracted only minor attention – even in Israel.

An assault by Israeli security officials on a diplomat sounds like an aberration – a peculiar case of mistaken identity – quite unlike an established pattern of police violence against poor black communities in the US. But that impression would be wrong. The man attacked in Jerusalem was no ordinary Israeli diplomat. He was Bedouin, from Israel’s large Palestinian minority. One fifth of the population, this minority



Photo: Metallurgist / Wikimedia.org

“I CAN’T BREATHE” – Diplomat Ismael Khaldi was abused by security officials.

enjoys a very inferior form of Israeli citizenship.

Ishmael Khaldi’s exceptional success in becoming a diplomat, as well as his all-too-familiar experience as a Palestinian of abuse at the hands of the security services, exemplify the paradoxes of what amounts to Israel’s hybrid version of apartheid.

Khaldi and another 1.8-million Palestinian citizens are descended from the few Palestinians who survived a wave of expulsions in 1948 as a Jewish state was

declared on the ruins of their homeland.

Israel continues to view these Palestinians – its non-Jewish citizens – as a subversive element that needs to be controlled and subdued through measures reminiscent of the old South Africa. But at the same time, Israel is desperate to portray itself as a western-style democracy. So strangely, the Palestinian minority has found itself treated both as second-class citizens and as an unwilling shop-window dummy on which Israel can hang its pretensions of fairness and equality. That has resulted in two contradictory faces.

On one side, Israel segregates Jewish and Palestinian citizens, confining the latter to a handful of tightly ghettoised communities on a tiny fraction of the country’s territory. To prevent mixing and miscegenation, it separates schools for Jewish and Palestinian children. The policy has been so successful that intermarriage is all but non-existent. In a rare survey, the Central Bureau of Statistics found 19 such marriages took place in 2011.

The economy is largely segregated too. Most Palestinian citizens are barred from Israel’s security industries and anything related to the occupation. State utilities, from the ports to the water, telecoms and electricity

Insights

industries, are largely free of Palestinian citizens.

Job opportunities are concentrated instead in low-paying service industries and casual labour. Two thirds of Palestinian children in Israel live below the poverty line, compared to one fifth of Jewish children. This ugly face is carefully hidden from outsiders.

On the other side, Israel loudly celebrates the right of Palestinian citizens to vote – an easy concession given that Israel engineered an overwhelming Jewish majority in 1948 by forcing most Palestinians into exile. It trumpets exceptional “Arab success stories”, glossing over the deeper truths they contain. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Israel has been excitedly promoting the fact that one fifth of its doctors are Palestinian citizens – matching their proportion of the population. But the health sector is the one major sphere of life in Israel where segregation is not the norm. The brightest Palestinian students gravitate towards medicine because there the obstacles to success can be surmounted.

Compare that to higher education, where Palestinian citizens fill much less than one percent of senior academic posts. The first Muslim judge, Khaled Kaboub, was appointed to the Supreme Court two years ago – 70 years after Israel’s founding. Gamal Hakroosh became Israel’s first Muslim deputy police commissioner as recently as 2016; his role was restricted to handling policing in Palestinian communities.

Khaldi, the diplomat assaulted in Jerusalem, fits this mould. Raised in the village of Khawaled in the Galilee, his family was denied water, electricity and building permits. His home was a tent, where he studied by gas-light. Many tens of thousands of Palestinian citizens live in similar conditions. Undoubtedly, the talented Khaldi overcame many hurdles to win a coveted place at university. He then served in the paramilitary border police, notorious for abusing Palestinians in the occupied territories.

He was marked out early on as a reliable advocate for Israel by his intelligence and determination; a steely refusal to be ground down by racism and discrimination; a pliable ethical code that condoned the oppression of fellow Palestinians; and blind deference to a Jewish state whose very definition excluded him.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry put him on a fast track, soon sending him to San Francisco and London. There his job was to fight the international campaign to boycott Israel, modelled on a similar one targeting apartheid South Africa, citing his own story as proof that in Israel anyone can succeed. In reality, Khaldi is an exception, cynically exploited to disprove the rule. Maybe that point occurred to him as he was being choked inside Jerusalem’s central bus station after he questioned a guard’s behaviour.

After all, everyone in Israel understands that Palestinian citizens – even the odd professor or legislator – are racially profiled

and treated as an enemy. Stories of their abuse are unremarkable. Khaldi’s assault stands out only because he has proved himself such a compliant servant of a system designed to marginalise the community he belongs to.

Last month, however, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself chose to tear off the diplomatic mask represented by Khaldi. He appointed a new ambassador to the UK.

Tzipi Hotovely, a Jewish supremacist and Islamophobe, supports Israel’s annexation of the entire West Bank and the takeover of Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. She is part of a new wave of entirely undiplomatic envoys being sent to foreign capitals.

Hotovely cares much less about Israel’s image than about making all the “Land of Israel”, including the occupied Palestinian territories, exclusively Jewish.

Her appointment signals progress of a kind. Diplomats such as her may finally help people abroad understand why Khaldi, her obliging fellow diplomat, is being assaulted back home. **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.

Insights

Linda McQuaig

Radical hints of a better economic future

“Nobody told us we could do that!” exclaimed a startled British commentator when Britain suddenly abandoned the gold standard in the depths of the 1930s Depression.

The move came as a shock because everyone had assumed the gold standard – an international agreement linking currency rates to gold – was an immutable law of nature, along with much else about the economy.

And then, just like that, it was gone.

That sense of shock is probably not unlike what many people are feeling today as all our long-held assumptions about how the economy works – and what is and isn’t possible – suddenly seem no

more certain than when we’ll be able to get our next tattoo.

For years, we’ve submitted to the economic orthodoxy dictated by Bay Street: that governments must deliver balanced budgets and low spending or economic disaster will follow – as surely as gravity will bring a heavy object plunging to the ground.

Then along came the pandemic. Suddenly the Bank of Canada is creating vast amounts of money, which the federal government is distributing to Canadians across the country.

Nobody told us we could do that!

In fact, it’s just what’s needed. To prevent an economic collapse, our central bank is buying \$5-billion a week in government bonds, which is effectively creat-

ing money out of thin air.

Private banks do this all the time; they effectively create money whenever they issue a loan. It’s one of the reasons banking is such a lucrative business.

Now, the Bank of Canada is creating enormous sums of money to help pay for

the federal government’s huge increase in spending during the pandemic.

Bay Street financial interests are grudgingly accepting this, given the emergency, but they want it to stop as soon as possible.

But wait! Not so fast! Now that we see how it can be done, one is tempted to ask: could this be a way to pay for increased government spending on future things we truly need – like building hospitals and public transit and investing in renewable energy?

This is the sort of dangerous thinking that a phalanx of powerful interests – from the Fraser Institute to the financial press – are keen to crush, realising it could spread more easily than coronavirus at a crowded, maskless beach party.

But, as economist Jim Stanford suggests, “the genie is out of the bottle”.

Bay Street is determined to return to low government spending and to ensure that the recovery focuses, not on new aspirations, but on restoring the corporate world so that it’s as rich and dominant as it was before the crisis.

As the Fraser Institute’s Jason Clemens insists, the priority must be on tamping down government intervention and encouraging entrepreneurial innovation, while avoiding tax hikes.

In other words, resurrecting the old orthodoxy – and making sure the rich aren’t asked to pay a penny more.

Photo: Alexander Lesnitski / Pixabay



Insights

This is exactly what financial interests urged during the 1930s Depression and it only prolonged the downturn.

The brilliant British economist John Maynard Keynes pointed out at the time that private enterprise wasn't investing during the Depression because, with everyone out of work, there was little prospect of making a profit. He argued that the only solution was for government to step in and spend massively on needed projects.

"We have the savings, the men and the material", he declared. "The things are worth doing".

Keynes said that putting people back to work would create productive capacity – the very



Art: Wikimedia

John Maynard Keynes

source of wealth: "It is utterly imbecile to say that we cannot afford these things. For it is with the unemployed men and the unemployed plant, and with nothing else, that these things are done".

Keynes' point was proved when US president Franklin D.

Roosevelt's vast government spending on New Deal projects put millions of Americans back to work building roads and power plants, and helped kick-start the recovery.

Roosevelt also defied economic orthodoxy by dramatically raising taxes on the rich.

Certainly, today, nobody is telling us we can do that!

But then, under the new reality of the pandemic, that looks like another bit of economic orthodoxy that now seems so 24 hours ago. **CT**

*Linda McQuaig's latest book is **The Sport & Prey of Capitalists**. This article was first published by the **Toronto Star**.*

George Galloway

Monument toppling and colonial crimes

Britain is in the grip of a revolution. Much to the relief of the country's ruling elite, it is a cultural revolution, and not an economic or political one.

Facing an economic recession of historic dimensions and presiding over some of the grimmest Covid-19 statistics on the planet, Britain is convulsed over whether the peccadilloes of Boy Scouts founder Robert Baden-Powell were sufficiently ugly to justify

his likeness taking a dip in Poole Harbour, as the slave trader Edward Colston did in Bristol.

Of course the hypocrites bewailing Colston suffering the same fate as tens of thousands of his victims tossed overboard – usually, but not always, dead – from his slave ships as “undemocratic” miss the point that hardly anybody in England even had the vote when the statue was erected.

And Baden-Powell's chief offence, cosying up to Adolf Hitler,

was the norm rather than the exception among the ruling caste in the 1930s. His attitude to imperialist wars in Africa was par for the course in Britain in his era, too.

Cecil Rhodes, who still towers over Oxford University, is certainly an egregious example of racist venality. He wasn't just a brutal racist and imperialist; he systemised racism, paving the way to apartheid – nowhere more so than in the country which for a time bore his very name: Rhodesia.

But if anything sums up the triumph of identity politics over class politics, it is the extraordinary verve with which millions of people around the world have poured their courage and energy

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into the Black Lives Matter protests, while Britain *continues* to be up to its neck in imperialist crimes which are largely unprotested.

Lives don't seem to matter in Yemen, for example, where plague and famine of biblical proportions are exacerbated by British- and American- enabled attacks that have killed hundreds of thousands of people. Not in centuries gone by, but *now*.

Arab lives in Syria haven't mattered to more than a handful of people in Britain throughout nearly a decade of explicit military, political, financial and propaganda support to fanatic hordes seeking to destroy the secular Arab republic.

When black people hung like strange fruit from Libyan trees following the UK/US/French invasion of the country and the sodomising with a bayonet of its leader, liberals like Hillary Clinton and David Cameron laughed – literally, in Clinton's case.

In Britain, where around 60,000 excess deaths were reported by the Office of National Statistics and the *Financial Times* over just a few months in 2020, a hugely disproportionate number of those deaths were suffered by BAME citizens. Those black lives don't seem to have mattered much. Not enough to protest about, at least.

Were disgust – entirely justified – at the crimes of British im-



BEFORE THE FALL: Statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol. The statue was thrown into the city's harbour during recent protests.

perialism in previous centuries translated into a determination to end the default British position of interfering in every part of the world – up to and including actual invasion – that would be a good thing of course, however unlikely.

Unlikely because the British crimes of the past didn't happen because the criminals were British. They didn't happen because the criminals were, psychologically speaking, sociopathic and

often possibly psychopathic individuals – although many of them were, judging by their actions. Captain Cook didn't slice off the limbs of recalcitrant natives in the antipodes because he loved the sight of blood (though he might well have) but because he was about the business of conquest and empire. And empire is about the business of business. Britain conquered much of the world not to hand out bibles but to loot everything they could carry – including, in the form of slavery, the very people of the invaded lands themselves.

Imperialism is ineluctably a development of our capitalist model, the need for captive markets and cheap (preferably free) sources of labour, basic commodities and raw materials.

It was not the British working class who benefitted from the British Empire – not the wage-slaves of the slavers. The colonised peoples and the slaves all had the same enemy, which fed on the blood, sweat and tears of us all. The enemy is at home. Not in the 17th-century, but now. **CT**

George Galloway was a member of the British Parliament for nearly 30 years. He presents TV and radio shows (including on RT). He is a film-maker, writer and a renowned orator. Follow him on Twitter @georgegalloway

Photo: Simon Cobb / Wikimedia

Insights

George Monbiot

Lying in State: a history of censoring the truth

When Boris Johnson claimed in the middle of June that removing statues is “to lie about our history”, you could almost admire his brass neck. This is the man who was sacked from his first job, on the *Times*, for lying about history. He fabricated a quote from his own godfather, the historian Colin Lucas, to create a sensational front-page fiction about Edward II’s Rose Palace. A further lie about history – his own history – had him sacked from another job, as shadow arts minister under the Conservative leader Michael Howard.

But, Johnson tells us: “We cannot now try to edit or censor our past. We cannot pretend to have a different history”. Yet lies and erasures are crucial to the myths on which Britain’s official self-image is founded, and crucial to hiding the means by which those who still dominate us acquired their wealth and power

Consider the concentration camps Britain built in Kenya in the 1950s. “What concentration camps?” you might ask. If so, job done. When the Kikuyu people mobilised to reclaim the land that had been stolen from them by British settlers and the colonial authorities, almost the entire population – over 1-million

– were herded into concentration camps and fortified villages. One of these camps, as if echoing Auschwitz, had the slogan “Labour and Freedom” above the gates. Even Eric Griffith-Jones, the attorney general of the colonial administration in Kenya, who was complicit in these crimes, remarked that the treatment of the inmates was “distressingly reminiscent of conditions in Nazi Germany”.

Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of prisoners died. Many succumbed to hunger and disease, including almost all the children in some camps. Many others were murdered. Some were beaten to death by their British guards. One, as the governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, acknowledged in a secret memo, was roasted alive. Others were anally raped with knives, rifle barrels and broken bottles, mauled by dogs or electrocuted. Many were castrated, with a special implement the British administration designed for the purpose. “By the time I cut his balls off,” one of the killers boasted, “he had no ears, and his eyeball, the right one, I think, was hanging out of its socket”. Some were rolled up in barbed wire and kicked around the compound until they bled to death. If you know nothing of this history, it’s because it was systematically

censored and replaced with lies by the British authorities.

Only in 2012, when a group of Kikuyu survivors sued the British government for their torture and mutilation, was an archive, kept secret by the Foreign Office, discovered. It revealed the extraordinary measures taken by colonial officials to prevent information from leaking, and to fend off questions by Labour MPs with outright lies. For example, after 11 men were beaten to death by camp guards, Baring advised the colonial secretary to report that they had died from drinking dirty water. Baring himself authorised such assaults. In implementing this decision, Griffith-Jones warned him, “If we are going to sin, we must sin quietly”. When questions persisted, Baring told his officials to do “an exercise ... on the dossiers”, to create the impression that the victims were hardened criminals.

As it happens, Baring was the grandfather of Mary Wakefield, the wife of Boris Johnson’s chief adviser, Dominic Cummings. Last month, her own truthfulness was called into question as an article she wrote in the *Spectator*, discussing her experiences of coronavirus, created the strong impression that she and Cummings had remained in London, rather than travelling to Durham, against government instructions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Baring’s family fortune was made from the ownership of slaves, and the massive

Insights

compensation paid to the owners when the trade was banned.

The hidden Kikuyu documents that came to light in 2012 were part of a larger archive, most of which was systematically destroyed by the British authorities before decolonisation. Special Branch oversaw what it called “a thorough purge” of the Kenyan archives. Fake files were inserted to take the place of those that were expunged. “The very existence” of the deleted files, one memo insisted, “should never be revealed”. Where there were too many files to burn easily, an order proposed that they “be packed in weighted crates and dumped in very deep and current-free water at maximum practicable distance from the coast”. So much for not editing or censoring our past.

The same deletions occurred across the British empire. We can only guess at what the lost documents might have revealed. Were there more details of the massacre of civilians in Malaya? Of Britain’s dirty war in Yemen in the 1960s? Of the catastrophic famine the British government created in Bengal in 1943, by snatching food from the mouths of local people and exporting it? Of its atrocities in Aden and Cyprus? One thing the surviving files do show us is the British

government’s secret eviction of the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, to make way for a US airbase. The Foreign Office instructed its officials to deny the very existence of the indigenous islanders, so that they could be removed without compensation or parliamentary objections.

The erasures and deletions continue. In 2010, the disembarkation cards of the Windrush generation of immigrants from the Caribbean were all destroyed by Theresa May’s Home Office. Many people suddenly had no means of proving their right to citizenship of this country, facilitating her cruel and outrageous deportations. In 2013, the Conservatives deleted the entire public archive of their speeches and press releases from 2000 to 2010, and blocked access to web searches using the Wayback Machine, impeding people trying to hold them to account for past statements and policies.

In the middle of last month, the Prime Minister asked the head of his policy unit, Munira Mirza, to set up a commission on racial inequalities. She is part of a network of activists whose en-

tire history has been, in my view, confused and obfuscated. It arose from the Revolutionary Communist Party and *Living Marxism* magazine. As these names suggest, they purported to belong to the far left, but they look to me like the extreme right. In 2018 I discovered that one of its outlets, spiked magazine, had been heavily funded by the US billionaire Charles Koch. Other sources of funding remain obscure. In common with some of her comrades, Mirza has cast doubt on institutional racism. Her new role has caused dismay among anti-racist campaigners, who fear yet more editing of history.

Lying about history, censoring and editing is what the political establishment does. The histories promoted by successive governments, especially those involving the UK’s relationship with other nations, are one long chain of lies. Because we are lied to, we cannot move on. Maturity, either in a person or in a nation, could be defined as being honest about ourselves. We urgently need to grow up. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com.

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

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

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



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www.issuu.com/frontline.south

Greg Palast

The US Presidential Election will be decided in just four months. But the fix is already in, and millions of young, poor, and minorities will be robbed of their votes

The Great Purge

An excerpt from Greg Palast's new book,
HOW TRUMP STOLE 2020

I've spent 20 years cracking the code on ballot burglary. Schemes with names like "Crosscheck" and "Caging" and "Spoiling". Expose one, another pops up like electoral Whack-a-Mole.

Every four years, some new cheat. I just couldn't figure this one out – *how are they going to take 2020?* – until I started tracking a character with a shotgun, a chainsaw, a pick-up truck, a dynamite detonator and a lot of love from Koch Industries.

On November 7, 2018, it all snapped into place when Chainsaw was elected the 83rd white Governor of Georgia.

It was raining that day in Atlanta. But I could see the large tears tracking down the face of Christine Jor-



dan's niece.

"It's horrible," she said.

Ms. Jordan, 92-years-old, had dressed elegantly for the occasion, her 50th year at the same polling station, "voting right here since 1968", Ms Jordan said, the year her cousin Martin Luther King Jr was gunned down.

But she would not vote this time. They threw her out of the polling station.

"It's horrible", repeated her niece, Jessica. "It's horrible to come out and not be able to vote and no one can give you an explanation. She held civil rights meetings in her home and they had no record of her.

"She was here in the West End community when we couldn't. . . ." She choked on the word "vote".

“The Census is about to list Georgia as the first “minority majority” state in the Deep South, whites outnumbered by non-whites”

“It’s extremely emotional. And it bothers me. Bothers me to my core”.

“I’m sorry”. She apologised for crying. “I’m sorry”.

I’m an investigative reporter. I don’t cry. But it bothered me, too. Because I knew I was witnessing more than the ugly Jim Crow blockade of an elderly Black woman from the ballot box. I knew I was witnessing the successful test run in Georgia of a new vote-snatching game that would re-elect Donald Trump no matter the will of America’s voters.

I’ve seen this movie before. In November 2000, when I got my hands on two computer discs from inside the offices of Katherine Harris, chair of the Bush for President campaign, and crucially, the Secretary of State of Florida, the person in charge of the voting. I cracked the codes, and discovered that Harris had flushed 97,000 voters from registration rolls – most of them Black – tagging them as felons, ex-cons, who can’t vote.

In fact, the number of illegal ex-con voters? Zero. Their only crime was VWB, Voting While Black.

Harris announced George W. Bush had won Florida, and therefore the Presidency of the United States, by just 537 votes. That is, “won” by excluding the tens of thousands of African-Americans she’d secretly-illegally-barred from voting.

And here I was in Georgia, 18 years later, and it’s déjà vu all over again. Again.

Raheim Shabazz was at the same polling station as Ms Jordan. He’d also been given the heave-ho. He got no ballot, but they did give him a lapel sticker that said, “I’m a Georgia voter!” printed on a peach, the state fruit.

At the next polling station, Ashlee Jones, a Latina, brought her three cute daughters to watch her get bounced from the poll as well. Bounced along with Yasmine Bakhtiari, daughter of Iranian immigrants, whose name had also

vanished from voter rolls.

Dark-hued voters, by the tens of thousands, flushed from voter registries. The Purged.

They didn’t accuse Ms Jordan of being a felon, an ex-con. So what was this new game?

The Purge’n General

Brian Kemp stood next to his pick-up truck. “Ah like to blow up . . .” Ka-blamm! A dynamite cap spews a part of his lawn into his hedges”. . . government spending!”

Next we see Kemp with a shotgun pointed at a nervous young man to ensure the kid has “a healthy respect for the Second Amendment”.

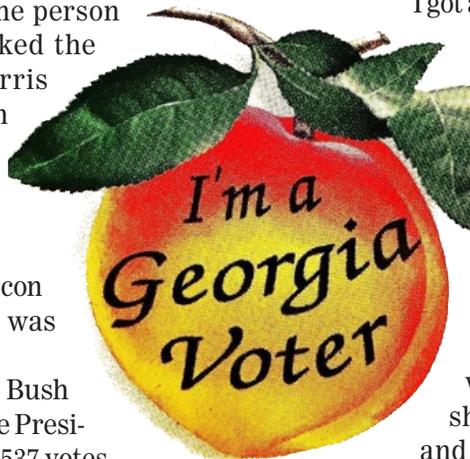
And, he adds in his brand-new Dawg Patch accent, “I got a Big Truck just in case I have to round up some criminal illegals and take’m in myself! I just said that!”

Brian Kemp isn’t some red-neck goober. He just plays one on TV. Until recently, he dressed as what he is, landed gentry, with that soft Jimmy Carter New South accent, Brooks Brothers blue suit and tie. But, running for Governor of the Peach State, he went full hayseed: old jeans, plaid shirts, pick-up truck and shotgun – and the yokels ate it up.

But Kemp had a problem: Stacey Abrams, his opponent, a super-popular legislator, Harvard Law grad, both parents Baptist ministers, the daughter every parent dreams of, the nice lady next door, the kind that will help your kid with their homework. No visible shotgun, no chainsaw, just a plan for expanding health care. In the polls, Abrams was passing Kemp’s alienladen pick-up truck.

And Kemp had another problem: demographics. A lack of Good Ol’ Boys. The Census is about to list Georgia as the first “minority majority” state in the Deep South, whites outnumbered by non-whites.

And as the first African-American woman in history to run for Governor of any state in the USA, the



“If you’re thinking, ‘How can this guy run for Governor and be in charge of his own election?’, you’ve never been to Georgia”



Photo from How Trump Stole 2020

GUNSLINGER: Brian Kemp Campaign Ad for Governor of Georgia

Black turn-out would be crushing and decisive.

Bluntly, there simply weren’t enough white people to make Kemp governor.

But Kemp wielded a dark weapon more powerful than mere voters. As Secretary of State, Kemp had complete authority over the election. Kemp could say where people vote, how they vote and, most importantly, who gets to vote.

There’s a cable TV show, *The Purge*, in which Americans in the future get one day a year when they can kill anyone they want to kill.

It’s based on a true story.

Once a year, since the beginning of this century, a group of political hitmen, “Secretaries of State”, are allowed to wipe out the voting rights of Americans by “purging” them from the

voter rolls.

As the Purge’n General of Georgia, Kemp used his power like a chainsaw. In the lead-up to his run for Governor, Kemp purged 665,677 – two-thirds of a million registrations. The Purge erased the voting rights of one in eight Georgians. Including Ms. Jordan, Mr. Shabazz, Ms. Jones and Ms. Bakhtiari.

(If you’re thinking, “How can this guy run for Governor and be in charge of his own election?”, you’ve never been to Georgia.)

I admit, I’m a suspicious man. I’d been trailing Kemp, for Al Jazeera and *Rolling Stone*, for six years.

His trick-bag of vote suppression tools, including prior purges that smelled of Jim Crow, kept drawing me back to Georgia.

But this Purge was breathtaking, something new. Surely, there must be a law to



“On the basis of the missed elections and a missed postcard, Kemp concluded that every one of these half million voters had moved away”

prevent someone like Kemp from just taking away your registration?

Yes: the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. Known as the Motor Voter law because it requires states to give out registration forms with your driver’s license applications. Every DMV becomes a safe voter registration centre. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 won African-Americans the right to vote in the South. But you can’t vote if you aren’t registered, so the NVRA jammed registration right down the throats of states that still made voting for Black people a cruel obstacle course.

Not that the Good Ol’ Boys hadn’t come up with a way around the Motor Voter law. I’d just returned from a visit to the DMV in Lowndes County, Alabama. The door was locked, midday. The DMV had been closed by order of the state, as was virtually every single DMV in the “Black Belt” counties of Alabama, the African-American counties.

Kemp himself was even less subtle.

When a registration drive sent Georgia officials 86,419 registration forms of new voters, mostly young students of colour, Kemp simply did not add 40,000 of them to the voter rolls. In 2016, I flew to Atlanta to find out what the hell was going on. I met attorney Nse Ufot: “You know what [Kemp’s office] told us? ‘We don’t know what you’re talking about. What forms?’ They did not disappear. We intentionally registered voters on paper forms so that we could make copies. We knew who they were. They were not on the voter rolls”.

Kemp responded by threatening to arrest the voter registration leaders – including the founder, Stacey Abrams – for alleged criminal tampering of voter registration forms. That is, they copied the forms so Kemp couldn’t disappear them.

Ufot saw the registrations sitting in government offices, piled high and dusty, “with my own four eyes” (she wears glasses). Once the forms were “discovered”, Kemp’s of-

fice then claimed the government simply had no time to review the voter applications. That was 2014. In 2018, four years later, and running against Abrams, Kemp still had not found time to add her voters.

340,134 lynched by laptop

How’d he get away with it? Pull off the caper? How did Mr. “I-got-a-big-truck” remove way over half a million voters, a nuclear hit on the registration rolls that somehow targeted Black, Hispanic and young voters with a laser-like precision? And how did he do it and stay on this side of prison bars?

And how, with this giant voter eraser, did Kemp snatch the Governorship of Georgia – *and* re-elect Donald Trump?

His excuse was so benign, so innocent, so simple.

The excuse the Purge’n General used to eliminate the registrations? Kemp kept the info locked up – but a federal judge unlocked them for me. Some Georgia voters had died (64,446 of them), some were imprisoned for felonies (14,021) and there were a few other smatterings of legit removals.

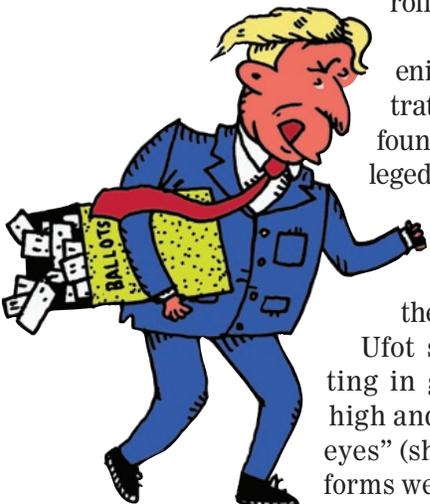
But that left 534,510 – over half a million purged – for a reason identified only as “System Cancels”. They were cancelled by the system because they had failed to vote in two elections and hadn’t returned a postcard mailed to their registration address. On the basis of the missed elections and a missed postcard, Kemp concluded that every one of these half million voters had moved away: they had moved out of their county, or out of state or out of the country.

Who can argue with that? Only a fool would say that someone who’s left Georgia for Ohio should stay on Georgia’s voter rolls.

But something was missing.

U-Haul trucks.

I’d travelled to Georgia a number of times during The Big Purge. With half a million voters leaving – and that means hundreds of thousands of families moving in two years – Interstate Highway 85 out of Atlanta should have been filled with U-Haul trucks,



“Kemp’s crew came out with their hands up and files open: turning over the names and addresses of half a million Georgians who had supposedly moved”

mini-vans, rickshaws, anything that could carry the households of this mass exodus.

The press wrung their hands over this terrible mass purge but wrote it was legit.

But no one asked, “Where are the U-Hauls?”

Riddle me this:

The US Census says less than 3 percent of Southerners move out of their county in any year, or 200,000 of Georgia’s 6.8 million voters.

You don’t have to be a math whiz to see the numbers don’t add up.

I’m not Sherlock Holmes. I didn’t figure out the con in a flash of inductive reasoning after injecting a 7 percent solution of cocaine. I started with Kemp’s office, with a formal Freedom of Information request. However, in Georgia, information has not yet been emancipated.

“Please, sir, could you give me the names of the voters you purged and their former addresses?” just didn’t cut it. Kemp’s office told me to fly.

Now, as an investigative reporter, I have a few (legal) tricks and a team of experienced tricksters. The best, Zach D. Roberts, who, conveniently, has other legal names, had gotten a purge list from Kemp four years earlier. ZD told one of Kemp’s flunkies, a leader of the Young Republicans, that he was gathering info for a Fox radio show to run a glowing story about Kemp’s worthy purge operation. ZD did in fact do some work for Fox, but the lists would go first to a *Rolling Stone* reporter: me.

You can’t pull that off twice. So, I wheeled out big guns: the New York law firm of Mirer, Mazzocchi and Julien. They filed an unprecedented lawsuit in federal court based on rarely used powers in the National Voter Registration Act.

Kemp’s crew came out with their hands up and files open: turning over the names and addresses of half a million Georgians who had supposedly moved. The Purged.

What could we do with half a million names? Start calling. We wanted to know, had they really left the state? There was Gladys Bonner, in an assisted living home, who had indeed moved – but from one room in her building to another. Under the law, she should never have lost her vote. And there were a whole lot

of people like ML King’s cousin, who hadn’t moved at all.

And almost every one we reached was . . . well, not white. Hmmm.

But this was anecdotal – a sample. I didn’t like the smell of Kemp’s purge, but a few cases do not an indictment make.

So my investigations team created a computer program at GregPalast.com which allowed Georgians to see whether they were on Kemp’s purge list. We added a request at the site: contact us. Within days 1,900 did, angry, upset that they lost their right to vote without so much as a posting on their Facebook page. Dawan Mitchell, returned from a tour of duty in Iraq, wrote us, telling us he did move . . . but into the state.

The smell of mendacity rose, but this still was not the scientific gotcha evidence I needed.

How could I find out exactly how many on the list had actually *moved* – versus how many were simply re-moved by Kemp?

Ask yourself, “Who knows exactly where every American lives, with 100 percent accuracy?” And you know the answer: Amazon. eBay. Amazon never sends John Jackson another John Jackson’s pimple remover. Who else knows where you live, with certainty? American Express. Your friendly credit card company will find you in the far corners of North Korea if you try to skip out on your bill.

So I turned to Mark Swedlund, a legend in the “direct marketing” business – do not call it “junk mail”. Swedlund had helped me out over the years, including setting up an elaborate false front for the *Guardian*. (We pretended to be fixers for a company called Enron and set out to buy the British government. It was surprisingly cheap. We were invited into Prime Minister Tony Blair’s residence at 10 Downing Street before we splashed the headline in the *Guardian* about the government’s flea market for favours.)

Swedlund’s clients included Amazon, eBay and American Express and he confirmed that “they know exactly where you were last Thursday, and if you ordered Chinese food and then downloaded a Kevin Costner movie”.

He added, “I think that’s creepy” – but suggested

“This was a name-by-name investigation of those disappeared in plain sight. We were using Amazon’s method and Amazon is infallible”

we could use their tracking systems to go through Kemp’s purge list.

For that, he said, you need to retain the services of someone called an “advanced address list hygiene expert.” I’d never heard of “advanced address list hygiene”. But Swedlund hooked me up with the best in the field, John Lenser, the CEO of the advanced address list hygiene company CohereOne, used by the industry big boys. Lenser and Swedlund put together a hell of a team, including a “de-concatenation” specialist who picked apart the pile of computer mush Kemp’s flunkies had given us.

What the Lenser/Swedlund team found was eye-popping. They went through Kemp’s purge list of half a million voters *name by name*, and the registration addresses of every person Kemp said had moved their residence. Lenser looked at tax bills, where someone last had pizza delivered, phone bills, your alimony checks . . . accessing *two hundred and forty* databases that can confirm where you reside with stone-cold accuracy.

Notably, Mr. Kemp hadn’t bothered to ask why thousands of people had supposedly moved out of Georgia but were still paying Georgia income taxes.

I lost the office pool. I expected about 15 percent inaccuracy in Kemp’s purge. I was wrong, *big wrong*.

Lenser’s first report blew me away: 340,134 Georgians that had been purged for moving were, in fact, *still living in the home in which they’d registered*.

Lenser told me, “340,000 of those voters remained at their original address. They should have never been removed from the voter registration rolls”.

More than a third of a million wrongly purged – in this one state. The list was more than 74 percent wrong. Three out of four. (*The report is so astonishing, I’ve included Lenser’s three-page summary in the Appendix.*)

This was not a statistical sample, not an algorithm nor an estimate. This was a name-by-name investigation of those disappeared in plain sight. We were using Amazon’s method and Amazon, unlike the Pope, is infallible. (Actually, 96 percent accurate, according to Lenser. He told me his figures had a 4 percent error rate because, between gathering data and reporting

it, people do pass on to another county or further: the Lenser team found that the state purged 19,118 folks who “moved,” but had, in fact, died.)

After two decades on this beat, I knew what would come next. The Georgia vote purge game, spread to a dozen key states, would stealthily bleach the voter rolls whiter than white.

The Purge, not the voters, would re-elect Donald Trump.

The unseen tsunami

And spread it did. Swing states that would decide the 2020 election – Ohio, North Carolina, Wisconsin – had done a “Kemp job” on their voter rolls. Purge-mania was moving through GOP states like poop through a goose. By mid-2020, leading into the Presidential race, the urge to purge took over:

Ohio – 432,000

North Carolina – 576,534

Arizona – 258,000

Wisconsin – 99,000 (+232,000 listed for purge)

. . . and so on.

What could we do with half a million names? **CT**

Gregg Palast is the investigative reporter for the *Guardian*, *BBC Television*, *Democracy Now!*, and *Rolling Stone* who broke the story of how George Bush stole Florida in 2000 by purging thousands of innocent Black voters. He is the author of four *New York Times* bestsellers including *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits*.



HOW TRUMP STOLE 2020

GREG PALAST

With comics by Ted Rall

Signed copies available at <https://www.gregpalast.com/how-trump-stole-2020>

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FIGHTING COVID-19. More than 100 Cuban nurses arrive in Barbados to help the fight against deadly virus.

Medea Benjamin / Leonardo Flores

Trump hammers Cuba – Cuba cures the sick

Not content to sabotage Cuba's domestic health sector, the US has been attacking Cuba's international medical assistance to 164 countries

A team of 85 Cuban doctors and nurses arrived in Peru on June 3 to help the Andean nation tackle the coronavirus pandemic. That same day, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced another tightening of the sanctions screws. This time he tar-

geted seven Cuban entities, including Fincimex, one of the principal financial institutions handling remittances to the country. Also targeted was Marriott International, which was ordered to cease operations in Cuba, and other companies in the tourism sector, an industry that constitutes 10 percent of Cu-

ba's GDP and has been devastated globally by the pandemic.

It seems that the more Cuba helps the world, the more it gets hammered by the Trump administration. While Cuba has endured a US embargo for nearly 60 years, Trump has revved up with a "maximum pressure"

strategy that includes more than 90 economic measures placed against the nation since January 2019. Josefina Vidal, Cuba's ambassador to Canada, called the measures "unprecedented in their level of aggression and scope" and designed to "deprive the country of income for the development of the economy". Since its inception, the embargo has cost Cuba well over \$130-billion dollars, according to a 2018 estimate. In 2018-2019 alone, the economic impact was \$4-billion, a figure that does not include the impact of a June 2019 Trump administration travel ban aimed at the tourist industry.

While the embargo is supposed to have humanitarian exemptions, the health sector has not been spared. Cuba is known worldwide for its universal public healthcare system, but the embargo has led to shortages of medicines and medical supplies, particularly for patients with AIDS and cancer. Doctors at Cuba's National Institute of Oncology have had to amputate the lower limbs of children with cancer because the American companies that have a monopoly on the technology can't sell it to Cuba. In the midst of the pandemic, the US blocked a donation of facemasks and Covid-19 diagnostic kits from Chinese billionaire Jack Ma.

Not content to sabotage Cuba's domestic health sector, the US has been attacking Cuba's international medical assistance, from the teams fighting coronavirus today to those who have travelled all over the world since the 1960's providing services to underserved communities in 164 countries. The US goal is to cut the island's income

For years, the US harboured Luis Posada Carriles, the mastermind of the bombing of a Cuban civilian plane in 1976

now the provision of these services has surpassed tourism as Cuba's top source of revenue.

Labelling these volunteer medical teams "victims of human trafficking" because part of their salaries goes to pay for Cuba's healthcare system, the Trump administration convinced Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil to end their cooperation agreements with Cuban doctors.

Pompeo then applauded the leaders of these countries for refusing "to turn a blind eye" to Cuba's alleged abuses. The triumphalism was short-lived: a month after that quote, the Bolsonaro government in Brazil begged Cuba to resend its doctors amid the pandemic. US allies all over the world, including in Qatar, Kuwait, South Africa, Italy, Honduras, and Peru have gratefully accepted this Cuban aid. So great is the admiration for Cuban doctors that a global campaign has sprung up to award them the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Trump administration is not just libelling doctors, but the whole country. In May, the State Department named Cuba as one of five countries "not cooperating fully" in US counterterrorism efforts. The main pretext was the nation's hosting of members of Colombia's National Liberation

Army (ELN). Yet even the State Department's own press release notes that ELN members are in Cuba as a result of "peace negotiation protocols". Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez called the charges dishonest and "facilitated by the ungrateful attitude of the Colombian government" that broke off talks with the ELN in 2019. It should also be noted that Ecuador was the original host of the ELN-Colombia talks, but Cuba was asked to step in after the Moreno government abdicated its responsibilities in 2018.

The classification of Cuba as "not cooperating" with counterterrorism could lead to Cuba being placed on the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list, which carries tougher penalties. This idea was floated by a senior Trump administration official to Reuters last month. Cuba had been on this list from 1982 to 2015, although, according to former State Department official Jason Blazakis, "it was legally determined that Cuba was not actively engaged in violence that could be defined as terrorism under any credible definition of the word".

Of course, the United States is in no position to claim that other countries do not cooperate in counterterrorism. For years, the US harboured Luis Posada Carriles, the mastermind of the bombing of a Cuban civilian airplane in 1976 that killed 73 people. More recently, the US has yet to even comment on the April 30 attack on the Cuban Embassy in Washington DC, when a man fired on the building with an automatic rifle.

While there are certainly

right-wing ideologues like Secretary Pompeo and Senator Rubio orchestrating Trump's maximum pressure campaign, for Trump himself, Cuba is all about the US elections. His hard line against the tiny island nation may have helped swing the Florida gubernatorial campaign during the midterm elections, yet it's not clear that this will serve him well in a presidential year. According to conventional wisdom and polls, younger Cuban-Americans – who like most young people, don't tend to vote in midterms – are increasingly skeptical of the embargo, and overall, Cuba isn't the overriding issue for Cuban-Americans. Trump won the Cuban-American vote in 2016, but Hillary Clinton took between 41 and 47 percent of that electorate, significantly higher than any Democrat in decades.

As an electoral strategy, these are signs that Trump's aggression towards Cuba may not pay off. Of course, the strategy might not be just about votes but also about financing and ensuring that the Cuban-American political machinery is firmly behind Trump.

The strategy has not paid off when it comes to achieving the goal of regime change. The Trump administration is arguably farther from achieving regime change in Cuba now than the US has been in over 60 years of intervention.

During Trump's tenure, Cuba calmly transitioned from the presidency of Raul Castro to that of Miguel Díaz-Canel. In 2019, Cuban voters overwhelmingly ratified a new constitution. These aren't

A total of 26 countries now have Cuban medical personnel caring for their sick

signs of a country on the brink of collapse.

All Trump has achieved is making life more difficult for the island's 11-million inhabitants, who, like people all over the world, have been battered by the economic impact from coronavirus. Tourism has collapsed. Income from remittances has tanked (because of new US restrictions and less income in the hands of the Cuban diaspora). Venezuela, once a major benefactor, is mired in its own crisis. But Cuba's economy, which was forecast to contract by 3.7 percent before the pandemic hit, has been through worse, particularly during the 1991 to 2000 economic crisis known as the "special period" after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A change in the White House would bring some relief, although Joe Biden has staked a rather ambivalent position, saying he would restore relations as President Obama did, but adding that he was open to using sanctions as punishment for Cuba's support to the Venezuelan government.

It's clear that from now until No-

vember, and perhaps for four more years, the Trump administration will pummel its island neighbour. Cuba will continue to seek global condemnation on the blockade (the 2019 UN vote was 187 against vs 3 in favour – the US, Brazil, and Israel) and continue to show what a good neighbour looks like. It responded to these latest provocations in the way that only Cuba does: with more global solidarity, sending Covid-19 healing brigades to Guinea and Kuwait a day after the June 3 round of sanctions. A total of 26 countries now have Cuban medical personnel caring for their sick.

That is the kind of goodwill that money just can't buy and it greatly presents a stark contrast to the Trump administration's shameful behaviour during the pandemic. Back in March, as Cuban doctors arrived in Italy, former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa tweeted:

One day we will tell our children that, after decades of movies and propaganda, at the moment of truth, when humanity needed help at a time when the great powers were in hiding, Cuban doctors began to arrive, without asking anything in return." **CT**

Medea Benjamin is an author/activist, and cofounder of the peace group CODEPINK.

Leonardo Flores is a Latin American policy expert and a campaign coordinator with CODEPINK. For more on the Nobel Prize for Cuban Doctors campaign, see www.cubanobel.org.

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Joe Allen

The volcanoes are alive ...

PART ONE: *Visiting Mount Shasta and the 5th Dimension – A redneck’s travelogue from the heights of Cascadia to the sordid depths of pop sorcery*

There is silence on the mountaintop. Silence and laughter. We take shelter from the biting wind behind the summit’s jagged volcanic rocks. These formations are fresh – around 8,000 years old. Many Native Americans were still newly arrived immigrants when this eruption cooled.

The stench of sulphur rises from a bed of steaming yellow stones just below. This activity hints at the chthonic forces that created Mt Shasta’s massive body in the first place – a succession of violent eruptions that laid waste to her surroundings – and it warns of the destruction she may unleash again. For now, vibrant life climbs up her fertile slopes, step by faltering step.

At 14,179ft above sea level, the icy air is thin. It takes two breaths to do the job of one. Snow clings to the steel crampons strapped to our boots. Looking out, we see the north Californian landscape forested with rows of triangular conifers. They’re so green, you can taste the chlorophyll.

A few barren squares have been clear cut. Other patches

were burned off by wildfires. The heat from these reckless outbursts will actually wake up the dormant seeds in pine cones. In the aftermath, acres of cutthroat saplings grow past each other in the shade of their charred ancestors. Rolling south to the Sierras, the gently uplifted land suggests the distant memories of bygone geological disasters. More climbers arrive at the summit.

At the base of the mountain, thousands of feet below the treeline, the tiny town of Mt. Shasta is waking up to another beautiful morning. “Where Heaven and Earth Meet”, as their motto goes. You certainly meet a few weird ones down there. Some astonishingly influential people in town claim there’s a hi-tech subterranean city inside this bulging volcano. It’s called Telos, they say, and it’s reportedly inhabited by survivors from the lost continent of Mu, which sank into the Pacific some 12,000 years ago.

The city’s underground urbanites are known as Lemurians. According to the various mediums who uncovered this esoteric histo-

ry through telepathic power, these beings still care about us deeply. They want humanity to evolve and to succeed – on their terms. You can’t see Lemurians with the naked eye, though, because they’ve ascended to the 5th dimension to escape the current degenerate crop of humanoid surface-dwellers. Therefore, to normal people, Mt. Shasta just looks like a big mountain.

It’s hard to believe, but multiple knife-eyed locals explained this to me with a straight face – as if I’m the moron for not already knowing about it. The very existence of such philosophies may alarm rational people, especially when openly voiced by enfranchised adults with reproductive potential and full voting rights. But we’ve heard so many astonishingly influential people make so many unbelievable claims in recent years, one suspects that pervasive horseshit is just part of the human condition, even at the loftiest heights.

I’d started my climb at midnight, beginning at a talus flat about 3,500ft below the summit. There was only one other climber mov-



THE ROAD TO MOUNT SHASTA: Snow, shamans and ominous omens.

ing that early, an energetic Asian-American from the Bay Area. When I caught up to him just past the frozen Lake Helen, he invited me to team up. He'd climbed this

stratovolcano 15 times before – the guy's a full on Cascadian snow leopard – so he knew a technical shortcut, plus a dozen other things I was yet to learn.

The frosty arc of the Milky Way ran overhead from its glowing bulge in the southern sky. Its arm disappeared behind the mountain in front of us. At this elevation, the familiar constellations are obscured by a billion other bright eyes, like an impassive audience bored by the petty drama below. Jupiter and Saturn charged westward, intense and haughty, following the galactic band's sweep across the sky.

The snowfield beneath our crampons was hard and crunchy – easy to slip and go flying, to be sure, but perfect for a steep ascent. The steel teeth on our boots dug into the ice. We drew deep, intentional breaths as the air became thinner. Breathe. Step. Breathe.

As we approached Misery Hill, just above 13,000ft, the sun crept up from the horizon, casting a strange shadow to our left. Despite Mt. Shasta's lumpy, irregular shape, its shadow manifests as a perfect pyramid that stretches for miles to the west. All stratovolcanoes cast this symmetrical shape on sunny mornings. It's as though a hidden Platonic form is being revealed by the breaking dawn.

Many mountaineers are baffled by this mystic vision – I certainly was – but those who understand the concept of a vanishing point hold the key to the optical illusion. (Hint: The elongated shadow would still look lumpy and irregular from a flying saucer's point-of-view.)

Upon reaching the summit, the panorama made it clear that we're not alone up here. A chain of snow-covered stratovolcanoes runs north through Oregon – from stark white Mt. McLoughlin, a hundred miles away, up to misty

Mt. Thielsen and other barely visible peaks.

Most of these towering cones began forming a half-million years ago, coming into their own in the last hundred-thousand years or so. Back in those tumultuous days, an evolving Homo sapiens was still arising in Africa, preparing to break out and eradicate our Hominid competition – at least if paleoanthropologists are to be believed.

To the south you see the lonesome Lassen Peak, only 27,000 years old – well over five times the age of the earliest Egyptian pyramid. Lassen is the southernmost lava dome in the long Cascade Volcanic Arc. This unruly line of icy, emotionally unstable giants extends 700 miles from north California to southwestern Canada.

Each volcano's ring of devastating rock slides and winding lava fields is testimony to their murderous potential. At present, they're content to let the hardiest conifers and wildflowers crawl up their backs. Heavy glaciers slide down their faces, inch by inch, carving out various expressions.

Some Cascadian volcanoes are asleep, they say, and others are dead. But geologists assure us that a few will wake up and kill again. Mt. Rainier, looming over Seattle, is a likely suspect. So is South Sister, who threatens Bend, Oregon. Maybe Mt. Hood will bury Portland. Or maybe Mt. Shasta will barf up her interdimensional beings. No one knows when, but one of these psychotic titans is bound to snap. That's just how Nature rolls. If the deadly eruption of Mt. St. Helens was only a dress rehearsal, you don't want a front row seat when the curtains part on

She condescended to inform me that, actually, her shamanic work is effective at any distance

opening night.

If the climb up Mt. Shasta was a powerful means to raise consciousness, the long slog back down was just as illuminating. By mid-morning, an ant line of globally homogenous wilderness consumers had formed behind us. The mountain's steep snowfield now swarmed with REI-outfitted bipedal apes, just like me. This colourful insectoid tendril – dotted with sweaty, sunburnt faces – stretched many thousands of feet from the packed parking lot up to the volcano's summit.

The emergent properties of this ravenous superorganism were impressive. Each individual has been neurologically programmed to capture a series of digital images on their smartphones. Having acquired this spiritual boon, they instinctively turn back and crawl down into the eusocial colony that animates America's postmodern hive. Safe within their electric tunnels, the exhausted globo-clones then upload their best photos to the Interwebs. From the East Coast to Eurasia, a billion sedentary non-participants absorb these vicarious sensations with some mixture of envy, admiration, and silent disdain. As the images accumulate, every corner of

our physical world is grafted onto Silicon Valley's inexhaustible digital simulation – a sort of parallel dimension – that we can all enjoy, even after our collective appetite has depleted the planet.

By the time I got back town, I was starved, so I proceeded to the Berryvale Grocery for some vegan chili and a cold stout. There was a long line outside, as usual, with each customer dutifully muzzled and standing six feet apart. While I waited on the sidewalk, the store's community bulletin board came to my attention. Never in my life have I seen so many wonderful fliers tacked up in one place. It was like Mt. Shasta's Chamber of Commerce had voted to suspend the laws of physics.

My favourite ad was HOLY FIRE 3 REIKI. The word "ONLINE!" had been hastily written in orange marker above the corporate font. A few bohemians sat nearby with no masks on, so I had to point it out. Online reiki?! I made the forceful argument that reiki practice – which consists of waving woo-charged hands over a patient's "energy body" to fix their problems – can't possibly work if both people aren't in the same room. That's just basic mechanics!

One of them condescended to inform me that, actually, her shamanic work is effective at any distance. "All energy work can be done in the spirit realm", she snapped.

"So then why pay for Internet service at all?" I asked with a grin. But she wasn't having it. I turned back to the board.

ASCENDED HEALING HANDS offers a "Sound healing session – crystal bowl", "Angelic card

reading”, “Crystal therapy”, and “Medical intuitive reading”. That might be pricey, but it’s gotta cost less than a CT scan.

LILITH LIVES ASCENSION TEMPLATE promises to be “The Ultimate Hook Up”, which includes “Ankh Healing and Release Work” and “Energy Massage”. The glossy flier explains: “This is literally an Ascension System that was practiced in Egypt, Atlantis, Lemuria as well as other civilisations”. Which obviously means this magical system won’t save you from extinction.

HIGHEST SELF AWARENESS provides “Animal Communication and Energy Healing”. Their services cover everything from “exploring diet and health issues” to “communication as a medium for those that have passed”. You can actually pay a metaphysical pro-

Clearly, in a free market of ideas, a clever person can sell anything

essional to talk to your dead cat’s ghost. Turns out the lil’ furball’s been trying to tell you... Mew!

Clearly, in a free market of ideas, a clever person can sell anything. In the past, I’ve worried that the scientific worldview might become so absolute, such hilarious magical thinking will be outlawed. Who wants to live in a world without intuitive prostate harmonisation?

Nowadays, I’m more concerned

that the populace has been so dumbed down, so easily manipulated, this sort of predatory hoo-doo – or something just as stupid – will become mandatory. And it’ll be against the law to ask skeptical questions.

Before departing, I knelt down to pray to the mountain. I gazed up at her snowy visage, and cried out:

My brothers and sisters have lost their minds!

No one helps another, except to help themselves!

Great One, hear my prayer!

To which the frozen stone replied, “Who cares?” **CT**

PART TWO: NEXT ISSUE

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he’s based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels

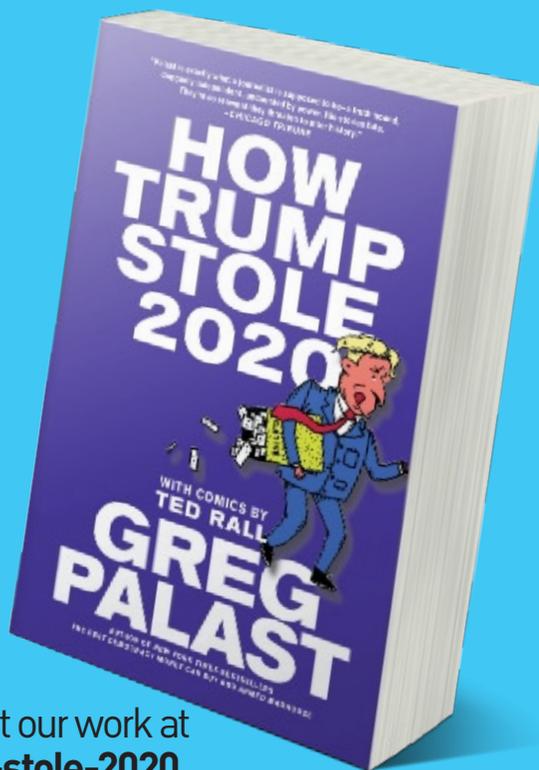
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Kerrie Davies / Willa McDonald

‘Gonzo’ press and the legend of Ned Kelly

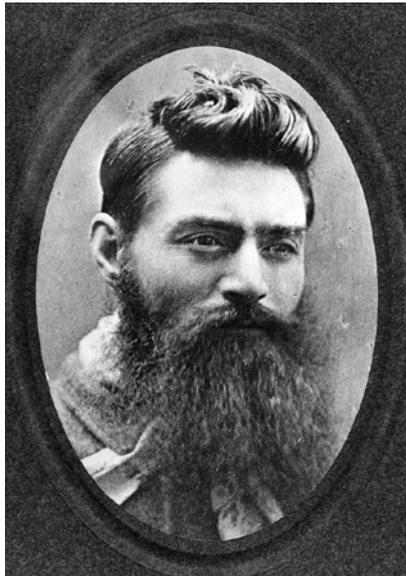
Take four journalists, a notorious gang and a fast-moving train. Add a platoon of troopers, an iron mask, and a glorious shoot-out – and a legend is born

Washington Post publisher, Philip L. Graham, famously declared that journalism is the “first rough draft of history”. It’s also the first rough draft of inspiration for movies and books “based on a true story”.

Since four Victorian journalists witnessed Ned Kelly’s last stand on June 28 1880, their vivid accounts have influenced portrayals of the bushranger – from the world’s first feature film in 1906 to Peter Carey’s 2000 novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, adapted to a gender-bending punk film earlier this year.

In the hours before the Glenrowan siege, the four newspaper men – Joseph Dalgarno Melvin of the *Argus*, George Vesey Allen of the *Melbourne Daily Telegraph*, John McWhirter of the *Age* and illustrator Francis Thomas Dean Carrington of the *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil* – received a last-minute telegram to join the Special Police Train from Melbourne to confront the Kelly Gang.

The rail journey would prove to



Art: Charles Nettleton / National Archives of Australia

Ned Kelly, days before his death.

be one hell of an assignment and inspiration for Kelly retellings over the next 140 years.

The journalists have a fleeting scene in the 1970 Ned Kelly film starring a pouty Mick Jagger. Two characters rush up to the train, holding huge pads of paper to signal their press credentials to the audience.

It’s a cinematic glimpse of the journalists whose historic descriptions continue to influence the Ned Kelly cultural industry that is the

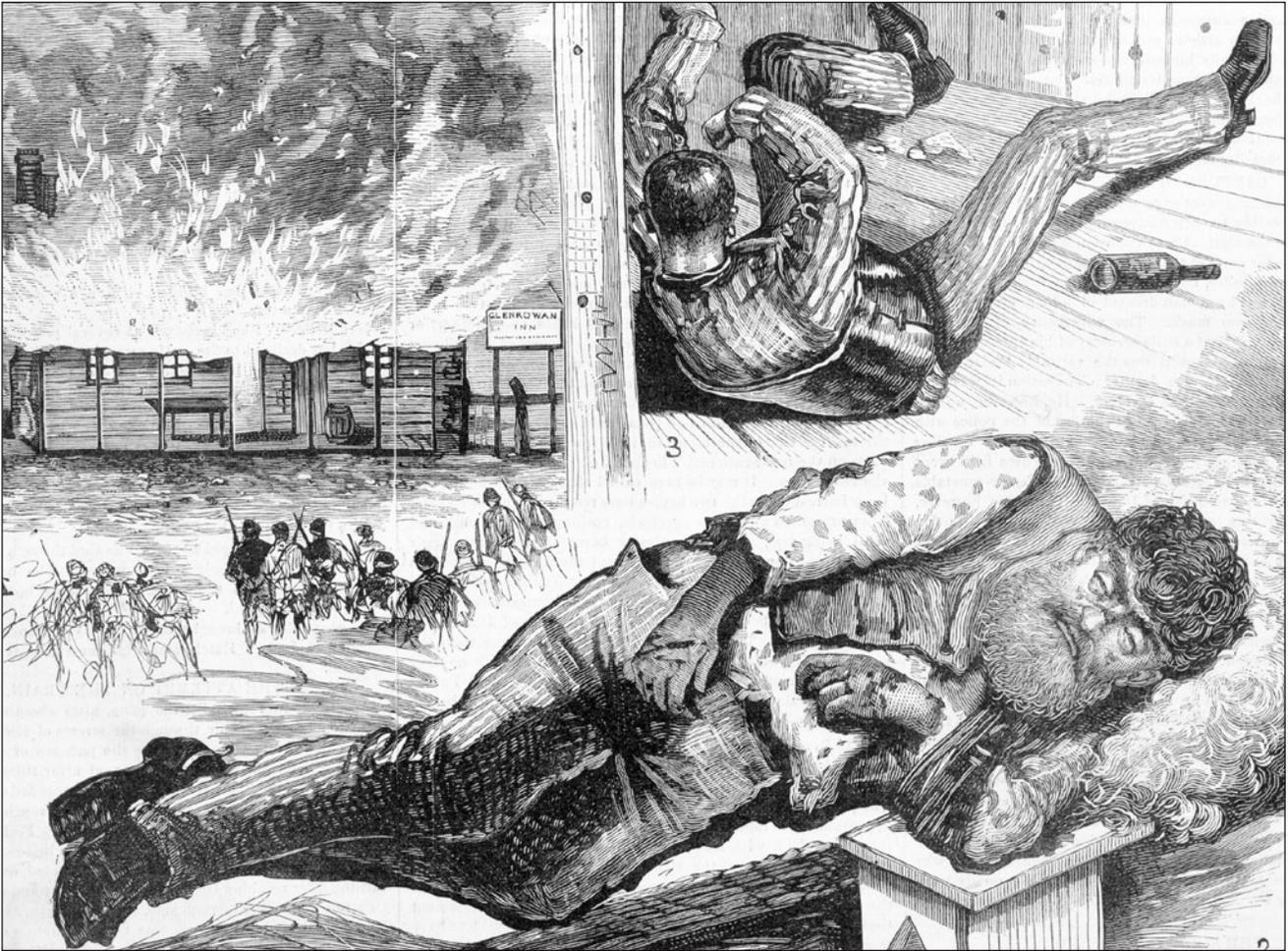
cornerstone of Australia’s bushranger genre.

The train left Melbourne late Sunday evening. Carrington, “embedded” along with the others, described the journey: “... the great speed we were going at caused the carriage to oscillate very violently ... The night was intensely cold”.

McWhirter’s take was somewhat more upbeat, suggesting a thrill in the cold evening air. He wrote the night was “a splendid one, the moon shining with unusual brightness whilst the sharp, frosty air caused the slightest noise in the forest beyond to be distinctly heard”.

After 1 am Monday, the train arrived at Benalla, where it picked up more troopers, horses and “Kelly hunter” Superintendent Francis Hare, played by Geoffrey Rush in Gregor Jordan’s 2003 adaptation of Robert Drewe’s novel, *Our Sunshine*.

Sometime later, the train was flagged down before Glenrowan by schoolteacher Thomas Curnow, alerting the travelling party to the dangerous Kelly gang ahead. In a follow-up article about the siege, Melvin reported the first details of



Destruction of the Kelly Gang. Drawn by Thomas Carrington during the siege.

the teacher's bravery. This would become a pivotal scene in future Kelly recreations: "Kindling a light behind a red handkerchief, he improvised a danger signal".

When the train arrived at Glenrowan station, the horses were released and bolted "pell-nell into a paddock", wrote Carrington, as the Kellys opened fire.

Unhindered by modern media ethics, the journalists became actively involved in the siege. Their involvement is a nod to "gonzo journalism" practices – made famous nearly a century later by writer Hunter S. Thompson – in which journalists join the action rather than neutrally report on it.

Kelly had a love-hate relationship with the press. He once wrote, "Had I robbed, plundered, ravished and murdered everything I met, my character could not be painted blacker than it is at present, but I thank God my conscience is as clear as the snow in Peru ..."

Early in the siege, the journalists sheltered from the gunfire at the station, until they saw Hare bleeding from the wrist. Carrington wrote, "We plugged each end of the wound with some cotton waste and bound it up with a silk pocket handkerchief ... Mr Hare again essayed to start for the hotel. He had got about fifty yards when he turned back and reeled. We ran to him and

supported him to a railway carriage, and there he fainted from loss of blood ... Some of the bullets from the verandah came whistling and pinging about us".

As the siege continued into the early hours, the journalists recorded the wails of the Glenrowan Inn's matron, Ann Jones, when her son was shot, as well as the eerie tapping of Kelly's gun on his helmet, which Carrington wrote sounded like, "the noise like the ring of a hammer on an anvil".

Their interviews with released hostages revealed gang member Joe Byrne was shot as he reached for a bottle of whiskey that, like Curnow flagging down the train,



In one frame, drawn during the siege by Carrington, 25 prisoners are released.

has become another key Kelly siege scene.

Of all the gripping details the journalists recorded, their first descriptions of the bushranger emerging in his armour in the morning mist were what proved most inspiring to subsequent Kelly creators.

Allen wrote the helmet was “made of ploughshares stolen from the farmers around Greta”, describing the cutting blade construction, and called him “the man in the iron mask”. Carrington wrote, “Presently we noticed a very tall figure in white stalking slowly along in the direction of the hotel. There was no head visible, and in the dim light of morning, with the steam rising from the ground, it looked,

for all the world, like the ghost of Hamlet’s father with no head, only a very long, thick neck”.

After Kelly was shot in the legs, the writer described his collapse and his dramatic unmasking, “The figure staggered and reeled like a drunken man, and in a few moments afterwards fell near the dead timber. The spell was then broken, and we all rushed forward to see who and what our ghostly antagonist was [...] the iron mask was torn off, and there, in the broad light of day, were the features of the veritable bloodthirsty Ned Kelly himself”.

Precious film footage restored by the Australian National Film and Sound Archive of the 1906 film *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, the world’s first feature film, shows Kelly shooting at police in

his iconic armour, then collapsing by a dead trunk on the ground surrounded by police. The scene is just as Carrington and his colleagues described it in their reports.

Perhaps the most faithful rendering of Carrington’s Kelly description is Peter Carey’s fictional witness in the preface of *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

Carey’s witness echoes the description of Kelly as a “creature” and describes its “headless neck”.

After he was shot in the legs, the witness recounts Kelly “reeled and staggered like a drunken man” and falling near dead timber. The book’s preface and Melvin’s first *Argus* report both describe Kelly after he fell as “a wild beast brought to bay”.

Carey’s witness may be fictional, but his account is based on

journalists' accounts of witnessing Kelly's capture. Carey credited many of his research sources to Kelly historian Ian Jones, who republished Carrington's account titled *Catching the Kellys – A Personal Narrative of One who Went in the Special Train along with illustrations in Ned Kelly: The Last Stand, Written and Illustrated by an Eyewitness*.

The journalists helped the police strip Kelly of his armour and carry him back to the station, cut off his boots and kept him warm, all the while interviewing him as the siege continued with the remaining bushrangers inside the inn.

McWhirter remarked the bushranger was “composed”.

“I had several conversations with him, and he told me he was sick of his life, as he was hunted like a dog, and could get no rest”, Carrington wrote. He described Kelly's clothes underneath the armour – a crimean (meaning a

The art may be in the interpreting eye, but the scenes are from that first rough draft of history

coloured, no button flannel) shirt with large black spots.

The journalists then turned their attention to the burning of the inn, featured in the background of Sidney Nolan's 1946 painting *Glenrowan*, which depicts a fallen Kelly towering in his armour over policemen and Aboriginal trackers.

Kelly was hanged in Melbourne in November 1880, a few months after the journalists' train ride and the siege.

The journalists continued their careers, with Melvin becoming the most prominent of the four in participatory journalism. After a stint

as a war correspondent, he joined the *Helena* ship as a crew member to investigate, undercover, the “blackbirding” trade that indentured South Pacific Islanders to the Australian cane fields.

In the 1906 review of the first feature film – *The Story of the Kelly Gang* and exhibition, the *Age* critic wrote, “if there were any imperfections in detail probably few in the hall had memories long enough to detect them”.

Yet, the 1906 film was criticised by the *Argus* for not being faithful to the original descriptions of his “bushman dandy” dress as described by Carrington and his colleagues on the day. The art may be in the interpreting eye, but the scenes are from that first rough draft of history. **CT**

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Trevor Grundy

Slaughter of the other innocents

Politicians like to think such things couldn't happen in Britain, but often their memories are short and selective...

Britain's Health Secretary Matt Hancock is pleased Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests are in response to events in America, not Britain.

"I think, thankfully, this is all based in response to events in America rather than here, but we must also continue the drive here for tolerance and genuine equality of opportunity", he is quoted saying in the June 12 edition of *New Statesman* magazine.

The left-leaning weekly says under a heading, "A World in Revolt", that there is a growing temptation for British politicians to contrast favourably the United Kingdom with the USA.

"Yet," says the NS, "the British protests were not just in response to Mr Floyd's death. They were a demonstration against entrenched socio-economic inequality and pervasive racism in the UK, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic".

Naturally, every politician and, hopefully, policeman in the UK hopes the killer of George Floyd will be brought to justice in America. But it's hard to avoid the fact

that so many prominent English politicians do enjoy sniffing the rubbish in other people's dustbins while ignoring the stench in their own backyards.

And many of them, like Matt Hancock, are blessed with short and highly selective memories.

Just think of Jean Charles de Menezes, the 27-year old electrician from Brazil, who was killed by an officer of the London Metropolitan Police at the Stockwell underground railway station in South London on July 22, 2005.

Police stalked him from his home to an underground station, chased him down an escalator, followed him onto a tube train, spreadeagled him on the floor, rendered him immobile and then pumped in not one ... not two ... not three ... but seven bullets into his head.

De Menezes was innocent of any crime, nor was he connected to any terrorist organisation in Britain or anywhere else. He was a young man on his way to work who was at the wrong place at the

wrong time when police struck, wrongly believing he might be connected to an organisation that had set off bombs across London on July 7 that year, killing 52 and injuring more than 700.

But the Brazilian had nothing to do with any of act of violence, so surely someone would face justice after the police admitted they'd killed the wrong man? However, none of the CCTV cameras was working at the underground station where de Menezes was shot dead, so it was decided not to prosecute individuals on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

At a court hearing, the man who killed the innocent Brazilian sat behind a screen weeping. A criminal prosecution of Sir Ian Blair, the Commissioner in his official capacity on behalf of his police force was brought under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, on the failure of the duty of care due to Menezes. The Police Commissioner was found guilty and his office was fined and fined £175,000.

There was public anger, of course, but it was minute compared with what's happening now

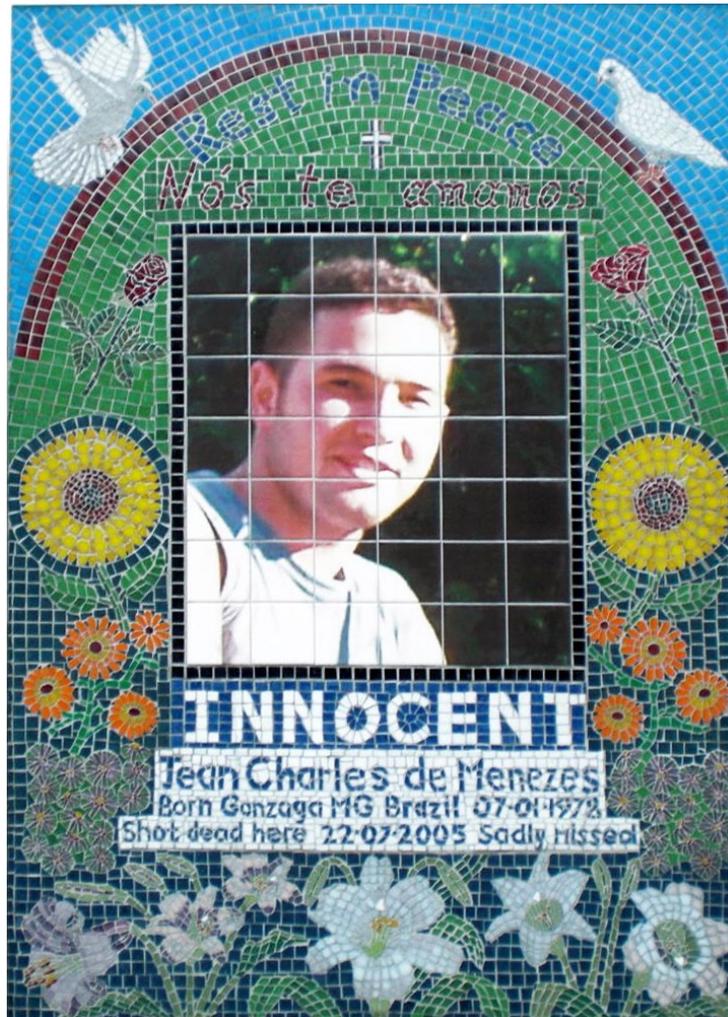
because of the murder in the USA of George Floyd.

On March 30 2016, the family of Jean Charles de Menezes lost a human rights challenge over the decision not to charge any UK police officer for the fatal shooting. British authorities, it was claimed, had thoroughly investigated the shooting and concluded there was not sufficient evidence for a realistic chance of conviction of any one officer over the shooting, said a court in Strasbourg.

A cousin of the dead man, Patricia da Silva Armani told the BBC on March 30, 2016: “We find it unbelievable that our innocent cousin could be shot seven times in the head by the Metropolitan Police when he had done nothing wrong. And yet the police have not had to account for their actions.

“We feel the decisions about guilt and innocence should be made by juries, not by faceless bureaucrats and we are deeply saddened that we have been denied that opportunity yet again”.

No-one asked him how he felt when Cressida Dick, the senior officer who directed this appalling miscarriage of justice by remote control from Scotland Yard – egging her men on to get that man – was promoted to the rank of assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in 2009 and then



REMEMBERING: Mosaic tribute to Jean Charles de Menezes at London's Stockwell underground station where he was killed by police.

Police Commissioner in 2016.

Mr Floyd’s violent death and his tragic last words, “I can’t breathe” echo around the world, but the final gasps of others are barely heard.

● Jimmy Mubenga, a 46 -year old Angolan, died aboard a British Airways flight on October 12, 2010, while bound for his home country, Angola. Three G4S security guards who restrained him were later cleared of manslaughter by a jury at the Old Bailey.

A court heard how his fellow passengers testified that they heard Mubenga cry out, “I can’t breathe”, as he was pinned down in his seat, despite already being handcuffed from behind with his seatbelt on.

Mubenga came to the UK with his wife, Adrienne Makenda Kambana in 1996. He was jailed in 2006 for causing actual bodily harm following a fight in a nightclub. He faced extradition to Angola which he fought until 2010.

● In Scotland, a public inquiry is to be held (when the Covid-19 pandemic eases) into the death of a man in custody after prosecutors decided not to charge police officers involved.

The Scottish government’s Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf, announced that there would be an independent public inquiry into the death of Sheku Bayoh in Kirkcaldy five years ago after the 31- year-old Sierra Leonean was restrained by nine police officers using batons, CS spray and pepper spray.

Public inquiries are set up by the government under the Inquiries Act 2005, to investigate events which could cause public concern.

They can be led by one person or a panel, who take evidence in the form of documents and oral

testimony regarding the events in question.

● On June 11, 2020, the *Guardian* reported that black people account for three percent of the British population but eight percent of deaths in custody. In a prominent article, the former chief prosecutor Nazir Afzal OBE drew attention to the death in Queens Gardens Police Station in Hull of a former British army paratrooper, Christopher Adler, who was arrested for a breach of the peace.

CCTV footage showed him lying face down on the floor of the station, motionless, with his trousers round his ankles. The *Guardian* report said that police stood around the dying man for ten minutes, laughing.

Three years later, an inquest returned a verdict of unlawful killing – because the officers did nothing while, for three minutes of that time, Adler was unable to breathe. A year later, five police officers were prosecuted for manslaughter and misconduct in public office. All were acquitted on the direction of

If you're British, say a prayer, and take "the balanced view" that the police are only doing their duty

the judge.

Since 1969, just one police officer has been convicted for a role in the death of someone in their care.

Afzal asked the question everyone who supports Black Lives Matter in Britain is asking. "Why is this? Well, invariably, in such cases the only witnesses are other police officers; there may also be CCTV and some medical or forensic evidence. In the civilian world, friends will give evidence against friends in the most serious of crimes, but after three decades working in criminal law I cannot recall a death-in-custody case where a police officer has

given evidence against another police officer. Juries are loath to convict police officers generally. One successful prosecution of an individual in 50 years tells its own story".

And there are so many other cases.

But if you're British, stand back a while and say a prayer or write to your local MP. You will be encouraged to understand and take "the balanced view" that the police are only doing their duty . . . men in uniform, guarding us while we sleep.

Never question their integrity.

The concluding lines from the poem *Summertime* by Sean O'Brien say it all:

You have to take a balanced view.

That kind of thing can't happen here,

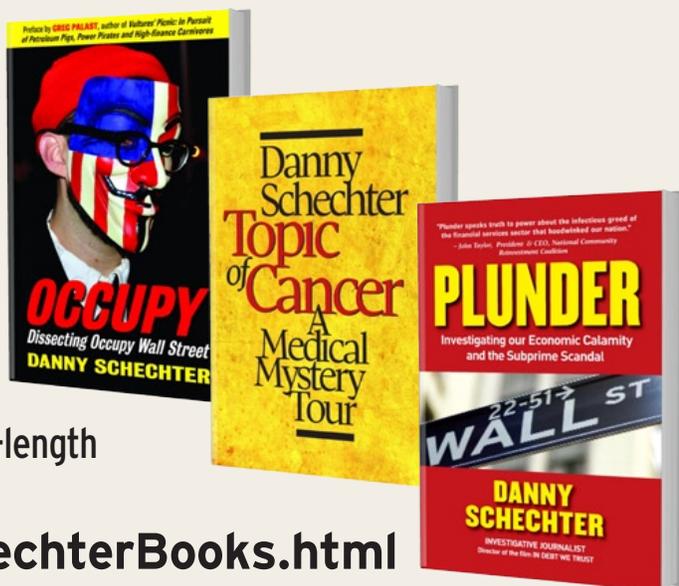
And when it does it isn't true. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is an English journalist who worked in Central, Eastern and South Africa from 1966 to 1996.

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Conn Hallinan

Tipping the nuclear dominoes

Some of Trump's talk is about making arms manufacturers and generals happy, but it is also about the fact that the last war the US won was Grenada

If the Trump administration follows through on its threat to re-start nuclear tests, it will complete the unravelling of more than 50 years of arms control agreements, taking the world back to the days when school children practised “duck and cover”, and people built backyard bomb shelters.

It will certainly be the death knell for the Comprehensive Test

Ban Treaty, passed by the UN'S General Assembly in 1996. The treaty has never gone into effect because, while 184 nations endorsed it, eight key countries have yet to sign on: the US, China, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Israel, Iran and North Korea.

However, even without ratification, the treaty has had an effect. Many nuclear-armed countries, including the US, Britain, and Rus-

sia, stopped testing by the early 1990s. China and France stopped in 1996 and Indian and Pakistan in 1998. Only North Korea continues to test.

Halting the tests helped slow the push to make weapons smaller, lighter and more lethal, although countries have learned how to design more dangerous weapons using computers and sub-critical tests. For instance, without actu-

ally testing any weapon, the US recently created a “super fuze” that makes its warheads far more capable of knocking out an opponent’s missile silos. Washington has also just deployed a highly destabilising low-yield warhead that has yet to be detonated.

Nonetheless, the test ban did – and does – slow the development of nuclear weapons and retards their proliferation to other countries. Its demise will almost certainly open the gates for others – Saudi Arabia, Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Turkey, and Brazil – to join the nuclear club.

“It would blow up any chance of avoiding a dangerous new nuclear arms race”, says Beatrice Fihn of the Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, and “complete the erosion of the global arms control framework”.

While the Trump administration has accelerated withdrawal from nuclear agreements, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement, and START II, the erosion of treaties goes back almost 20 years.

At stake is a tapestry of agreements dating back to the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty that ended atmospheric testing. That first agreement was an important public health victory. A generation of “downwinders” in Australia, the American Southwest, the South Pacific and Siberia is still paying the price for open-air testing.

The Partial Test Ban also broke ground for a host of other agreements.

The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) restricted

It was President George W. Bush’s abandonment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that tipped the first domino

the spread of nuclear weapons and banned nuclear-armed countries from threatening non-nuclear nations with weapons of mass destruction. Unfortunately, key parts of the agreement have been ignored by the major nuclear powers, especially Article VI that requires nuclear disarmament, followed by general disarmament.

What followed the NPT were a series of treaties that slowly dismantled some of the tens of thousands of warheads with the capacity to quite literally destroy the planet. At one point, the US and Russia had more than 50,000 warheads between them.

The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty reduced the possibility of a first-strike attack against another nuclear power. The same year, the Strategic Arms Limitation Agreement (SALT I) put a limit on the number of long-range missiles. Two years later, SALT II cut back on the number of highly destabilising multiple warheads on missiles and put ceilings on bombers and missiles.

The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement banned land-based medium-range missiles in Europe that had put the continent on a hair-trigger. Four years later, START I cut the number of warheads in the Russian and

American arsenals by 80 percent. That still left each side with 6,000 warheads and 1,600 missiles and bombers. It would take 20 years to negotiate START II, which reduced both sides to 1550 deployed nuclear warheads and banished multiple warheads from land-based missiles.

All of this is now on the verge of collapse.

However, while Trump has been withdrawing from treaties, it was President George W. Bush’s abandonment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 that tipped the first domino.

The death of the ABM agreement put the danger of a first-strike back on the table and launched a new arms race. As the Obama administration began deploying ABMs in Europe, South Korea and Japan, the Russians began designing weapons to overcome them.

The ABM’s demise also led to the destruction of the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement (INF) that banned medium-range, ground-based missiles from Europe. The US claimed the Russians were violating the INF by deploying a cruise missile that could be fitted with a nuclear warhead. The Russians countered that the American ABM system, the Mark 41 Aegis Ashore, could be similarly configured. Moscow offered to let its cruise be examined, but NATO wasn’t interested.

The White House has made it clear that it will not renew the START II treaty unless it includes Chinese medium-range missiles, but that is a poison pill. The Chinese have about one-fifth the number of warheads that Russia

and the US have, and most of China's potential opponents – India, Japan, and US bases in the region – are within medium range.

While Chinese and Russian medium-range missiles do not threaten the American homeland, US medium-range missiles in Asia and Europe could decimate both countries. In any case, how would such an agreement be configured? Would the US and Russia reduce their warhead stockpile to China's 300 weapons, or would China increase its weapons levels to match Moscow and Washington? Both are unlikely.

If START II goes, so do the limits on warheads and launchers, and we are back to the height of the Cold War.

Why?

On many levels this makes no sense. Russia and the US have more than 12,000 warheads between them, more than enough to end civilisation. Recent studies of the impact of a regional nuclear war between India and Pakistan found it would have worldwide repercussions by altering rain patterns and disrupting agriculture. Imagine what a nuclear war involving China, Russia, and the US and its allies would do.

Partly this is a matter of simple greed.

The new programme will cost in the range of \$1.7-trillion, with the possibility of much more. Modernising the “triad” will require new missiles, ships, bombers and warheads, all of which will enrich virtually every segment of the US arms industry.

But this is about more than a rich payday. There is a section of

The US knows Russia is not a conventional threat because the US and NATO vastly outnumber and outspend Moscow

the US military and political class that would like to use nuclear weapons on a limited scale. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review explicitly reverses the Obama administration's move away from nuclear weapons, reasserting their importance in US military doctrine.

That is what the recently deployed low yield warhead on the US's Trident submarine is all about. The W76-2 packs a five-kiloton punch, or about one-third the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, a far cry from the standard nuclear warheads with yields of 100 kilotons to 475 kilotons.

The US rationale is that a small warhead will deter the Russians from using their low yield nuclear warheads against NATO. The Trump administration says the Russians have a plan to do exactly that, figuring the US would hesitate to risk an all-out nuclear exchange by replying in kind. There is, in fact, little proof such a plan exists, and Moscow denies it.

According to the Trump administration, China and Russia are also violating the ban on nuclear test by setting off low yield, hard to detect, warheads. No evidence has been produced to show this, and no serious scientist supports the charge. Modern seismic weap-

ons detection is so efficient it can detect warheads that fail to go critical, so-called duds.

Bear baiting – and dragon drubbing in the case of China – is a tried and true mechanism for opening the arms spigot. Some of this is about making arms manufactures and generals happy, but it is also about the fact that the last war the US won was Grenada. The US military lost in Afghanistan and Iraq, made of mess of Libya, Somalia and Syria, and is trying to extract itself from a stalemate in Yemen.

Just suppose some of those wars were fought with low-yield nukes? While it seems deranged – like using hand grenades to get rid of kitchen ants – some argue that if we don't take the gloves off we will continue to lose wars or get bogged down in stalemates.

The Pentagon knows the Russians are not a conventional threat because the US and NATO vastly outnumber and outspend Moscow. China is more of a conventional challenge, but any major clash could go nuclear and no one wants that.

According to the Pentagon, the W76-2 may be used to respond “to significant non-nuclear strategic attacks” on the US or its allies’ “infrastructure”, including cyber war. That could include Iran.

Early in his term, President Trump asked why the US can't use its nuclear weapons. If Washington successfully torpedoes START II and re-starts testing, he may get to do exactly that. **CT**

Conn Hallinan can be read at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and at middleempireseries.wordpress.com

Andrew Bacevich

Martin Luther King Jr. and the giant triplets

An end to racism was his prime message 53 years ago, but we seem to have forgotten what he said about militarism and materialism?

In the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, Americans are finally – or is it once again? – confronting the racism that afflicts this country and extends into just about every corner of our national life. Something fundamental just might be happening.

Yet, to state the obvious, we've been here before. Mass protests in response to racial inequality and discrimination, including police brutality, have been anything but unknown in the United States. Much the same can be said of riots targeting black Americans, fomented and exploited by white racists, often actively or passively abetted by local law enforcement officials. If Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, formerly known as H. Rap Brown, was correct in calling violence “as American as cherry pie”, then race-related urban unrest is the apple-filled equivalent.

The optimists among us believe that “this time is different”. I hope events will prove them right. Yet recalling expectations that Barack Obama's election in 2008 signalled the dawn of a “post-racial America”, I see no reason to expect it to

be so. A yawning gap, I fear, separates hope from reality.

Let me suggest, however, that the nation's current preoccupation with race, as honourable and necessary as it may be, falls well short of adequately responding to the situation confronting Americans as they enter the third decade of the 21st-century. Racism is a massive problem, but hardly our only one. Indeed, as Martin Luther King sought to remind us many years ago, there are at least two others of comparable magnitude.

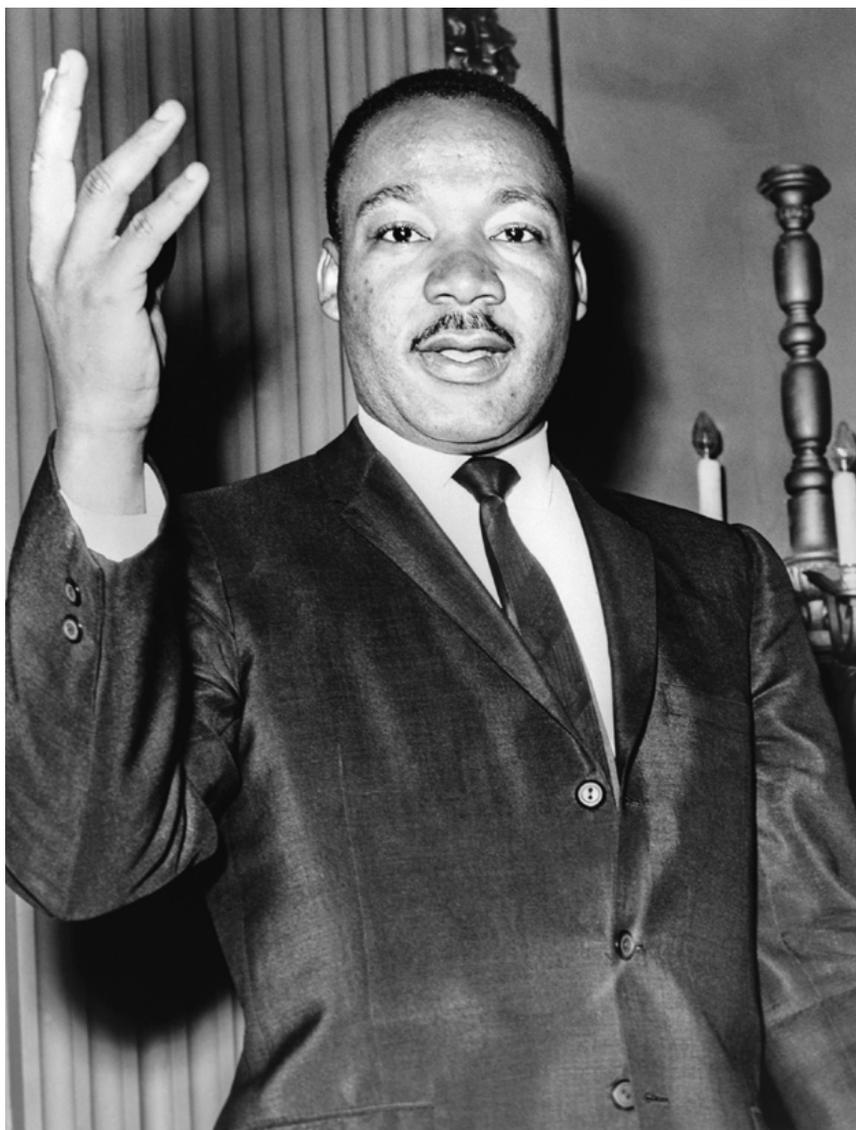
In April 1967, at New York City's Riverside Church, Dr. King delivered a sermon that offered a profound diagnosis of the illnesses afflicting the nation. His analysis remains as timely today as it was then, perhaps more so.

Americans remember King primarily as a great civil rights leader and indeed he was that. In his Riverside Church address, however, he turned to matters that went far beyond race. In an immediate sense, his focus was the ongoing Vietnam War, which he denounced as “madness” that

“must cease”. Yet King also used the occasion to summon the nation to “undergo a radical revolution of values” that would transform the United States “from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society”. Only through such a revolution, he declared, would we be able to overcome “the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism”.

The challenge confronting Americans was to dismantle what King referred to as the “edifice” that produced and sustained each of those giant triplets. Today's protesters, crusading journalists, and engaged intellectuals make no bones about their determination to eliminate the first of those giant triplets. Yet they generally treat the other two as, at best, mere afterthoughts, while the edifice itself, resting on a perverse understanding of freedom, goes almost entirely ignored.

I'm not suggesting that members of the grand coalition of Americans today fervently campaigning against racism favour extreme materialism. Many of them merely accept its reality and move on. Nor am I suggesting that they



UNCHANGING SOCIETY: In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. considered the US to be “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today”. That same criticism would raise few eyebrows today.

consciously endorse militarism, although in confusing “support” for the troops with genuine patriotism some of them do so implicitly. What I am suggesting is that those calling for fundamental change will go badly astray if they ignore Dr. King’s insistence that each of the giant triplets is intimately tied to the other two.

The protests triggered by the recent murders of George Floyd and

other black Americans have produced widespread demands to “defund the police”. Those demands don’t come out of nowhere. While “reform” programmes undertaken in innumerable American cities over the course of many years have demonstrably enhanced police firepower, they have done little, if anything, to repair relations between police departments and communities of colour.

As an aging middle-class white male, I don’t fear cops. I respect the fact that theirs is a tough job, which I would not want. Yet I realise that my attitude is one more expression of white privilege, which black men, regardless of their age and economic status, can ill afford to indulge. So I fully accept the need for radical changes in policing – that’s what “defund” appears to imply – if American cities are ever to have law enforcement agencies that are effective, humane, and themselves law-abiding.

What I can’t fathom is why a similar logic doesn’t apply to the armed forces that we employ to police huge chunks of the world beyond our borders. If Americans have reason to question the nation’s increasingly militarised approach to law enforcement, then shouldn’t they have equal reason to question this country’s thoroughly militarised approach to statecraft?

Consider this: on an annual basis, police officers in the United States kill approximately 1,000 Americans, with blacks two-and-a-half times more likely than whites to be victimised. Those are appalling figures, indicative of basic policy gone fundamentally awry. So the outpouring of protest over the police and demands for change are understandable and justified.

Still, the question must be asked: Why have the nation’s post-9/11 wars not prompted similar expressions of outrage? The unjustified killing of black Americans rightly finds thousands upon thousands of protesters flooding the streets of major cities.

Yet the loss of thousands of

American soldiers and the physical and psychological wounds sustained by tens of thousands more in foolhardy wars elicits, at best, shrugs.

Throw in the hundreds of thousands of non-American lives taken in those military campaigns and the trillions of taxpayer dollars they have consumed and you have a catastrophe that easily exceeds in scale the myriad race-related protests and riots that have roiled American cities in the recent past.

With their eyes fixed on elections that are now just months away, politicians of all stripes spare no effort to show that they “get it” on the issue of race and policing. Race may well play a large role in determining who wins the White House this November and which party controls Congress. It should. Yet while the election’s final outcome may be uncertain, this much is not: neither the American propensity for war, nor the bloated size of the Pentagon budget, nor the dubious habit of maintaining a sprawling network of military bases across much of the planet will receive serious scrutiny during the political season now underway. Militarism will escape unscathed.

At Riverside Church, King described the US government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today”. So it unquestionably remains, perpetrating immeasurably more violence than any other great power and with remarkably little to show in return. Why, then, except on the easily ignored fringes of American politics, are there no demands to “defund” the Pentagon?

Radical changes are necessary if cities are to have policing that is effective, humane, and law-abiding

King considered the Vietnam War an abomination. At that time, more than a few Americans agreed with him and vigorously demonstrated against the conflict’s continuation. That today’s demonstrators have seemingly chosen to file away our post-9/11 military misadventures under the heading of regrettable but forgettable is itself an abomination. While their sensitivity to racism is admirable, their indifference to war is nothing short of disheartening.

In 1967, Dr. King warned that “a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death”. During the intervening decades, his charge has lost none of its sting or aptness.

Given their size and duration, the protests occurring in the wake of the murder of George Floyd have been remarkably peaceful. That said, some of them did, early on, include rioters who resorted to looting. Smashing windows and ransacking stores, they walked off not with milk and bread for the hungry, but with shopping bags filled with high-end swag – designer shoes and sneakers, purses, clothing, and jewellery lifted from stores like Prada and Alexander McQueen.

Also stolen were smart phones, handguns, even automobiles. In-store surveillance systems recorded scenes reminiscent of Black Friday doorbuster sales, though without anyone bothering to pass through a checkout counter. Some looters quickly attempted to monetise their hauls by offering to sell purloined items online.

Certain right-wing commentators wasted no time in using the looting to tar the protest movement as little more than an expression of nihilism. Tucker Carlson of Fox News was particularly emphatic on this point. Americans taking to the streets in response to George Floyd’s murder, he said, “reject society itself”.

“Reason and process and precedent mean nothing to them. They use violence to get what they want immediately. People like this don’t bother to work. They don’t volunteer or pay taxes to help other people. They live for themselves. They do exactly what they feel like doing... On television, hour by hour, we watch these people – criminal mobs – destroy what the rest of us have built...”

To explain such selfish and destructive misconduct, Carlson had an answer readily at hand: “The ideologues will tell you that the problem is race relations, or capitalism, or police brutality, or global warming. But only on the surface. The real cause is deeper than that and it’s far darker. What you’re watching is the ancient battle between those who have a stake in society, and would like to preserve it, and those who don’t, and seek to destroy it”.

This is vile, hateful stuff, and entirely wrong – except perhaps on

one point. In attributing the looting to a deeper cause, Carlson was onto something, even if his effort to pinpoint that cause was wildly off the mark.

I won't try to unravel the specific motives of those who saw an opportunity in the protests against racism to help themselves to goods that were not theirs. How much was righteous anger turned to rage and how much cynical opportunism is beyond my ability to know.

This much, however, can be said for certain: the grab-all-you-can-get impulse so vividly on display was as all-American as fireworks on the Fourth of July. Those looters, after all, merely wanted more stuff. What could be more American than that? In this country, after all, stuff carries with it the possibility of personal fulfilment, of achieving some version of happiness or status.

The looters that Tucker Carlson targeted with his ire were doing anything but "rejecting society itself". They were merely helping themselves to what this society today has on offer for those with sufficient cash and credit cards in their wallets. In a sense, they were treating themselves to a tiny sip of what passes these days for the American Dream.

With the exception of cloistered nuns, hippies, and other vanishing breeds, virtually all Americans have been conditioned to buy into the proposition that stuff correlates with the good life. Unconvinced? Check out the videos from last year's Black Friday and then consider the intense, if unsurprising, interest of economists and journalists in tracking the latest consumer spending trends. At least until

Those looters, after all, merely wanted more stuff. What could be more American than that?

Covid-19 came along, consumer spending served as the authoritative measure of the nation's overall health.

The primary civic obligation of US citizens today is not to vote or pay taxes. And it's certainly not to defend the country, a task offloaded onto those who can be enticed to enlist (with minorities vastly overrepresented) in the so-called All-Volunteer Military. No, the primary obligation of citizenship is to spend.

Ours is not a nation of mystics, philosophers, poets, artisans, or Thomas Jefferson's yeomen farmers. We are now a nation of citizen-consumers, held in thrall to the extreme materialism that Dr. King decried. This, not a commitment to liberty or democracy, has become our true national signature and our chief contribution to late modernity.

At Riverside Church, King reminded his listeners that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he had helped to found a decade earlier, had chosen this as its motto: "To save the soul of America". The soul of a nation corrupted by racism, militarism, and extreme materialism represented King's ultimate con-

cern. Vietnam, he said, was "but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit".

In a tone-deaf editorial criticizing his Riverside Church sermon, the *New York Times* chastised King for "fusing two public problems" – racism and the Vietnam War – "that are distinct and separate". Yet part of King's genius lay in his ability to recognize the interconnectedness of matters that *Times* editors, as oblivious to deeper maladies than as they are today, wish to keep separate. King sought to tear down the edifice that sustained all three of those giant triplets. Indeed, it is all but certain that, were he alive now, he would call similar attention to a fourth related factor: climate change denial. The refusal to treat seriously the threat posed by climate change underwrites the persistence of racism, militarism, and extreme materialism.

During the course of his sermon, King quoted this sentence from the statement of a group that called itself the Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam: "A time comes when silence is betrayal". Regarding race, it appears that the great majority of Americans have now rejected such silence. This is good. It remains an open question, however, when their silent acceptance of militarism, materialism, and the abuse of Planet Earth will end. **CT**

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SYMBOL OF A DISASTER: The ferris wheel at Pripyat, in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

Nate Robert

Inside Chernobyl – without the tourists

But you might find looters, poachers, illegal loggers, and contract killers

I was in North Africa on the edge of the Sahara desert when the global lock-down began in March. In Tataouine, a dusty Tunisian town in the middle of nowhere, my companions and I were discussing the just-announced travel restrictions. Tunisia was about to be locked down, so we could either leave the Sahara immediately, cross the

country and fly out from Tunis, the capital city, or stay quarantined for an unknown length of time.

After organising escape plans for the group of American tourists for whom I was responsible, I needed to decide on a “safe” country in which I could bunker down and ride out the pandemic. As I was researching where to fly, flights departing Tunis began to

sell out and airlines started cancelling routes, as other countries closed their borders. My options were becoming more limited with each passing moment.

For the quarantined life, I wanted a city with fresh air, inexpensive cost of living, plentiful local produce, and a reasonably healthy amount of civil disobedience in case things got a little cra-



LAST RESTING PLACE: Soviet tank, now resting in a graveyard with other vehicles used in the initial response.

zy. Mostly, this is what I got when, two days later I ended up in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Ukrainians have been stoic behind their masks, supermarkets have remained well-stocked over the last few months, and I've been happy with my hastily chosen pandemic-base, even though fresh-air has been a problem at times. For weeks Kyiv was blanketed by thick (and radioactive) smoke as out-of-control wildfires razed through the not-so-far-away Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. That was the downside, but being one of only a few foreigners who chose to enter Ukraine for the lockdown, it gave me the opportunity to be the only foreign tourist in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

On April 26 1986, Chernobyl's Reactor Number Four exploded

during a test procedure. The cataclysmic event was the worst nuclear disaster in history – and led to the creation of the Exclusion Zone, an enormous area that will be contaminated with radioactive fallout for millennia.

For several months, the area was closed to tourists because of the pandemic and wildfires. However, early in June, Chernobyl was opened for tourism. All you needed was an official guide, permission from the authorities, and a vehicle. The main impediment was that foreign tourists are not allowed to enter the country.

But I was already in Kyiv. Furthermore, one of my friends is an authorised Chernobyl guide, and another owns a Kia. That was all we needed, so on June 12, the three of us drove from downtown Kyiv into the Ukrainian countryside. Just a couple of hours later, we

were stopping for inspection at the Dytyatky control gates, the checkpoint on the southern edge of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, 20 km from the nuclear power plant.

The guards checked Anton's vehicle and our permits and passports. We signed the usual paperwork, and were issued with personal radiation dosimeters, then the boom-gates were raised, and we drove into a hazardous area covering more than 2,000 square kms to explore as we wished, unsupervised.

Although the Exclusion Zone incorporates almost 200 abandoned villages, towns, and cities, for most Chernobyl tourists the main attraction is Pripyat, a purpose-built Soviet-era city just walking distance away from the infamous Reactor Number Four. Pripyat was evacuated soon after the disaster, residents fleeing a once-thriving



TESTING: We carry personal dosimeters at all times, to measure the total amount of radiation our bodies absorb. Chernobyl is safe for tourism, indeed, an x-ray, or international flight, will expose you to a higher dosage of radiation than walking around the Exclusion Zone. We also carry a meter to alert when passing a radiation "hot spot", where we recorded levels well over a thousand times higher than normal.

ghost-city, a showcase of the Soviet-era, that's much larger than photos (or TV shows) can convey.

There are 13,000 apartments, five high schools, 15 kindergartens and elementary schools, many department stores and shopping malls, 27 restaurants, ten gymnasiums, three indoor public swimming centres, four factories, a railway station, sports stadium, multiple theatres and cinemas, an amusement park, and several hospitals. The scale of this abandoned city is epic, and there is nothing like Pripyat anywhere else on the planet.

I've spent perhaps 30 days in Prip-yat over the last few years, and it's unusual to spend a day here without bumping into at least one or more Chernobyl tour groups. However, as international flights

into Ukraine ended in March and the country is still waiting for airports to reopen, I was the only tourist and I experienced an almost-abandoned Prip-yat.

On Friday, June 12, I met just two small groups of fellow humans: a delegation of officials walking around looking important, plus a small team of engineers trying to figure out why water pressure at the nearby nuclear power plants had dropped.

During "normal" times, Chernobyl tour groups are only a small fraction of the total number of people within the alienated zone. Every day thousands of workers are here – decommissioning the remaining three nuclear reactors (expected to take several more decades), monitoring environmental conditions, cleaning contaminated areas, and carrying out scientific ex-

periments. There are also plenty of "regular" jobs out here – the Chernobyl town-site, as it has for centuries, remains functional – with markets, administrative buildings, hotels, a church, and apartment blocks.

During April, however, the number of visitors was reduced drastically as wildfires raged through the Exclusion Zone. For several weeks hundreds of firefighters battled the blazes, at times reaching within a very short distance of the reactors.

Highly contaminated areas burned uncontrollably, the charred biomass releasing into the atmosphere. Increased levels of radiation were detected within the zone, while Kyiv city, more than 100 kms away, recorded the highest air-pollution of any city on the planet as the blanket of toxic smoke rolled in.



SHOP STUFF: Soviet-era street art outside a former bakery on Lenina Avenue, a main thoroughfare of Pripjat city.

Walking around the zone just a few weeks later, the intensity of the blaze was evident: shells of destroyed buildings, remnants of entire villages, blackened forests, the ground remained charred and hard-baked. More than a month after being extinguished, the smell of the fires was heavy in the air. But, nature is returning with vigour – green grass and wild-flowers have burst forth between the dead trees.

Apart from the usual visitors who criss-cross the zone each day, 200 mostly elderly people call this place “home”. After multiple attempts at removal, the Ukrainian authorities have informally allowed the returning “self-settlers” to remain in their family homes, albeit with limited services.

On several previous occasions, I’ve visited a self-settler named Sofia. She lives alone

in a simple house, tending her bountiful garden, pickling the vegetables she grows on the scorched earth in her backyard, and fetching drinking water from her well.

The roads leading to the abandoned village of which Sofia was once the mayor, are decayed almost to the point of being impassable. But she’s always happy to host visitors for lunch, or just share a tippie of genuine homemade Chernobyl moonshine.

Being such a large area, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone has proved impossible to keep completely under control. Clandestine visitors include “stalkers” – people who enter the zone illegally, just for the adventure. More nefarious are the looters, searching for any remaining items of value,

including potentially radioactive scrap metal. Logging operations continue unabated, despite plenty of video evidence of the crimes. Sadly, poachers are killing the few large animals, including the endangered wild Mongolian horses that were introduced some decades ago, for sausage meat.

There are also unconfirmed tales of contract-killers burying dead bodies in the contaminated forests – the perfect crime in a place where disturbing the ground is officially forbidden.

The point is, you’re never really alone out here. **CT**

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John W. Whitehead

Summer of hate meets the age of intolerance

If we bury the mistakes of the past under a sanitised present, we will allow the government to repeat those mistakes – rewritten for a new age

“Violence creates many more social problems than it solves.... If they succumb to the temptation of using violence in their struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Violence isn’t the way.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Marches, protests, boycotts, sit-ins: these are nonviolent tactics that work.

Looting, vandalism, the destruction of public property, intimidation tactics aimed at eliminating anything that might cause offence: these tactics of mobs and bullies may work in the short term, but they will only give rise to greater injustices in the long term.

George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis in May sparked the flame of outrage over racial injustice and police brutality, but political correctness is creating a raging inferno that threatens to engulf the nation.

In Boston, racial justice activists beheaded a statue of Christopher Columbus. Protesters in Richmond, Va., used ropes to topple that city’s Columbus statue, spray-painted it, set it on fire and tossed it into a lake. Columbus’s crimes against indigenous peoples throughout the Americas are well known.

In San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, protesters tore down a statue of Francis Scott Key, who penned *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Key was also a slaveholding lawyer who tried to prosecute abolitionists vocally opposing slavery.

Activists who object to Yale University being named after its founder Elihu Yale, a slave trader, are lobbying to re-name the school.

Administrators at Woodrow Wilson High School in Camden, N.J. – named after the nation’s 28th president, who guided the nation through World War I while upholding segregation policies – are now looking for a new name.

The distributors of Aunt Jemima Pancake Syrup, Uncle Ben’s Rice and Mrs. Butterworth’s Syrup have announced plans to re-

brand and re-name their products in an effort to avoid perpetuating racist stereotypes.

Not to be outdone, Dreyer’s Ice Cream plans to retire the 99-year-old name for its Eskimo Pie frozen confections on a stick because “Eskimo” has been denounced as a racist nomenclature used by “colonisers to Arctic regions to refer to Inuit and Yupik people.”

Gone with the Wind, the Civil War epic that won 10 Academy Awards and has long been considered one of the greatest films of all times, was temporarily pulled from HBO Max’s streaming service in response to concerns that it depicts “ethnic and racial prejudices” that “were wrong then and are wrong today.”

What is the end sum of all these actions? What started as a movement to denounce police brutality in the wake of George Floyd’s death at the hands of killer cops has become a free-for-all campaign to rid the country of any monument, literal or figurative, to anyone who may have at any time in history expressed a racist thought, exhibited

racist behaviour, or existed within a racist society.

The police state has got us exactly where it wants us: distracted, distraught and divided.

While protesters topple statues of men with racist pasts who are long dead, unarmed Americans continue to be killed by militarised police trained to shoot first and ask questions later.

While activists use their collective might to pressure corporations to rebrand products in a more racially sensitive fashion, the American police state – aided and abetted by the Corporate State – continues to disproportionately target blacks, Hispanics and other minorities.

And while politically correct censorship is attempting to sanitise the public sphere of words and images that denigrate minorities, it is not doing anything to rid hearts and minds of racism.

What we need is more speech, more discourse, and a greater understanding of history and the evils perpetrated in the name of conquest, profit and racial supremacy. Because if we bury the mistakes of the past under a sanitised present, if we fail to at least provide context to the past, we risk allowing the government to repeat those past mistakes – rewritten for a new age – and no one will be the wiser.

Censoring speech – toppling monuments – kowtowing to political correctness – is not the answer to what ails the United States.

As long as we focus on words and ignore the systemic injustices that undergird the words, the disease will spread.

As long as we continue to allow the most controversial issues of

Censoring speech, and kowtowing to political correctness is not the answer to what ails the United States

our day to serve as battlegrounds for those who claim to believe in freedom of speech but only when it favours the views and positions they support, we will all eventually lose.

Silencing unpopular viewpoints with which the majority might disagree – whether it's by shouting them down, censoring them, muzzling them, or criminalising them – only empowers the controllers of the Deep State.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the police state could not ask for a better citizenry than one that carries out its own censorship.

So what we can do to end racial inequality, police brutality, and systemic injustice that does not involve sacrificing free speech on the altar of political correctness or adopting violent tactics?

Stop tiptoeing around, easily offended or afraid to cause offense. Stop allowing the government and its architects to micromanage your life and curtail your freedoms. Stop being a pawn in someone else's game.

Find your own voice. Give voice to your own outrage. Speak truth to power non-violently. And through-out it all, love your enemies and put that love into action

That last point, to love your enemies, is the hardest of all, yet it was the principle that Jesus Christ spoke of most often.

This principle was also at the core of Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts to combat racism and injustice. In fact, King delivered an entire sermon on what it means to love one's enemies even when they continue to wrong you. Mind you, this was a man who, despite having faced down water cannons, police dogs and police brutality, intimidation and prejudice and assassination attempts, still insisted that "mass non-violent resistance based on the principle of love" was his best weapon.

The first step in loving one's enemies, says King, is to discover the element of good in them.

Second, focus on defeating evil systems, rather than vanquishing individuals caught up in an evil system

Third, cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe with love. "Men must see that force begets force, hate begets hate, toughness begets toughness. And it is all a descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for all and everybody."

Fourth, use love to redeem and transform those who would do you harm.

And, finally, don't resort to violence. **CT**

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David Cromwell

‘Six months to avert climate crisis’

Climate breakdown is on the horizon, but the corporate media has other issues in the forefront of their minds

In his classic science fiction novel, *Foundation*, Isaac Asimov posited a future in which “psychohistorians” could predict outcomes based on past history and the large-scale behaviour of human populations by combining psychology and the mathematics of probability. Using “psychohistory”, the protagonist Hari Seldon discovers that the 12,000-year-old Galactic Empire will collapse in 500 years. He warns the galactic rulers of this likely fate, while explaining that an alternative future in which human knowledge is preserved can be attained. For his trouble, he is exiled to the remote planet of Terminus.

In today’s world, the prospects for human civilisation, never mind the existence of historians in the future, look bleak indeed. According to many leading climate scientists and biologists, the most likely outcome for humanity is the collapse of what is called “civilisation”. They warn that it may already be too late to change course.

These are the shocking expert conclusions, rooted in scientific evidence and careful rational

arguments, which are routinely underplayed, marginalised or simply ignored by mainstream news media.

Last November, the world’s most prestigious science journal, *Nature*, published a study by eminent climate scientists warning that nine major tipping points which regulate global climate stability are dangerously close to being triggered. These include the slowing down of ocean circulation in the North Atlantic, massive deforestation of the Amazon, and accelerating ice loss from the West Antarctic ice sheet. Any one of these nine tipping points, if exceeded, could push the Earth’s climate into catastrophic runaway global warming. There could even be a domino effect whereby one tipping point triggers another tipping point which, in turn, triggers the next one and so on, in a devastating cascade.

Given the normal custom of academics to use sober language, the warning statements in the pages of *Nature* were stark: “The growing threat of abrupt and irreversible

climate changes must compel [our emphasis] political and economic action on emissions.”

The researchers are clear that, “we are in a climate emergency and [our study of tipping points] strengthens this year’s chorus of calls for urgent climate action – from schoolchildren to scientists, cities and countries”.

In short, there is “an existential threat to civilisation” and “no amount of economic cost-benefit analysis is going to help us”.

This should have dwarfed news coverage of Brexit for months.

One of the study’s co-authors, Will Steffen, emeritus professor of climate and Earth System science at the Australian National University, told *Voice of Action*, an Australian publication, that all this raises the ultimate question, “Have we already lost control of the system? Is collapse now inevitable?”

In other words, there may simply not be enough time to stop tipping points being reached, as he explained with this metaphor, “If the Titanic realises that it’s in trouble and it has about 5km that it needs to slow and steer the ship,



but it's only 3km away from the iceberg, it's already doomed".

I searched the ProQuest media database for mentions of this particularly disturbing quote by Steffen, a world-renowned climate expert, in national UK newspapers. I found the grand total of one in a short article in the *Daily Express*. What could better sum up the pathology of the mainstream news media than ignoring urgent authoritative warnings of the likely collapse of the climate system?

Scientists have been sounding the alarm for some time that we are in the midst of a sixth mass extinction in Earth's long biological history. But this time the cause is not a natural calamity, such as a huge volcanism event or an asteroid strike, but human civilisation. Worse still, the careful evidence accrued by biologists in study after study indicates that the global mass loss of species is accelerating. In 2017, a study published in

the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, reported that billions of populations of animals have disappeared from the Earth amidst what they called a "biological annihilation". They said the findings were worse than previously thought.

Last month, a new study revealed that 500 species of land animals are likely to become extinct over the next two decades. Gerardo Ceballos, an ecologist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and lead author of the paper, declared, "We're eroding the capabilities of the planet to maintain human life and life in general".

While humans continue to destroy species and natural habitats, Ceballos and his colleagues warn of a "cascading series of impacts", including more frequent occurrences of new diseases and pandemics, such as Covid-19. He

summarised, "All of us need to understand that what we do in the next five to 10 years will define the future of humanity".

But the crucial window for action is likely much shorter than that. And it is not just the usual suspects of Greens and wild-eyed radicals who claim so. According to Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, the world has just six months to avert climate crisis. This is the timescale required to "prevent a post-lockdown rebound in greenhouse gas emissions that would overwhelm efforts to stave off climate catastrophe".

Samuel Alexander, a lecturer with the University of Melbourne and research fellow at the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, told *Voice of Action* that the looming end of organised human society would not be a single event. Instead, we are approaching a stage, "where we face decades

of ongoing crises, as the existing mode of civilisation deteriorates, but then recovers as governments and civil society tries to respond, and fix things, and keep things going for a bit longer”.

He added, “Capitalism is quite good at dodging bullets and escaping temporary challenges to its legitimacy and viability. But its condition, I feel, is terminal”.

Meanwhile, Steffen believes that current mass protests, such as Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, are not yet a sign of collapse but one of “growing instability”. Alexander concurs, saying that it is a sign of “steam building up within a closed system”. Without large-scale grassroots action and radical shifts in government policies, we are “likely to see explosions of civil unrest increasingly as things continue to deteriorate”. However, he offered hope that, with sufficient public pressure, the future could still be “post-growth / post capitalist / post-industrial in some form”.

Graham Turner, a former senior Australian government research scientist, observed, “I think if we all manage to live a simpler and arguably more fulfilling life then it would be possible still with some technological advances to have a sustainable future, but it would seem that it’s more likely ... that we are headed towards or perhaps on the cusp of a sort of global collapse”.

He fears that the public as a whole will only demand change once “they’re actually losing their jobs or losing their life or seeing their children directly suffer”.

One positive practical step that people could take, he says, is to push for changes in the law

The case for a radical shift towards sustainability are barely touched upon in corporate news media

governing corporations, “so that corporations don’t have more legal rights than people, and are not compelled to make a profit for shareholders”.

Meanwhile, Siberia, of all places, is undergoing a prolonged heatwave, described by one climate scientist as “undoubtedly alarming”, which is driving 2020 towards being the globally hottest year on record.

Many new and dramatic climate findings are, of course, reported in the science and environment sections of newspapers. But the compelling case for a radical shift in society towards sustainability are barely touched upon in corporate news media, for obvious reasons.

In particular, the imminent threat of climate collapse rarely intrudes into the numerous pages devoted to politics, business and the economy. These pages feature a whole slew of correspondents, columnists and commentators who are rewarded for not questioning the status quo.

Worse, no leading political editor – the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg and ITV’s Robert Peston spring to mind – ever seriously challenges the prime minister, or other senior politicians, on the huge risk of

climate breakdown. The Westminster “village” – surely as insular a social bubble as has ever existed in this country – is almost entirely divorced from the reality of onrushing climate chaos.

As independent journalist Rebecca Fisher, formerly of Corporate Watch, noted recently, “UK’s current form of ‘democracy’ cannot protect the public. The ‘Westminster model’ was developed to promote unregulated economic growth and prevent the public from real participation in how society is run”.

And yet, unlike the power-hungry Westminster navel-gazers, the public does believe climate is an urgent issue. A new survey of 80,000 people conducted across forty countries reveals that fewer than three per cent believe climate change is not serious at all.

But, as we and others have long argued, a fundamental obstacle to shifting to a saner, more democratic society is the narrow concentration of media ownership; a structural impediment in today’s world to truly free and open debate. This extreme state of affairs has been tracked in the UK by the independent Media Reform Coalition which represents several groups and individuals committed to promoting journalism and communications that work for the benefit of the public. The MRC is currently chaired by Natalie Fenton, professor of media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The coalition’s most recent report on UK media ownership, published in 2019, revealed that the problem is now even worse than at the time of its previous report in 2015. Just three companies –

Rupert Murdoch's News UK, *Daily Mail* Group and Reach (publisher of the *Mirror* titles) dominate 83 percent of the national newspaper market (up from 71 percent in 2015). When online readers are included, just five companies – News UK, *Daily Mail* Group, Reach, *Guardian* and *Telegraph* – dominate nearly 80 percent of the market.

The report's authors warned, "We believe that concentration in news and information markets in particular has reached endemic levels in the UK and that we urgently need effective remedies. Concentrated ownership creates conditions in which wealthy individuals and organisations can amass vast political and economic power and distort the media landscape to suit their interests".

The warning is further backed up in a forthcoming book, *The Media Manifesto* (Polity Books, August 2020), by Fenton and co-authors Des Freedman, Justin Schlosberg and Lina Dencik. They emphasise a crucial point that is a longstanding characteristic of rational media analysis: we must stop using the misleading framework of media failures. As Noam Chomsky observed many years ago in his book *Deterring Democracy* in describing media performance, "The basic principle, rarely violated, is that what conflicts with the requirements of power and privilege does not exist".

It is therefore not a "failure" when newspapers and broadcasters neglect to scrutinise state-corporate power. Granting a free pass to power is virtually their *raison d'être*. Or, as *The Media Manifesto*

"The BBC has been a key institutional mechanism for reinforcing establishment 'common sense' "

observes, "[The] inability to hold power to account shouldn't be seen as an unprecedented 'failure' of the media to perform its democratic role when, in fact, this has long been the media's normal role under capitalism: to naturalise and legitimise existing and unequal social relations".

The authors continue with examples, "It's not about failing to hold banks to account but about the complicity of financial journalists and commentators in celebrating neoliberal economics ahead of the 2008 financial crash; it's not about failing to be tough on racism but about the media's historic perpetuation of racist stereotypes and promotion of anti-immigrant frames; it's not about failing to recognise the challenges of apocalyptic climate change but about repeating tropes about 'natural' disasters such as hurricanes, heatwaves and forest fires, together with routine "balanced" debates between climate change scientists and deniers. These are not examples of the media's malfunctioning but of its default behaviour".

But, goes up the cry from the back row, what about "our" blessed BBC? It is, after all, obliged by its Royal Charter to report objectively and impartially, untrammelled by billionaire ownership or tawdry

commercialisation. Right? Not so.

As Des Freedman observes of the BBC in *The Media Manifesto*, "[It] is a compromised version of a potentially noble ideal: far too implicated in and attached to existing elite networks of power to be able to offer an effective challenge to them".

As can be seen every day of the week, the BBC typically follows a similar agenda to UK newspapers in its own news coverage. Freedman adds: "Far from retaining its autonomy from all vested interests, and delivering a critical and robust public interest journalism, the BBC has been a key institutional mechanism for reinforcing establishment 'common sense' and has represented the strategic interests of the powerful more than the disparate views of ordinary audiences".

He continues, "It has reached the point where even the accomplished former World Service journalist, Owen Bennett-Jones, has condemned the BBC's dependence on official sources and argues that 'there is plenty of evidence that the BBC, in both its international and domestic manifestations, deserves the epithet 'state broadcaster'. Without significant reform, public service media are, in reality, just as likely to be embroiled in the reproduction of media power as their commercial counterparts and therefore just as likely to be part of the problem rather than the solution."

Fenton emphasises the point later in the book, "despite its claims to be impartial and independent, the BBC has always sided with the elite and been in thrall to those in power".

Regular readers will be aware

that, since Medialens began publishing media alerts in 2001, we have examined in depth hundreds of examples of the BBC doing exactly this. If you include those examples that we highlight almost daily on Twitter and Facebook, they undoubtedly number in the thousands. Many of the most insidious examples of such bias, omission and distortion in BBC News have been expanded upon in several of our books. There is no shortage of evidence that BBC News functions as a propaganda outlet for state and corporate interests.

A fundamental obstacle to radical societal change to avert climate breakdown, therefore, is that mainstream media, including BBC News, exist primarily to uphold the interests of capital and, in addition, particularly in the case of the BBC, the state, “Modern capitalism resides on the complex relationship between the neoliberal market and the neoliberal state. To address meaningfully the consequences of climate change, massively reduce inequality and eradicate poverty, would destabilise the power relations that underpin finance-led growth. For example, if the mainstream [sic] press industries do not attempt to maximise their profits in any way they can today, they will probably not exist tomorrow”.

In a sane world, if senior scientists who normally use understated academic language start warning of an “existential threat” to human civilisation, then responsible news media would leap into action with huge headlines and in-depth coverage. There would be extensive

Billionaire-owned media, and a state broadcaster bowing to governments, can never provide the answers

interviews with scientists on BBC News at Ten, ITV News, Channel 4 News, Newsnight, Good Morning Britain, BBC Radio 4 Today, and other major programmes. They would all follow up with urgent analysis of what needs to be done immediately in the realms of politics and economics to avert the climate threat, or at least minimise the serious consequences of that threat. Instead, state-corporate media have, in effect, exiled scientists to a distant planet in a remote part of the Galaxy where they can be ignored.

Billionaire-owned media, controlled by corporate boards and dependent on corporate ad revenue, and a state broadcaster forever hobbled by bowing to corporate-beholden governments, can never provide the answers to climate breakdown. As *The Media Manifesto* argues, with detailed recommendations, we need properly accountable, public-interest news media that are truly democratic, diverse and sustainable.

All the citizen movements that we see today, including Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, will not succeed unless common aims are sought across diverse campaigns with a united goal; namely, dismantling the state-corporate media that are

the propaganda wing for destructive state-corporate power, and replacing such media with news organisations that serve the public interest.

We must be clear that the powerful need to be challenged directly; non-violently, yes, but with strength, persistence and wisdom on the basis of clear strategic aims. Meekly asking for change and accepting weak compromises will not work given the gravity of the climate crisis.

Media academic Robert McChesney put it well, “Many liberals who wish to reform and humanise capitalism are uncomfortable with seemingly radical movements, and often work to distance themselves from them, lest respectable people in power cast a withering eye at them. ‘Shhh’, they say to people like me. ‘If we antagonise or scare those in power we will lose our seat at the table and not be able to win any reforms’. Yet these same liberal reformers often are dismayed at how they are politically ineffectual. Therein lies a great irony, because to enact significant reforms requires a mass movement (or the credible prospect of a mass movement) that does indeed threaten the powerful.” (Robert McChesney, *Blowing the Roof Off the Twenty-First Century: Media, Politics, and the Struggle for Post-Capitalist Democracy*, Monthly Review Press, 2014/)

In short, the powerful need to have their power – originally stolen from us anyway – taken away from them in order to ensure human survival. **CT**

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Andrew Fischer's Random Thoughts

Artistic streaks

A few months back, I wrote the piece *Brushes With Celebrity* (ColdType 205), in which I related a few of my encounters with famous people. Some days later, I thought “Why not reverse it to “Celebrities With Brushes” and poke fun at the paintings produced by conceited actors and other swelled-heads who believe they have art talent? I rubbed my hands together in gleeful villainy, pondering the enjoyment in which I’d revel. I visualised vapid landscapes, pitiful two-dimensional portraits and puerile abstract impressions of their pompous lives. I could hardly wait to get started; it was simply a matter of a quick internet search for “celebrity art” ...

But a funny thing happened on the way to columnist nirvana. Practically all the celebrity art that appeared was so good that I couldn’t find fault with any of it. How could I – a man without a shred of art ability – make fun of the celebrities, or anyone else, who actually did have such talent? I felt miserable and defeated, and barely stopped short of chastising myself for behaving so mean-spiritedly.

So, the joke is on me (sorry, Bee-Gees). By way of atonement for my antisocial thoughts, I suggested to the editor he should publish one of my attempts at art and encourage

readers to make fun of it. He declined the offer, suggesting I find a helpful therapist.

The horror ...

One fine day in the mid-1970s my writing partner and I visited the office of our agent at the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles. We were extremely fortunate to have him, and the only reason we did was that my partner’s ex-girlfriend had once worked as his secretary. Getting an agent back then (and doubtless today, as well) was like having first-and-goal on your opponent’s one-yard-line in American and Canadian football. (However, in our case, we fumbled the ball.)

We’d been scheduled for a quick meeting of one type or another with “Al”. After four months the agent had set up just a single interview – with the female vice-president of a famous record company’s fledgling movie division. (You remember records, right? Those thin, black vinyl disks you spun on a record-player which produced music?) That meeting had quickly gone awry when it became apparent that the VP in question had a brain the size of a cockatoo’s.

Anyway, as we neared Al’s office he stepped outside it, finishing a conversation with – “Hey, that looks like Mickey Dolenz!”

Indeed it was Dolenz, actor/musician best remembered as one of the four Monkees in the eponymous mid-1960s TV show.

As we walked up to the two men, I noticed the actor was taller than I imagined. He wore a tight-fitting, light gray sharkskin suit. Al introduced us as “hot young writers” and my partner and I beamed like the sun.

Dolenz was pleasant enough and soon stated he wanted to produce movies at this point in his career.

“What kind?” I asked.

“Whore stories”, he replied.

“Whore stories?” I echoed.

“Whore stories”, he repeated.

The non-Mickey members of the group looked at each other, puzzled.

“Whore stories! Whore stories!” he exclaimed.

It dawned on me first.

“Oh – horror stories.” He’d been saying “horror” all the time, pronouncing it with slurred speech: “hoor-ore”. Dolenz spun around and left after another minute. The three of us rolled our eyes. **CT**

Andrew Fischer is an accountant and author of two books.

Purgastories, a collection of short stories, is available at amazon.com. He enjoys his fiancée and designing board games; the latter can be downloaded at no charge from boardgamegeek.com.

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