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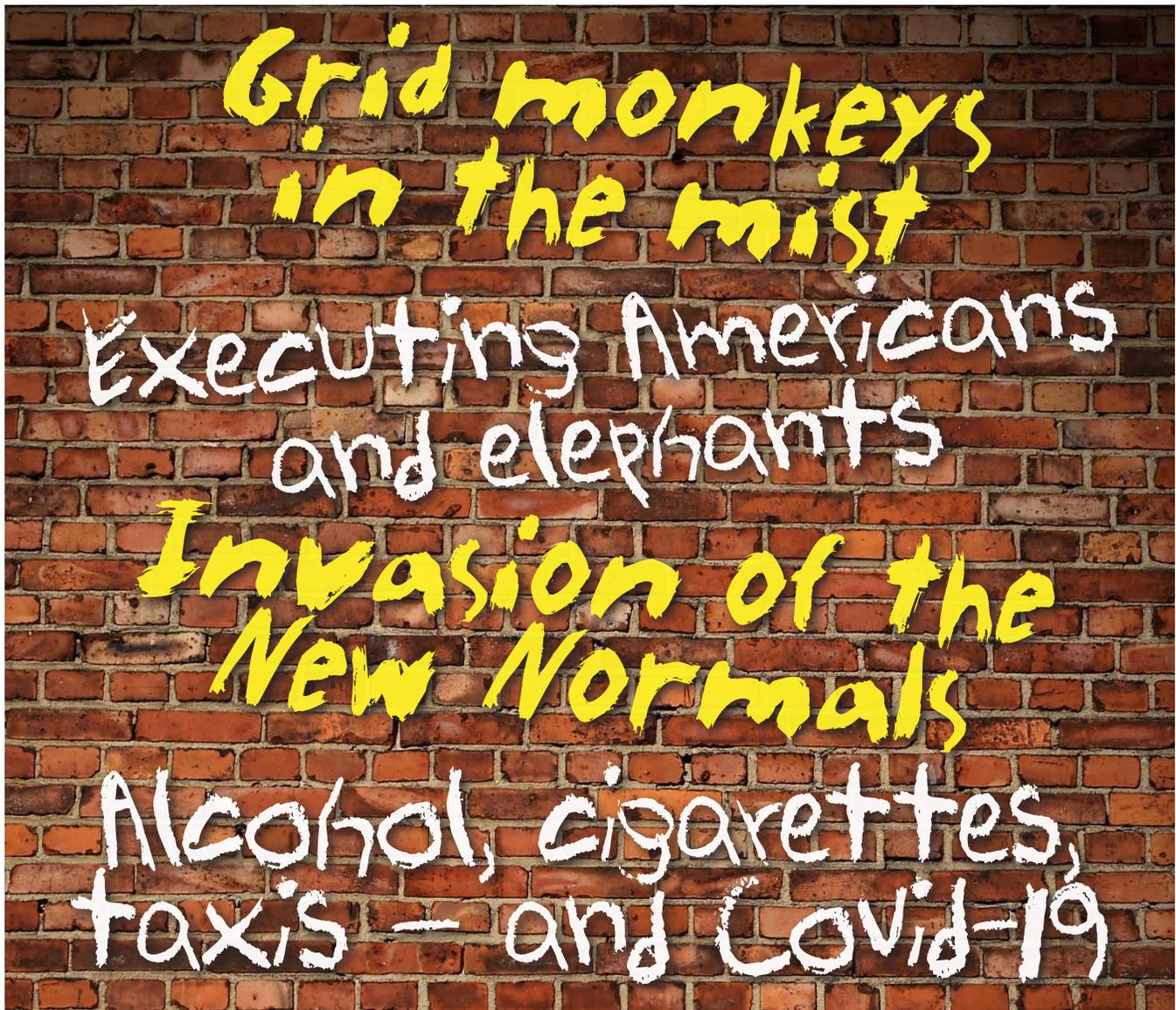
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Mid-August 2020



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# NO TRUE FRIENDS IN A RACE WAR

"By the time I arrived in downtown Oakland, California, the protests were peaceful. Young people marched and chanted against a backdrop of fresh graffiti and boarded-up windows. Most of their signs were scrawled with "DEFUND THE COPS" or "WHITE SILENCE IS VIOLENCE" or "BLACK LIVES MATTER". Perhaps a Marxist's power really does lie in repetition. A woman in a slow-walking Eldorado convertible, flanked by marchers, held up a sign that read: "POLICE BRUTALITY IS SMALL DICK ENERGY". Her phrase cuts to the heart of the issue - the male drive for dominance yields endless cruelty." - **JOE ALLEN** | PAGE 15

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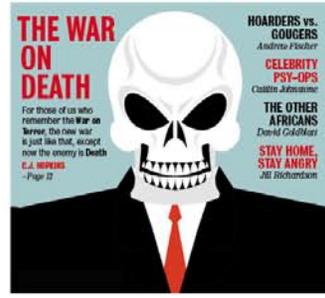


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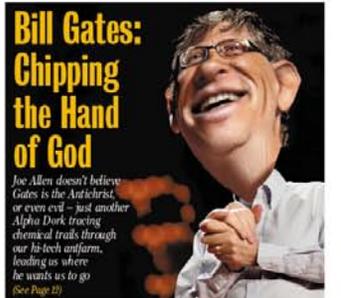


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# Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

Joe Allen doesn't believe Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil - just another Alpha Dark training chemical trails through our hi-tech uniform, leading us where he wants us to go. **(See Page 12)**

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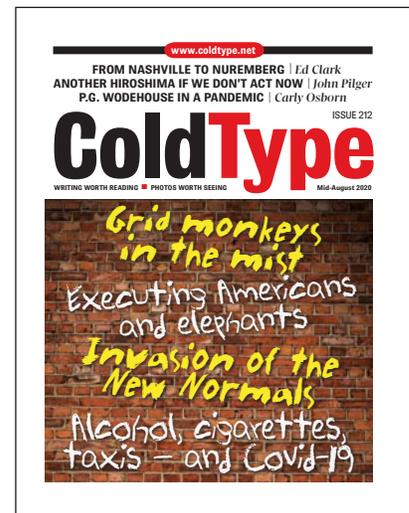
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Cover art: Roystudio / 123rf.com

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News | Views | Opinions

# Insights

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Photo: Jonathan Cutrer / Flickr.com



THEY'RE WATCHING: Surveillance drone operated by the US Customs Border Patrol on the Mexican border.

*Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick*

## How to hide from a drone

Drones of all sizes are being used by environmental advocates to monitor deforestation, by conservationists to track poachers, and by journalists and activists to document large protests. As a political sociologist who studies social movements and drones, I document a wide range of nonviolent and pro-social drone uses in my new book, *The Good*

*Drone*. I show that these efforts have the potential to democratise surveillance.

But when the Department of Homeland Security redirects large, fixed-wing drones from the US-Mexico border to monitor protests, and when towns experiment with using drones to test people for fevers, it's time to think about how many eyes are in the sky and how to avoid unwanted aerial surveillance.

One way that's within reach of nearly everyone is learning how to simply disappear from view.

Over the past decade there's been an explosion in the public's use of drones – everyday people with everyday tech doing interesting things. As drones enter already-crowded airspace, the Federal Aviation Administration is struggling to respond. The near future is likely to see even more of these devices in the sky, flown by an ever-growing cast of social, political and economic actors.

Public opinion about the use and spread of drones is still up in the air, but burgeoning drone use

# Insights

has sparked numerous efforts to curtail drones. These responses range from public policies exerting community control over local airspace, to the development of sophisticated jamming equipment and tactics for knocking drones out of the sky.

From startups to major defence contractors, there is a scramble to deny airspace to drones, to hijack drones digitally, to control drones physically and to shoot drones down. Anti-drone measures range from simple blunt force, 10-gauge shotguns, to the poetic: well-trained hawks.

Many of these anti-drone measures are expensive and complicated. Some are illegal. The most affordable – and legal – way to avoid drone technology is hiding.

**The first thing** you can do to hide from a drone is to take advantage of the natural and built environment. It's possible to wait for bad weather, since smaller devices like those used by local police have a hard time flying in high winds, dense fogs and heavy rains. Trees, walls, alcoves and tunnels are more reliable than the weather, and they offer shelter from the high-flying drones used by the Department of Homeland Security.

**The second thing** you can do is minimize your digital footprints. It's smart to avoid using wireless devices like mobile phones or GPS systems, since they have digital signatures that can reveal your location. This is useful for evading

drones, but is also important for avoiding other privacy-invading technologies.

**The third thing** you can do is confuse a drone. Placing mirrors on the ground, standing over broken glass, and wearing elaborate headgear, machine-readable blankets or sensor-jamming jackets can break up and distort the image a drone sees.

Mannequins and other forms of mimicry can confuse both on-board sensors and the analysts charged with monitoring the drone's video and sensor feeds.

Drones equipped with infrared sensors will see right through the mannequin trick, but are confused by tactics that mask the body's temperature. For example, a space blanket will mask significant amounts of the body's heat, as will simply hiding in an area that matches the body's temperature, like a building or sidewalk exhaust vent.

**The fourth, and most practical, thing** you can do to protect yourself from drone surveillance is to get a disguise. The growth of mass surveillance has led to an explosion in creative experiments meant to mask one's identity. But some of the smartest ideas are decidedly old-school and low-tech. Clothing is the first choice, because hats, glasses, masks and scarves go a long way toward scrambling drone-based facial-recognition software.

Your gait is as unique as your fingerprint. As gait-recognition software evolves, it will be impor-

tant to also mask the key pivot points used in identifying the walker. It may be that the best response is affecting a limp, using a minor leg brace or wearing extremely loose clothing.

Artists and scientists have taken these approaches a step further, developing a hoodie wrap that's intended to shield the owner's heat signature and to scramble facial recognition software, and glasses intended to foil facial recognition systems.

These innovations are alluring, but umbrellas may prove to be the most ubiquitous and robust tactic in this list. They're affordable, easy to carry, hard to see around and can be disposed of in a hurry. Plus you can build a high-tech one, if you want.

It would be nice to live in a world with fewer impositions on privacy, one in which law enforcement did not use small quadcopters and the Department of Homeland Security did not redeploy large Predator drones to surveil protesters. And, for people in some parts of the world, it would be nice not to associate the sound of a drone with impending missile fire. But given that those eyes are in the sky, it's good to know how to hide. **CT**

*Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick is Associate Professor of Political Sociology at the University of San Diego. He is the author of *The Good Drone: How Social Movements Democratize Surveillance*. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*

# Insights

Ronnie Kasrils

## Fidel Castro's legacy for Southern Africa

From the 1960s the *nom de guerre* of “Castro” was popular among freedom fighters in Southern Africa. Today the sons of many offspring of those guerrillas bear the name Fidel or Fidelis, in Africa, as in the Latina-speaking counties and elsewhere.

That 'sixties generation was immensely inspired by Fidel Castro Ruz's epic leadership of the Cuban revolution in overthrowing tyranny, confronting imperialism, transforming society and the historic lessons of international solidarity.

Generations since have learnt those motivational lessons, have studied in Cuba, continue to follow his legendary footsteps, in theory and practise, of one of the foremost revolutionaries of modern times. His life and legacy are intrinsically bound-up with Africa's destiny and the undying gratitude of its peoples along with the rest of humanity.

In Fidel's immortal words, after forcing the ignominious retreat of the racist South African military from Angola in 1988, “The history of Africa will be written as before and after Cuito Cuanavale”.

From 1975, Cuban internationalist forces under the direction of Commandante Fidel, had helped



Fidel Castro, arriving at MATS Terminal, Washington DC in 1959.

Photo: US Library of Congress

save the independence of emergent People's Angola from those same racist invaders and the CIA-backed counter-revolutionary bandits.

Becoming aware of these historic developments from his prison cell through secret means, Nelson Mandela wrote, “It was the first time that a country had come from another continent not to take something away, but to help Africans to achieve their freedom”.

Assisting Angola over the following years those self-same reactionaries finally met their fate at the five-month long battle for Cuito Cuanavale, which sent them packing.

The outcome was Angola being free of foreign forces from

that time on; the subsequent independence of Namibia from Pretoria's occupation in 1990; followed by freedom for South Africa in 1994.

Mandela stated that victory at Cuito Cuanavale “destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor and inspired the fighting masses of South Africa”.

I had been privileged to have been present in Havana, as member of a South African Communist Party (SACP) delegation in 1988, when Fidel briefed us at a huge topographical map of the southern part of Angola, as to how that epic Cuito Cuanavale battle had been won.

I was privileged when at the presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela, in Pretoria on March 27, 1994, the greatest approval for a foreign guest by the cheering masses, was reserved for the legendary Cuban leader. “Fidel! Fidel!” And “Cuba! Cuba!” They chanted in unison.

I was yet again privileged to escort Fidel on a naval ship out of Cape Town in September, 1998, to Robben Island, when he visited Nelson Mandela's one-time prison cell, and he was so visibly moved.

It is the privilege of Southern Africa's people to have shared trenches, trained and studied in Cuba, received unstinting aid in countless ways not only on the battlefields, including presently that of the gallant Cuban health workers in the struggle against Covid-19. This of course is the experience of people around the

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# Insights

world, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but amazingly, too, in European countries such as Italy. As it does elsewhere in the Caribbean and Latin America, Cuba continues to send medical professionals to Africa – over 50,000 Cuban doctors world-wide including in 32 African countries.

When we launched our armed struggle in the 1960s there was a popular song we composed to a calypso beat, “Take the country the Castro way!” By the time freedom and independence came through bloody struggles, we came to realise so much more about the examples Cuba provided in people’s living conditions, health care and education, housing and social welfare, overcoming colonial backwardness and inequalities, the provision of security for the people and defence of the revolution. In the enormous global struggle against imperialist domination, exploita-

tion and racism; military aggression and counter-revolutionary regime-change; capitalism’s gargantuan divide between wealth for the privileged few and crushing poverty for billions; horrific diseases such as Covid-19 in the wake of environmental peril; those words, “Take the country the Castro way”, are alive in our hearts. The song inspires hope, motivates united action, signposts Fidel’s immortal teachings and vision of the future.

We salute Fidel this August 13, the 94th anniversary of his birth. Fidel will live on in Africa, as everywhere else, as an everlasting icon of liberation in all its forms. **CT**

*Ronnie Kasrils is a veteran of the anti-apartheid struggle. He was chief of military intelligence in the ANC’s armed wing, a former government minister (1994-2008) and is the author of several books on the liberation struggle.*

unimaginable just six months ago. You’ve watched colleagues die. You’ve worried that you may be bringing death home to your families.

If you work in health care but don’t interact with pandemic patients, the months since March haven’t exactly been easy street either. In April alone, 1.4-million health care workers lost their jobs, as virus-free Americans delayed and cancelled appointments and elective procedures.

If, on the other hand, you swivel your day away in a corporate health care executive suite, these difficult and horrific months of Covid-19 have been among the most rewarding – financially – you’ve ever seen. The “vast majority” of health care companies, *Axios* reports, “are reporting profits that many people assumed would not have been possible as the pandemic raged on”.

Health insurers are leading the way, enjoying earnings, as a *New York Times* analysis puts it, “double what they were a year ago”. UnitedHealth, for instance, registered \$6.7-billion in 2020 second-quarter profits, up from \$3.4-billion in last year’s second quarter.

What explains this huge insurance industry profit spike? The simple story: Insurers like UnitedHealth, Aetna, and Anthem are continuing to collect their regular premiums from the Americans they insure, but they’re paying out far less – as the pandemic rages on – for claims on normal maladies.

Now the Affordable Care

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Sam Pizzigati

## The risks and rewards of US healthcare

**H**ow’s pandemic life been going for you? If you work in America’s health care industry, that depends. That totally depends.

If you happen to provide health care services to actual

Covid-19 patients – as a nurse or a doctor, an orderly or a physician’s assistant – this has been the year from hell. Amid the worst world-wide pandemic in over a century, you’ve been working long, intense, chaotic hours. You’ve watched patients die at rates

# Insights

Act – Obamacare – does have a provision that requires insurers to spend at least 80 percent of the premium dollars they collect on providing direct health care services. If they miss that target, they have to rebate dollars to the businesses and individuals they insure. Those rebates, unfortunately, seldom amount to much.

One reason: Many of the giant health insurers don't just sell insurance. They also control networks of doctors and own health services firms like pharmacy benefit managers. These auxiliary companies charge – and overcharge – their parent health insurer for the health care services they provide. These relationships, in effect, let health insurers launder their profits and sidestep the Obamacare profit limits.

A second reason the Obamacare rebates provision has been less than an effective check on corporate greed: Health insurers can delay paying any rebates to customers for up to three years. In the meantime, their excessive profits can trigger one windfall after another for the CEOs who engineer them.

At CVS Health, the corporation that owns Aetna, CEO Larry Merlo pocketed \$36.5-million last year, up from \$21.9-million the year before. Merlo took home 790 times the pay of his company's most typical worker.

The lowest-paid CEO among America's seven biggest health insurers, Anthem chief Gail Boudreaux, grabbed a healthy \$15.5-million in 2019, the equiva-

lent of just under \$300,000 a week.

If current pandemic-time trends continue, top execs like Merlo and Boudreaux will end up doing even better in 2020. But they might not do quite as well as their counterparts in Big Pharma.

The Trump administration is currently shovelling cash to the nation's biggest drug makers – for the development of coronavirus vaccines – at a furious pace. If the vaccines these companies are developing and testing end up flubbing, the drug-makers get to keep all that cash. If the vaccines work, these companies will get still more cash – since their deals with the White House entitle them to register patents they can exploit for years to come.

The most visible of these corona vaccine companies has so far been Moderna, a Massachusetts-based start-up founded ten years ago. The federal government, notes economist Dean Baker from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has signed Moderna to nearly \$1-billion in contracts, \$483 million for pre-clinical research and initial testing and another \$472-million for advanced testing. In the process, notes Baker, the federal government is taking all the risk.

“If Moderna's vaccine turns out to be ineffective”, he points out, “the government will be out the money, not Moderna”.

Already “in” the money: Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel. His company's soaring share price

now has him a billionaire three times over.

How can we put the kibosh on this sort of shameless profiteering? We need, no more than ever, systemic change in health care, starting with Medicare for All.

In the shorter term, legislation along the line of the “Make Billionaires Pay Act” that Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) have just introduced would speak directly to Corporate America's pandemic jackpots.

This new legislation would, if enacted, place a one-time 60 percent tax on the \$732-billion in new wealth that 467 top US billionaires have added to their fortunes since the corona lockdown in March.

Some of those billionaires – most notably Tesla CEO Elon Musk – have openly defied the pandemic's public health protections. Musk reopened his flagship California Tesla plant in a direct challenge to local safety rules. His defiance of these rules has helped Musk triple his personal fortune since the pandemic began. Under the new Senate legislation, he would face a richly deserved wealth tax of \$27.5-billion. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His recent books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*.

# Insights

Sonali Kolhatkar

## Trump's presidency is a 'death cult'

When President Donald Trump was challenged by *Axios* national political correspondent Jonathan Swan to respond to the fact that, “a thousand Americans are dying a day” due to Covid-19, the president responded as though the grim tally was perfectly acceptable, saying, “They are dying, that’s true. And it is what it is”. While observers were aghast at the callousness of his statement, it should not have surprised us. Trump had warned that the death toll would be high, and he had asked us months ago to get used to the idea. In late March, the White House Coronavirus Task Force had projected that 100,000 to 240,000 Americans would die from the virus. Rather than unveil an aggressive plan to tackle the spread and prevent the projected mortality figures, the president had said, “I want every American to be prepared for the hard days that lie ahead”.

The *New York Times* saw this warning as a contradiction to Trump’s stance in February and early March when he had said that “we have it totally under control”, and “it’s going to be just fine”. The paper seemed to heave a sigh of relief that a few weeks later, “the president appeared to

understand the severity of the potentially grave threat to the country” But the report’s authors failed to grasp that Trump is willing to accept anything – including mass deaths – in service of his political career.

In fact, mass death appears to be part of Trump’s reelection strategy as per a July 30 *Vanity Fair* report on the administration’s strategy to contain the pandemic. The investigative piece explained that Trump’s adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner was part of a group of White House staffers that corresponded frequently to discuss the rapidly spreading virus. According to a public health expert who was described as being “in frequent contact with the White House’s official coronavirus task force”, one of the members of Kushner’s team had concluded that, “because the virus had hit blue states hardest, a national plan was unnecessary and would not make sense politically”. The unnamed expert told *Vanity Fair*, “The political folks believed that because it was going to be relegated to Democratic states, that they could blame those governors, and that would be an effective political strategy”.

If it is true that Kushner embraced the idea of Covid-19

deaths as part of a political strategy for Trump’s reelection, there can be no clearer evidence that the Trump presidency fits the definition of a “death cult”.

But Trump’s team is also deeply inept, and its macabre tactics appear to have backfired. If Kushner expected a highly contagious virus to follow his political rules and relegate itself to Democratic-run states, he was proven very wrong, very quickly with Republican-run states like Florida, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, and Arizona being among the hardest hit.

For years, the Republican Party has cast itself as a self-righteous force for morality, embraced the “pro-life” movement, and claimed to align with “Christian values.” But just as Trump – arguably the most criminal of all US presidents – has adopted a mantle of “law and order” with no hint of irony, the GOP as a whole has also shown time and again that its embrace of morality and law is a purely political tool. Now, as the nation grapples with mass deaths from a disease that a Republican president spectacularly and willfully failed to contain, conservative politicians appear willing to simply accept it. Their silence is deafening compared to the angry denunciations many Republican lawmakers hurled at President Barack Obama over his response to the Ebola epidemic – a crisis that resulted in a nationwide total of 11 infections and two deaths.

Ultimately it may be Trump’s own base that suffers as it internalises the president’s mixed and

# Insights

confused messaging on ignoring social distancing guidelines, eschewing protective masks, swallowing hydroxychloroquine preventatively, and even accepting the inevitability of their own death (because “it is what it is” according to Trump). Even after more than 150,000 Americans have died from the virus, a majority of Republicans trust Trump’s coronavirus comments.

When Trump loyalist and former presidential candidate Herman Cain died of Covid-19, testing positive 11 days after attending Trump’s Tulsa, Oklahoma, rally without wearing a mask, his death did not change minds. The 74-year-old was reportedly on a ventilator during his last days, but conservatives are vehemently opposed to “politicising” Cain’s death. Right-wing commentator and talk show host Ben Shapiro slammed those who made a connection between Cain’s refusal to take the virus seriously and his own infection and death. Shapiro said, “The kind of dunking on people after they die of Covid is pretty gross”. Certainly, Cain did not deserve to be vilified for his own sad fate. But his death offers a cautionary tale about the dangers of the Trump death cult – a point Shapiro refused to acknowledge.

We should hardly be surprised at this acceptance of death as inevitable. For years, conservatives have responded to gun violence with angry renunciations of any links to gun proliferation or lax gun control laws, offering instead “thoughts and prayers”. The one exception where Repub-



Photo: Wikimedia

GRIM TALLY: President Trump.

licans express outrage is over the “death” of fetal cells inside women’s bodies – indicating that the fight is less about “murder”, as the anti-abortionists like to call it, than it is about controlling women’s bodies. By and large, the nation’s right-wing factions have for years wanted us to accept mass deaths and preventable mortality as a price for our “freedom”. They expect the same during a pandemic.

But we do not have to all be members of the death cult. According to a new study, states where people live the longest also have the strictest environmental laws, stronger gun control and stronger protections for minorities. These are also states that tend to be run by Democrats. California, for example, which has among the most stringent protections for minorities and the environment, also has one of the highest average life expectancy rates in the United States.

Covid-19 infections and deaths are hardly inevitable, and Americans are starting to see it. A Texas woman named Stacey

Nagy penned an obituary for her late husband David that has garnered widespread attention. She wrote in her local paper that, “Family members believe David’s death was needless. They blame his death and the deaths of all the other innocent people, on Trump, [Gov. Greg] Abbott and all the politicians who did not take this pandemic seriously and were more concerned with their popularity and votes than lives”. Nagy also blamed “the many ignorant, self centred and selfish people who refused to follow the advice of the medical professionals, believing their ‘right’ not to wear a mask was more important than killing innocent people”.

Perhaps the only way out of Trump’s death cult is to speak out as Nagy has done.

The *Washington Post*, which interviewed Nagy, explained, “Feeling helpless, Stacey approached her husband’s obituary as a chance to speak out about how she felt her country had failed her family”. While Trump’s most loyal supporters might choose death in his service, the rest of us need not be bound by their blind, cultish and suicidal ideology. **CT**

**Sonali Kolhatkar** is the founder, host and executive producer of *Rising Up With Sonali*, a television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations KPFF, KPFA, and affiliates. This article was produced by *Economy for All*, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Joe Allen

# Grid monkeys in the mist

*Humans have climbed higher than any primate on Earth  
– mostly for their own entertainment, but also for yours*

Last spring, the live entertainment industry vanished in the blink of an eye. Across the world, millions of careers were vaporised. As late as February, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, America boasted nearly 2.5-million jobs in arts, entertainment, and recreation. By May, that number had dropped below 1.2-million. As the panic intensified, every touring show came to a screeching halt in the middle of the road. A researcher from Pollstar's Concert Hotwire told me that there were over 3,500 artists on tour when the hammer fell. A booming \$26-billion global industry was reduced to fleets of parked tour buses and useless gear crammed into warehouses. Entire productions were left hanging in empty venues. A few stayed up for months, collecting dust. From well-paid production managers to cleaning crews who scraped for change, pretty much everyone was told to hit the bricks.

Thank God for gov'mint cheez – if you could get your hands on it – but it looks like that cow's getting milked dry. Of the many riggers,



Photo: Alpha Rigger One

**HELLRAISER:** Pinheads design a cumbersome rig. Grouchy grid monkeys make it happen.

touring techs, and stagehands I've spoken to recently, some haven't received a single drop from Uncle Sam's withered teat. Rumour has it that mass gatherings won't be held again for another a year or two, maybe longer. So now what?

Pop stars are still singing for

virtual audiences, but as for the workers backstage, our former lives are in suspended animation. Sometimes, it evokes a haunting sense of emptiness. As a rigger, I don't miss the performances. Not really. With massive pop shows, the talent onstage is inversely proportional to the weight in the air. But man, do I miss the mark-outs in the morning, the view from the ceiling, and the fellowship at night.

The first thing you have to understand about riggers is that we take pride in our work. This isn't just a job for us. It's a complicated craft with a rich tradition. Rigging takes years to master. If we didn't know what we were doing, believe me, our employers wouldn't let us climb up here and do this – if they had any idea what we were actually doing, anyway. So just relax. And stand back.

Imagine the average large production from a tour rigger's perspective. The sun's coming up. You had two hours of sleep on the ride in from the last city. The goal is to get 50 tons of truss, intelligent lights, audio arrays, LED video



**BOOKWORM ON THE BEAM:** "Narrow is the way that leads to life – broad is the path to destruction".

walls, and an automated rigging system into the air in time for soundcheck. Every chain should be up by the five hour mark. You know what, we're off to a late start. Get 'em up in under four.

Make the band happy, man – at least happier than your nagging, anal retentive audio tech, who just sneezed the last of his common sense right off the mirror. And watch out, because your production manager is hungover again, and it's literally your fault.

The 50 tons of gear will hang from 100 chain-hoist motors, attached to the arena's rafters, most well over 100ft high. (In some cities, it's over 200ft.) Your local rigging crew, many of whom you've never met, will climb out, send in

ropes, and pull every up chain, one way or another. To get each point in the right place – some time today, dude, holy shit – you'll need to balance exactitude with time constraints. You have to weigh necessity against safety.

Roadcases full of steel are rolling in from the loading dock. There are 20 up-riggers and 10 ground-riggers from the local crew standing around, waiting for instruction. There are 30 some-odd touring techs watching from the sidelines. They command a 70-strong army of impatient stagehands. No one can do their jobs until you do yours. Better make this good, son, because in this cutthroat business, one false move can mean your gig.

Coveted as the tour rigger's position may be – hot damn, I loved it – walking that razor's edge is just half the fun. The real magic happens up top.

Yep, rigging a rock show as a local feels as good as it looks. Every time you climb a stage tower or walk out onto an I-beam, there's this surge of animal energy. You can actually get high pulling up a 200lbs reeved chain, rope in hand, balanced on a six-inch beam a hundred feet in the air, staying in sync with your simian partner, toes hanging over the edge. You feel the life in every breath.

There's something primal in climbing angle iron upside-down,

relying on taut limbs that evolved for arboreal manoeuvres. It feels natural. Rappelling in fast after a long day puts your body in tune with the equations that underpin the universe. Especially if there's cold beer waiting for you down there – or, best case scenario, a good lay. During those fleeting peak moments, you don't just have a job in rock 'n' roll – you fucking are rock 'n' roll.

If riggers are arrogant jerks, on rare occasion, it's because working at heights demands serious skill and responsibility. If you drop a 22oz steel shackle from a hundred feet, it could punch a hole in some stagehand's skull and let all the smoke out. So screwing up isn't an option. Got it?

Excellence requires a heroic paradox. It's contradictory, but it works. Mostly.

An up-rigger does everything exactly right, every time. And when he doesn't – which happens way too often – it's his duty to whip himself until he never makes another mistake. That's why accidents rarely happen (knock on wood). But when they do happen – and they always will – you've gotta put a boot up somebody's ass. That's just the law of the jungle gym.

There's an integrity to entertainment rigging – especially up in the rafters – that you won't find in many fields. The sheer physicality makes bullshitting impossible, at least in the long run. It simply isn't one of those “fake it til ya make it” gigs that attract morons and grifters. Not unless you can stomach horrific accidents. To cite a controversial example, when you meet a fit woman swaggering across the high steel, you can gen-

## ***The guy just hopped over the catwalk rail, marched out onto the black box beams – 90ft over the concrete floor***

erally assume she's solid to the core. Rigging forces you to prove your strength.

This critical attitude extends to the wider society. Riggers despise people with no work ethic. We would gripe about it all the time in hammocks under the stage, or over beers in the tourbus's back lounge. We hate laziness and complacency. And we can't stand a phony.

Now pass that over here, will ya? It's a pipe, not a microphone.

**B**ecause I suffer from a genetic disorder called “aching sentimentality”, I miss my steel-bound brothers and sisters even more than I do the work. Riggers develop the sort of camaraderie you might find in a fire hall or a mercenary squad. You can't trust these guys with your wife, but you can trust them with your life.

Local riggers are either snarling lone wolves or they travel in bands of thrill-seeking gypsies, so you meet all kinds of misfits. Depending on the city, you find various combinations of white, black, and Latino, with all the attendant synthesis, conflict, and off-colour jokes.

The culture is untamed and beautiful. On any given day, you might find a macho farm boy,

a knot-tying bondage freak, a hardass from the 'hood, a shell-shocked war vet, a tough chick in striped knee socks, or a right-wing metrosexual on the beam beside you. Every local crew is an exclusive cabal where ability is the watchword and weirdness is the norm.

**O**f all the manoeuvres you'll see up in the steel, ghostwalking is the wildest. The practice is borderline spiritual in its intensity and potential repercussions. A ghostwalker simply steps out onto a beam, high in the air – with no safety whatsoever – and puts one foot in front of the other. Few human beings are capable of doing it on command. Even fewer can make it look good.

Maybe it's just coincidence, but the three best ghostwalkers I've ever known – men who can glide down a six-inch beam like a cat – also hold a supernaturalist philosophy. One is a damn Yankee, twenty years older than me. Back in the '90s, he was drumming for Debbie Harry. These days, he techs the drum kit for Metallica.

I met him on the low steel in Nashville's main arena, years before any safety system was installed. The guy just hopped over the catwalk rail, marched out onto the black box beams – 90ft over the concrete floor – and tossed in his rope tail.

“Hey, kid”, he barked, “whaddaya waiting on? The work's out here”.

It was stunning, for sure, but he really shocked me when he later confessed to loving the white-toothed televangelist, Joel Osteen.

“Are you serious?!”



**ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE:** You're never too old to play on the jungle gym -- but you CAN be too clumsy.

“Life is full of horror and negativity, Joe. At least Osteen brings something positive into the world”.

Incidentally, the world-famous Nik Walenda, who recently walked a 1,800ft tightrope over the crater of an active volcano called “The Mouth of Hell,” is also a diehard fundamentalist who – for the love of God – also follows Joel Osteen.

Quite a few men have died proving themselves in the air. In response, OSHA now requires anyone working above 6ft to wear a harness. But boys will be boys. There’s tremendous value in real-

izing human potential for its own sake, however senseless it appears to the outside world.

The best steel-climber I know is my brother from another mother. We grew into manhood together – however reluctantly – bouncing from one adventure to the next. Hippie dens in Minneapolis. Waterfalls in Oregon. Shroom tea on a California cliffside. The cursed eclipse in Dallas. Bike rides through Miami ghettos. Pints in London pubs. Ancient shrines in southern France.

While building a stage in Flushing Meadows, Queens, I saw this African lion walk a 15ft plan bar – a steel tube, 3 inches in diameter – at 50ft up, his arms out like wings, cawing like a bird. In arenas, I’ve seen him zig-zag from one end of the steel grid to the other, a hundred feet up, like he was strolling to the local bodega. The last time we worked together, he literally leapt from truss to truss across a European mother grid, grinning from ear to ear like a kid hopping creek stones.

The soul is strong with this one. As a boy, he was raised by a Baptist preacher in the Deep South, who turned him on to the Holy Spirit. As a young man, he ventured out to the liberated edge of pagan mysticism. Throughout his journey across the planet, my friend has never strayed from the magical path. He just steps across the clouds, one foot in front of the other.

In circles down South, the next generation’s best steel-climber is a country boy, ten years younger than me. I’ve watched him walk the four-inch spreaders in Nashville’s arena, 107ft up. I’ve seen him underclimb the curved I-beams in Knoxville’s Civic Coliseum – 70ft over certain death – with pure Zen in his eyes, swinging upside-down like a badass gibbon. The kid’s whip smart, crazy as hell, and – wouldn’t you know it – a devout Christian.

A couple of years ago, our wild child made national news. The smarmiest headline was “Man Lets Jesus Take the Wheel and Truck Flips 5 Times”, written by the self-proclaimed “progressive secular humanist” Michael Stone. This hot

take was published at Patheos, a left-wing Christian site.

Displaying his nauseating blend of progressive sensitivity and Christian charity, Stone concluded, “Bottom line: An intoxicated man in Tennessee let Jesus take the wheel, with predictable consequences”. In the unflattering mugshot that follows, we see a tear under the culprit’s eye. I wonder if Michael Stone has ever considered the sort of pain that pushes a man to guzzle whiskey, sniff uncut cocaine, and haul ass into the void? Has Stone ever lost his mother to tragedy, or endured separation from his wife and son?

To be fair, though, it really is a hilarious story. When our wayward ghostwalker told me his side, he quipped, “You either do cocaine til it’s gone, or it does you til you’re gone”. He insists that the police report was inaccurate. For one thing, the truck flipped seven times, not five. But he admits to closing his eyes and hitting the gas.

“Afterward, I looked up and saw angels”. For a time, he was reduced to tears and speaking in tongues. “Once I recovered, I simply gave God glory for my miraculous survival as they put me in the back of the car. ... I didn’t deserve to live”. But he did live. And he still keeps the faith while climbing to the sky.

Backstage work has its kicks, but no dream job is perfect. As a local, my least favourite duty is shooting spotlight during the show. You have to actually watch the ... ahem ... “talent” on display. Every second of it. If the CIA had known about this form of torture, they could’ve saved money on all those water-

## ***The crowd can’t help but sing along. Their wallets empty out as their heads are filled with vapid propaganda***

boards, and promoters could’ve cut labour costs.

Disgruntled spot operators compare the task to *A Clockwork Orange*, when Alex is forced to watch awful videos with his eyes held open by metal forceps. Some nights you’ll hear a spot-op on the headset yelling, “It’s a sin! It’s a sin! It’s a sin!”

By aiming a bulky spotlight at the Rascal Flatts for two hours – or Selena Gomez, or R Kelly, or Katy Perry, or neo-NKOTB, or Kings of Leon, or (shivers up my spine) DC Talk – you’re exposing yourself to repetitive, brain-numbing tunes with no PPE whatsoever. I’ve had earworms crawling around my skull for weeks afterward. Honestly, you’d be better off taste-testing uranium at a nuclear plant.

Not everyone feels this way, of course. Many stagehands and touring techs will wax poetic about adding their small part to a worldwide production. In their noblest moments, they explain that bringing tremendous joy to so many people satisfies a deep need to do meaningful work.

To which I say, “I guess so. But this show still sucks.”

Many nights I’ve leaned on the catwalk rail, burning a joint,

watching some robotic pop star go through the motions for the thousandth time. The nebulous, smile-pocked blob undulates before their exalted idol, smartphones held aloft. I see the culmination of thousands upon thousands of man-hours, woman-hours, and machine-hours down there. A gorgeous lighting design. An impeccable audio focus. The intricate movements of automated truss moving from one geometric configuration to the next.

All of this technical excellence for a postmod tribal totem doing the orgy porgy onstage. This android belts out lyrics that are so idiotic – yet so damn memorable – every line must’ve been generated by neuro-linguistic programmers. The crowd can’t help but sing along. Their wallets empty out as their heads are filled with vapid propaganda:

*Be free. Embrace your vices. Live for one another. Do your own thing. Make love. Make war (on hate). Make duck face for selfie.*

My eyes roll until I’m dizzy. What time is it, anyway?

Then I’ll look over to find a fellow rigger completely entranced, smiling, bobbing his head in pure bliss. Or maybe it’s a stagehand dancing her heart out. In those moments, I understand that life is about sharing happiness, whatever form it may take. I realise I’m just a sardonic killjoy, and that the human community, starved for pleasure, deserves satisfaction – with or without my participation.

Then again, other times I’ve looked over and seen co-workers nodding out from too much heroin. So maybe some joys are healthier than others.

I mean, what if hypno-pop really



**BEHIND THE CURTAIN:** Warrior and the Wizard make the magic happen.

does make the populace dumber? What if the accelerating cultural transitions from the Beatles to the Backstreet Boys to Barack Obama to Donald Trump are as seamless as they appear to be? What if pop culture is engineered to keep us obsessed with synthetic stars instead of understanding the complexity of our social constellations?

Seriously, how long before we reach peak Idiocracy, and people just gather to watch a giant, jiggy butt passing gas on the big screen? They'd never notice the electrodes in their own rear ends, draining their life force away. Vital questions, I suppose. But every night, I'd ground myself with the same thought: The paycheck will clear.

Nowadays, we're humming the chorus in the unemployment line. Mass gatherings are banned until further notice.

In fact, the only up-coming concert I'm aware of is an epidemiological experiment to be conducted

on August 22. German scientists from Martin Luther University will stuff 4,000 (vid-negative) fans into Leipzig Arena to watch Tim Bendzko play his schmaltzy tunes. Each individual will be slathered in florescent hand sanitiser and have their exact position tracked via contact-tracing devices.

Researchers hope to uncover the patterns by which germs spread through crowded venues, with the ultimate goal of creating a super-safe New Normal. Maybe social engineers can also analyse spending habits and mating behaviours, and finally quantify the bar-to-urinal pipeline.

If it's gonna be years before the touring machine gets back on the road, the most competent people

will probably shift to other careers. One of the sharpest riggers I know is now crafting custom guitar pedalboards. As much as he loves the steel, he ain't looking back.

Salaried bureaucrats have plenty of time to invent more tedious rules for the replacements. When shows finally come back, arena floors will be flooded with clueless goobers wearing shiny new hard hats, hi-viz vests, and expressionless PPE burkas, eager to smash thumbs with mallets and crush each other with roadcases. Up top, you'll find greenhorn riggers tangled in their mandatory safety gear, ready to rain carabiners and shackle pins on the hapless ground-pounders below.

Should my worst fears be realised, there won't be enough bright minds left to raise the collective IQ to a reasonable average. Due to stagnant wages, negligent supervisors, and increasingly atrophied brains, that scene was already popping up all over the country.

In my experience, there's a high correlation between heavy-handed regulation and decreasing competence. If you want to cultivate strong, independent workers, there's a sweet spot somewhere between black-lunged coalminers and self-driving trucks.

It's one thing to provide prophylactics. It's another to cut off our balls. But those are concerns for another day. For now, us grid monkeys are left sitting on our feet-hands. If all else fails, we can always climb back into the trees. **CT**

**COMING IN PART TWO**  
 Pop iconoclasm, insectoid hierarchies, cross-cultural chaos, and enough booze to kill a stone mason. In the next issue of ColdType, we'll duck backstage to join the tech ants on a tourbus

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he's based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels. His website is [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz)*

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David Niddrie

# Alcohol, cigarettes, taxis – and Covid-19

*South Africa started its fight against coronavirus really well, then the politicians discovered how easy it was to foul it all up*

It may be too early to tell, but tobacco, alcohol and taxis will probably be the enduring symbols of South Africa's Covid-19 experience – all of them entirely negative for South Africans, but particularly for President Cyril Ramaphosa.

South Africa's reaction to the arrival of Covid-19 (carried by affluent South Africans returning from holiday in Italy – at the time the pandemic's global epicentre) in early March started well: within days Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster, imposing a comprehensive six-week lockdown, one of the most extreme in the world, complete with bans on the sale of all tobacco-based products (including nicotine patches) and alcohol.

To offset the massive impact of wages lost from even a temporary closure of the economy, Ramaphosa's government introduced a grant payable to registered workers, while upping social grants and expanding access to the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

The best and the brightest of the country's world class scientists were invited to join various



Photo: GovernmentZA/Flickr.com

**SAFETY FIRST:** South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa addresses the nation on the Covid-19 crisis.

government advisory committees – and, unusually, the government seemed to be listening to their advice.

Medically, it followed what was increasingly the standard global procedure, using the lockdown-driven delay in cases to develop ICU capacity and to procure equipment – particularly ventilators (local automotive assembly plants stepped in to retool their plants to begin ventilator manufacture), PPEs and other vital

equipment, in preparation for a projected June-July surge in cases. It looked impressive: at last a president who'd make us proud, instead of humiliating us in the eyes of the world.

Ramaphosa's popularity surged, buoyed by the first prosecutions of the kleptocrats who had wiped R4,9-trillion (US\$280-billion) off South Africa's GDP (more than a third), under his predecessor, Jacob Zuma. For several months, Ramaphosa was comfortably South Africa's most popular president since Nelson Mandela's father-of-the-nation period in the early 1990s.

Unfortunately Ramaphosa is not a detail person and has, since his time as head of the miners' union in the 1980s, been quick to delegate even the most key functions. Control over the fight against Covid-19 passed to the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), notionally a Cabinet sub-structure.

Several of the more assertive Cabinet Ministers on the NCCC are of the "never let a good crisis go to waste" school, and used the



Police enforce social distancing in Johannesburg's densely populated African migrant Hillbrow district.

pandemic to force through policies they had previously been unable to navigate through parliament.

The first was Trade and Industry Minister Ebrahim Patel, a droningly mediocre ex-textile worker trade unionist who attempted to restrict the sale of clothes to locally produced winter wear only. In a country with 30 percent pre-pandemic unemployment rate (it's now at round 42 percent), and possibly the world's highest Gini coefficient, the majority couldn't afford to indulge him: the regulation was quietly scrapped.

More crucially, Ramaphosa left policing the lockdown to Police Minister Bheki Cele, a craggy Christian fundamentalist who, in an earlier life as national police commissioner, reintroduced mili-



Photo: GovernmentZA/Flickr.com

**IN CHARGE?:** Police Minister Bheki Cele briefs media on Covid-19 regulations levels of compliance and adherence.

tary ranks to the police (removed as part of its post-apartheid demilitarisation) and routinely exhorted his "boys" to "shoot to kill". A teetotaler, he also seems to have been behind the alcohol ban.

In less than three months police, backed by the military, had arrested a world-beating 230,000 lockdown violators. They'd also killed 11 people. Only Nigerian and Kenyan police have killed more on the continent. The most horrifying of these killing was of Collins Khoza, a 40-year-old bakery worker, at about the same time as police in the US killed George Floyd. Khoza's "crime"? Drinking a beer in the sun, on his own property, in Alexandra, Johannesburg's oldest black township.

Drinking wasn't banned; selling alcohol was. But the military patrol that spotted him, barged into his house, found another quart of beer in the fridge, poured it over Khoza

and, when he objected, punched and kicked him into unconsciousness. He died three hours later. A military inquiry cleared the troops (at Khoza's wife's request, the courts intervened to order their suspension pending a full criminal investigation).

Cele was unapologetic. When lockdown regulations eased, he persuaded the NCCC to maintain the alcohol ban, arguing that it had led to a major drop in violent crime, murders, assaults and domestic violence. When it was lifted briefly in July, he persuaded the NCCC to have it re-imposed on the basis that the long-projected surge in Covid-19 cases was somehow driven by alcohol. As I write, the ban remains in force.

Paralleling Cele's anti-booze campaign, Cooperative Governance Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was pursuing her own hobby-horse, against smokers.

Although Dlamini-Zuma is the only one of Zuma's eight wives to have divorced him (another committed suicide), she remains politically close to the polygamous expresident. In 2018 she stood against Ramaphosa for the presidency of



**NO SMOKING:** Cooperative Governance Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

## Three surveys indicated that over 90 percent of smokers kept smoking – but paid up to five times more

the ruling African National Congress – thus effectively of the country – on a ticket strongly endorsed by the Zuma kleptocracy. She came close to winning (which says more about voter fraud in the ANC than it does about her popularity. Utterly uncharismatic and a poor political manager, she was known in exile circles in London pre-1990 as “Mother Gundy”). Ramaphosa kept her in government as an attempt at ANC unity.

Her Cabinet post as cooperative governance Minister made her ex-officio chair of the NCCC. She initially proffered the jaw-dropping argument that South Africa's 8-million smokers (about one in five adults) should be deprived of nicotine because smokers often shared cigarettes (“zols”), thereby potentially transmitted Covid-19. The Cabinet, which pretty much rubber-stamped any NCCC suggestion, accepted this non-explanation. When Ramaphosa announced that the smoking ban would be lifted as lockdown restrictions eased from level 5 to level 4, Dlamini-Zuma, one of three medical doctors in Ramaphosa's Cabinet, managed to block him, amending her position to a marginally more refined stance: smokers were at greater risk of contracting Covid-19 because of their lower,

smoking induced, lung capacity. This would add to the possibility of overwhelming the capacity of the country's medical system to handle the Covid-19 load, thus potentially massively increasing the death toll.

It sounded better than the “sharing zols” argument. But it was no more scientifically based. The government's scientific advisers began to grumble publicly about the lack of science behind many of the lockdown regulations – almost all are in the medical professions, so are no great fans of smoking or of alcohol abuse, but they are scientists, used to basing decisions on fact, not untested opinion.

And the ban didn't work anyway: three separate surveys indicated that well over 90 percent of smokers kept smoking – but paying up to five times more for illegal cigarettes, costing the government at least R5-billion (US\$287-million) in lost taxes

The crunch came when the biggest of South Africa's cigarette producers demonstrated in court papers that the ban had freed up precisely 16 of the Covid-19 ICU beds that might otherwise have been occupied by smokers – out of 2 000 extra beds added to deal with an expected pandemic such, most of which remain unused.

Facing court cases the government would lose, and with the alcohol and tobacco bans costing his government in lost taxes nearly half the value of the US\$4,3-billion IMF loan it took in July, Ramaphosa finally intervened. In a carefully orchestrated leak as *ColdType* went to bed, Ramaphosa let it be known that “the NCCC (ie:

Dlamini-Zuma and Cele) recommends lifting the bans”.

But if personal hobby horsing were responsible for two key aspects of the Covid-19 period, the motive behind the third was pure political expediency.

Despite the obvious pandemic risks of cramming 12-15 people into 11 enclosed cubic metres, eased lockdown restrictions in July included allowing South Africa’s primary transport platform, mini-bus taxis to resume carrying full loads. It did so as Covid-19 cases were surging in the two most populous provinces, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, driving the country into the fifth position globally on case-count (South Africa’s death toll is low – about a quarter of the UK’s, despite having 1,5 times as many cases).

Privately-owned minibus taxis account for about 75 percent of South Africa’s commuter travel. So when the owners threatened to pull their vehicles indefinitely unless the state dropped all load



Masked commuters in a minibus taxi in Johannesburg, South Africa.

restrictions, the state did just that.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize at least had the grace to look shamefaced when he announced that the taxis would “have to travel with their windows open”.

Management of the pandemic has come at a cost for Ramaphosa, if not for Cele and Dlamini-Zuma:

in three months his approval ratings have plummeted 20 percent. They’re still sitting at around 60, but down from his April high. **CT**

*David Niddrie is a Johannesburg-based former journalist, who’ll resume work as a media consultant once the pandemic allows him to.*

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Tony Sutton

# The people need to take back control

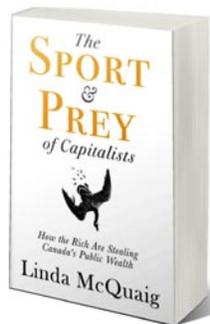
*Recent Canadian governments thought it would make sense to place the economy in the hands of the private marketplace. Bad decision*

It's painful to recount the times in recent decades that we've been fed the neoliberal mantra that privatising public services is more cost effective than allowing them to remain in the hands of 'spendthrift' governments.

To see the unreality of those claims of corporate fiscal superiority, we need look no further than Britain, where various governments have, over the past few decades, sold essential public utilities cheaply to companies that promised greater efficiency and lower prices. Unfortunately, as the Brit consumers soon discovered, the private sector is much better at raising prices, slashing services, pigging on profits, and squealing for government support when, inevitably, things go wrong.

The situation on the other side of the Atlantic is worse, US leaders having convinced their guileless citizens that they live in a classless society in which unions are the devil's creation, socialism is for commie bastards, taxation is evil, and a half-decent public health service is just a liberal wet dream.

Canada is different, we are



## **THE SPORT & PREY OF CAPITALISTS**

**How the Rich Are Stealing Canada's Public Wealth**

Linda McQuaig

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**Can \$25.99**

told. Ours is a kinder, gentler, and generally more sensible society. People are polite. Healthcare is a right, not a luxury. And, perhaps most important of all, Canada has long resisted the economy-gobbling excesses of US-style military funding.

Well, yes. But, as Linda McQuaig points out in her latest book, *The Sport & Prey of Capitalists: How Capitalists Are Stealing Canada's*

*Wealth*, a succession of political betrayals have taken Canada on a long ride down the neoliberal highway, leaving the country “increasingly dominated by the forces of private greed that rule the marketplace”.

*Sport & Prey* begins with a cautionary tale that warns against reckless distribution of public cash, in which McQuaig tells how Justin Trudeau's Liberal government paid \$4.5-billion of taxpayer cash in 2018 to take over the long-troubled Trans Mountain oil pipeline. Kinder Morgan, its Texas-based owner, started the pipeline in more optimistic times, as a means of transporting heavy crude oil from Alberta's tar sands to West Coast ports en route to Asia. However, their plans were thwarted by protests from indigenous groups and others, including the government of British Columbia.

The decision to buy the pipeline was, Trudeau insisted, “in the public interest”, although critics pointed out that its completion would have compromised our ability “to survive on the planet”. How, McQuaig, asks, could “something serve our interest as a nation



**AFTER THE CRASH:** Photograph taken from a police helicopter on July 6, 2013, after a train carrying almost 10,000 tons of oil slipped its moorings at the top of a hill 11 kilometres from the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic. 47 people died in the inferno that followed.

Photo: Sûreté du Québec

when it undermines our more basic interests *as humans*?

“In purchasing the pipeline, the Liberal government was following a long Canadian tradition of establishing publicly-owned enterprises. But Trudeau was using this important tool of national development in a new way: not in a way that would advance the interests of Canadians, but in a way that would – by any meaningful measure – set back those interests”.

This mocked a tradition of public enterprise in which Canada had, for a century after Confederation in 1867, “created significant public enterprises and national programmes that helped transform this vast stretch of land into a functioning and successful nation: power plants, a national railway, a public broadcaster, a nationwide postal service, coast-to-coast transportation infrastructure, strong public health care and education systems, a publicly owned pharmaceutical company that pioneered

medical breakthroughs”.

Most of those public enterprises have been sold over the past decades by governments that were “under the illusion that we’re better off if we leave our economy and our lives in the hands of the private marketplace. We haven’t made these changes because of the inherent superiority of the marketplace or due to financial necessity”, writes McQuaig. “Rather, we’ve made them because of the pressure exerted by powerful financial interests who have been keen to take over lucrative parts of our public domain so they can own them and milk them for profits”.

In the eight chapters of *The Sport & Prey of Capitalism*, the author recounts many of the earlier feats of public enterprise in Canada. Those include the development of a massive cross-country railway network that catered not only for large urban centres, but also for tiny

off-the-beaten-track communities that would never feature in the business plans of wealthy industrialists; and the creation of a public power generating company that harnessed the natural energy of the Niagara Falls to bring cheap electricity to Ontario at the beginning of the 20th-century.

After recounting the fights involved in creating these, and other, successes, McQuaig turns her attention to the disastrous effects of more recent politically motivated interventions. Her strongest criticism is aimed at former Ontario Conservative premier Mike Harris’s selling of the almost-new Highway 407, the province’s highly profitable Toronto area toll road, to an international consortium for \$3.1-billion in 1999, in an effort to balance the books for the upcoming election. The unbreakable 99-year lease he negotiated, described by McQuaig as “the worst deal of the century”, assured its new owners of billions of dollars in prof-

its (\$900-million in 2014 alone) from an asset that has since been valued at worth as much as \$45-billion.

Compiling a sorry catalogue of ideologically-driven government ineptitude, the author also points to former Conservative PM Stephen Harper's decision to gut railway safety regulations after taking office in 2011. At the same time, oil companies were switching to rail to transport their volatile product to east coast refineries, numbers rocketing from 500 railcar loads in 2009 to 160,000 in 2013. The effect of those decisions was grimly predictable. In the early morning of July 6, 2013, a train carrying almost 10,000 tons of oil slipped its moorings at the top of a hill 11 kilometres from the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic.

"The runaway train raced forward, reaching a speed of 105 kilometres", writes McQuaig, before it "finally derailed at a curve in the track in the centre of Lac-Mégantic, engulfing the town and dozens of its people in a gigantic inferno. The fire soared to 1,650 degrees Celsius. Water streaming from firehoses simply evaporated in the scorching heat. There were no survivors. Everyone caught up in the flames in the little town died".

The disaster, which killed 47 people, could have been much worse – the train had earlier passed through packed residential areas of Toronto.

Afterwards, the Harper government ignored calls for a public

## ***The runaway train reached a speed of 105 kilometres, finally derailed in the centre of Lac-Mégantic***

inquiry, leaving three railway workers to stand trial for criminal negligence. They were acquitted.

"Harper and his officials were never held accountable for their reckless deregulation. Nor were the greedy rail barons who pushed – and continue to push, mostly successfully – for relaxed safety laws", adds McQuaig in a poignant post-script to the story.

There's much more here for those who are concerned about the decaying trust between government and voters, including:

- The rise and ultimate politically-motivated sale of Connaught Laboratory, a world-leading drugs company that developed a serum in 1913 to combat diphtheria, the main killer of children at the time, and later discovered insulin before helping eradicate smallpox. The company was sold by a Conservative government for \$72-million in 1972; and

- The government's rejection

of a 2013 plan to introduce public banking, using the thousands of post office branches throughout the country, to provide competition to the country's Big Five banks. Those giant institutions are regularly accused of being more interested in expanding ever-bulging profit margins than serving low-income customers, who increasingly have to resort to payday loan sharks for their 'banking'.

McQuaig ends with a call to action. We should, she urges, "consider not just resisting further privatisation, but actually expanding the public domain", including public banking, a publicly owned pharmaceutical company "to provide generic drugs and other drugs rejected as insufficiently profitable by private industry.

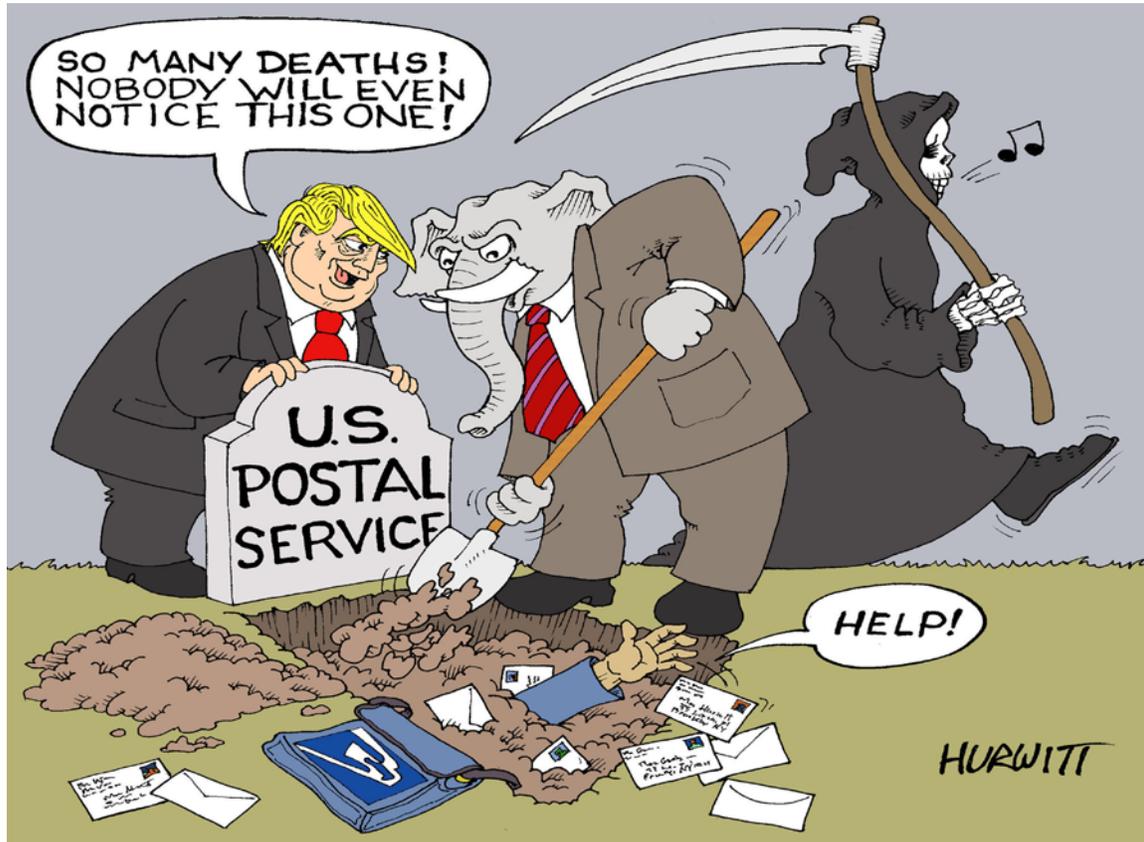
"An expansion of the public domain should also include a national child care programme, and a universal pharmacare programme, as well as an expanded national infrastructure, which would be owned and operated by the people of Canada. All these innovations are possible, worthwhile, and within our reach".

That's sound advice for our political master, not only in Canada, but also the rest of the world. So, what are we waiting for, Mr Trudeau? And no more bailouts for the oil industry, eh! **CT**

*Tony Sutton is the editor of ColdType.*

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Photo: Linh Dinh

RELIGIOUS PROCESSION brings a burst of fervour to a Belgrade street.

*Linh Dinh*

# An upright zebra crossing for sleepy lizards

*In a world gone mad, Belgrade is a cool place to hang out*

Pandemic, lockdowns, riots, disappeared jobs, collapsed businesses, empty fridges, closed borders, weird explosions and, just now, Beirutshima, so 2020 is already a horror show, but wait, it's actually a mousy prelude to the endlessly crashing cymbals, just ahead. Many more ambulances

will howl down streets. The empire will only exit with a bang.

Meanwhile, all is still relatively calm in most places. I hear a child singing outside my basement window here in my new temporary home in Belgrade, Serbia.

To reach the front door the other day, I had to sidestep four boys playing cards. As I fumbled with

the key, one kid looked up, frowned and said something that sounded like a correction. I ignored the pipsqueak, only to understand immediately that he meant, "It's already open, dumbshit".

To fuss over trivia is a peacetime privilege, or curse. Here in Serbia, they squirt ketchup on pizzas! Italy is nearby, but so what.



**WE WERE JUST CHILDREN:** Memorial to victims of the Nato onslaught on the former Yugoslavia.

Everybody and his Kalashnikov-waving grandma have their own way of doing things. South Koreans eat pizzas with corn, and dill pickles on the side.

Yesterday, I met a 70-year-old architect whose name translates as Lucky Darling. Nearly every morning, Sretan can be seen outside a beauty salon. Since its owners are two striking beauties, it makes sense for the old fart to park himself there. Sitting at a table, Sretan sips coffee, looks at traffic and waves at neighbours. Around 11, he wanders to Kafe Parkić.

“You should go there. Garden. Very nice”.

My spot is Dzidzi Midzi, where, perched on the balcony overlook-

ing the sidewalk, I’m quite visible to passers-by. Alien to a place, you won’t recognise anyone, but they all see you.

Although Serbia has reopened for tourists sans conditions, few have entered, and in Hadžipopovac, I’m the only Martian. It’s cool, though. Staring hard at me, a girl of about three smiled and waved, which brightened her mom also.

Despite their fearful reputation, Serbs are quite mellow, I’ve found. Yes, there is an edge here, as expressed by the graffiti, for example, with fans of Red Star and Partizan football teams cancelling each other out all over town, and each time they clash, a riot is almost inevitable. Walking for miles across Belgrade, however, I’ve not felt anything like the tension or

even menace that’s become banal in American cities, with each morning’s newspaper yawningly reporting last night’s carnage. My landlord never locks his house or car, he told me.

Vietnamese, too, are generally not aggressive. Save your butchery for when it really matters, tough guys.

In Busan, my friend Jung-min said, “We Koreans have all been in the military, so we know how to use weapons, but when it’s over, we forget about it. When there’s a war”, he chuckled, “we can be quite brutal”.

Sretan’s English is not bad. His wife is a career diplomat. Together, they spent two years in Tokyo, three in NYC and four in New Delhi.

“New York is fantastic. We lived in the middle. Sutton Place”.



**KINATOWN:** The Chinese Panda department store occupies an elegant historical building in Belgrade.

“Very expensive!”

“Yes, very expensive, but my wife is a diplomat. I didn’t have to do anything. I just walked around and looked”.

“Did you go to other American cities?”

“Washington. We were there for 15 days. I didn’t like it. Washington is like a village. New York, great”.

“Are there many Serbs in New York”.

“No. Chicago”.

“I’ve heard. Did you go to Chicago?”

“No, but I know. Many Serbs there”.

When young, Sretan’s passion was karate, so Japan was particularly fascinating. Still, he disapproved of their lifestyle, “Japanese, all they do is sleep and work. No life”. He shook his head.

Opening a plastic container, Sretan offered me a baklava. “You like? No pressure. You like?”

It was excellent, “This is very good, and the coffee, too”.

“I told you. I don’t lie. Turkish coffee, but Serbian style. She knows how to make”.

Sretan on Russia, “We are close. Russians, Serbs, same people. Slavs”.

“But Croats are also Slavs”.

“Ah, but... Between Serbs and Croats, there’s a complex. If I look at you and have a complex, then I hate you, but it’s nothing. It’s in my head, my imagination. People have complex”.

Like all who grew up in poorer societies, Sretan’s teeth are not perfect. Mine are fourth world.

Sretan on America, “They put pressure on every country. They

bomb. Yugoslavia, your country. Saddam Hussein...”

“Iraq”.

“Yes, Iraq. Destroyed his whole family. Gaddafi... Libya, Syria, Yemen. No good. America must change. The cosmos will make America change. History, the cosmos. There are two new powers. Russia, Kina. America will change”.

Kina is China, of course. I picked that up just from walking around. Kineska robna kuća is a store selling made-in-China household goods. Kineski restoran is a monosodium glutamate factory.

There’s a Chinese department store, Panda, with two branches in Belgrade. Well-made and elegantly proportioned, Serbs can wear burlap bags and still look good, so they’re fine in bargain Chinese fashion.



LADY IN BLACK. "She's like an upright zebra crossing for sleepy lizards".

Seeing a slim lady in black and white horizontal stripes, framed by body-hugging red, I immediately thought, This is why you left your room today. She's like an upright zebra crossing for sleepy lizards.

The many used clothing stores are dressed up with the English "Second Hand", often coupled with Butik. When I was in Ukraine in early 2016, used clothing was sold in huge mounds, for shoppers to dig through. Haven't seen that here.

In Kiev, I saw beggars kneeling under snowfall, heads drooping, behind soggy cardboard signs. They had just been colour revolutionised by Uncle Sam. In Belgrade, beggars aren't nearly as abject. Many are gypsies.

In plastic sandals and pink sweat pants, a scrawny teenage girl meandered into a pizza joint

to mumble at each table. It's called Poncho, oddly enough. Offering no burritos or tacos, it does have cacti painted on its walls. Its logo is a Mexican with a bulbous nose, handlebar moustache and a sombrero sagging over his eyes.

There are many gambling parlours here, an index of desperation, and even more Western Union outlets. Folks in each neighbourhood need to easily collect cash from relatives overseas.

Like all of Eastern Europe, Serbia is haemorrhaging people like there's no tomorrow. At least 7000,000 Serbs live in Germany. Moldova has lost a third of its population since 1989!

One day on the street, a very cosmopolitan Serb gave me his thoughts on this issue, and more. Seeing me photographing, he

started to talk, for he, too, had a camera. Also, he likely assumed I was Chinese. Turned out he had spent a year there.

"What were you doing there?"

"Studying the language. I'm a translator". His English was excellent and practically accent-free.

"Have you been to the States?"

"No. I got a visa but I never went".

"It's not the same any more. It's ruined. Still, you should go and have a look. Have you travelled a lot?"

"Some. It's not easy for Serbs to travel. Just stopping at an airport, you have to pay for a transit visa. One year, I went to Brazil, but the transit visa for the UK was so high, I had to pick a different flight".

"Wow".

"It is ridiculous. When I was in



**PARTIZAN HERO** – Image of George Orwell is appropriated by fans of one of Belgrade’s football rivals.

middle-school, we loved British culture and British music, but the UK is not very welcoming to us Serbs”.

“Lots of Poles there”.

“Yes, but few Serbs”.

“So where do they go?”

“Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France. Many young people are leaving. Here, you can only make 500, 600 Euros a month, so after you pay for food and rent, there’s nothing left. There’s no future here. You can only live day to day”.

To make things worse, there’s the coronavirus, but that’s a universal problem. Tourism is comatose everywhere.

When Middle Eastern, North African and South Asian refugees swarmed over from Greece five years ago, they marched right through North Macedonia and

Serbia.

“We used to see them on the highways, with backpacks. I talked to some of them. One man asked me, ‘What’s better, Germany or Austria?’” My instant friend cracked up. “They had walked all the way here from Asia, but they didn’t know exactly where they were going”.

To reach Austria, they still had to cross Hungary, however. “The Hungarians were tough. The border guards would beat them, so they had to dig tunnels”.

“But what happened on the other side? It’s not like they fitted in”.

“They had guides, smugglers. Coyotes!”

Even though his English was clearly flawless, I was still surprised by his use of *coyotes*. Some people just have supremely quick twitching synapses, man, while

the rest of us must rely on miniature ox carts, bogged down by mud, prejudices and clichés, between our frayed neurons.

To escape Turks, Serbs themselves migrated en masse to Hungary in the 17th- and 18th-centuries, but there are key differences, no? You tell me!

My instant friend remembered a trip to Switzerland. “In a restaurant, I met a Dutch couple. I also speak Dutch. When the man found out I was a Serb, he looked at me like I was a monster!” He laughed.

“He probably thought you were, like, a mass rapist!”

“And a mass killer! Dutch people, how should I say it, they’re very righteous, you know. They’re even worse than Germans!”

“Yes, but Germans are righteous against themselves. The most



**SOLITARY:** It took 16 days to spot an American flag. "in most foreign cities, I'd catch that several times a day".

righteous Germans hate being German!"

We had a good laugh over that. It was time to go, so I stuck out my hand.

"No, we will not shake hands!"

"Oh, that's right. Corona-virus!"

After 16 days in Belgrade, I finally spotted an American flag on someone's clothing. In most foreign cities, I'd catch that several times a day. The wearer was a teenager, so born after American bombs exploded in his city.

It had 18 stars and 17 stripes, so both present and past had been tampered with, a common enough occurrence, though not usually so harmless.

U.S.A. MDTWN LOS ANGELES / CALIFORNIA was superimposed

in black. NYC and LA are mythical destinations. Thanks to Hollywood, their colour saturated, larger than life images have become parts of everyone's consciousness, subconsciousness and memory, to flare up as teasing dreams.

As the American dream is snuffed out in situ, it persists as a quasi-religion outside it. Uncle Sam's sexy fantasies about himself lord over foreign minds. The NY logo is the world's most popular icon. Meanwhile, the country sinks into degradation and farce.

Crotch grabbing Michael Jackson feared actual sex, granite-jawed Bruce Jenner is a cleavage and leg flashing grandma, a casino hustler and reality TV star tweets as the president, Joe Biden never perks up unless there's a squirming girl within stroking distance, and yet, even here in Belgrade,

books by Michelle Obama sell.

It's already 11 and I haven't been outside yet. Done with this article, I'll reward myself with a huge slice of pepperoni with mushroom at Poncho. The long stroll down there will be pleasant. From the most hideous apartment buildings will step the most lovely people.

At the corner, I'll likely run into Sretan. "Come to my building and ring the intercom", he has said. "If I'm home, you can come up and we'll drink coffee".

I'll bring a bottle of Ždrepcjeva Krv. From his roof, we can look down at a still calm universe. **CT**

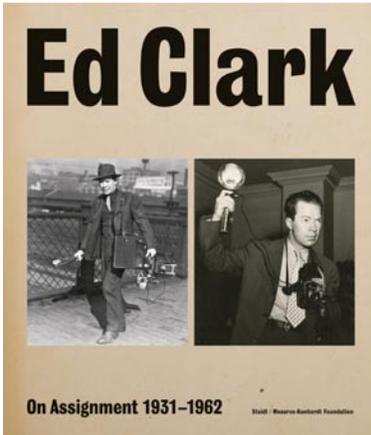
*Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. He maintains a regularly updated photo blog at [www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com](http://www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com).*



Embodying the grief of a nation, Graham Jackson plays "Goin' Home" for President Roosevelt for the last time, Warm Springs, Georgia, 1945.

# Ed Clark: Life from Nashville to Nuremberg

*One of the world's most fascinating 'unknown' photographers*



**ON ASSIGNMENT  
1931-1962**

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672 pages

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**Can \$195.00**



Montmartre artist, Paris, France, 1946.

**D**rawn from Ed Clark's extensive personal archive of photographs, negatives, contact sheets and scrapbooks, the two volumes of *On Assignment 1931-1962*, co-published by Steidl and the Meserve-Kunhardt Foundation,

reveal the work of a key figure from the golden age of American photojournalism. From the pagantry of politics to the rhythms of small-town life, from movie stars to the working class, Clark covered the defining personalities and events of his age.

Clark is one of the 20th-

century's most fascinating and important "unknown" photographers. A gifted photojournalist, Clark began his career in 1929 with the *Tennessean* newspaper in Nashville, and went on to work for 22 years for *Life* magazine. He photographed many of *Life's* most important assignments



Fire engulfs a boarding house near Nashville airport, Nashville, Tennessee, late 1930s

during the period of the magazine's greatest cultural impact; Clark's images helped shape a nation's sense of itself and the world.

His vast range of subjects includes the Nuremberg war crimes trials, the conflict over civil rights in the late 1940s and early '50s, Hollywood stars and the movie industry of the '50s, the people and arts of the Soviet Union, and the White House during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

Born in 1911 in Nashville, Tennessee, Ed Clark was a quintessential and prolific American photojournalist. He began assisting staff photographers at the daily *Nashville Tennessean* in 1929, and worked for the paper until 1942. He was hired as



Senator Kennedy and baby Caroline at the N Street house, Washington, DC, 1958



Ed Clark began his career at the *Nashville-Tennessean* newspaper before spending 22 years with *Life* magazine.

His vast range of subjects includes the Nuremberg war crimes trials and the civil rights conflict in the late 1940s and early '50s



Child and Nuremberg, both casualties of war (Hansi Tolver), Nuremberg, Germany, 1945



The second volume of *On Assignment* features facsimiles of the photographer's 10 scrapbooks spanning his 47-year career.

a stringer for *Life* in 1936, the publication's inaugural year, and became a full-time *Life* staff photographer in 1942.

In his work for *Life* over the

next 20 years, Clark held posts in Nashville, Paris, Moscow, London, Hollywood and Washington, DC, covering covered some of the most important subjects of his

time, including the post-war rebuilding of Germany and France and the desegregation of schools in Arkansas.

Clark died in 2000, aged 88. **CT**

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Lee Camp

# Executing elephants and Americans

*You're on the wrong side of history when government officials pretend to be someone else when contracting with companies that make killer cocktails.*

The first person to receive the electric chair in America was not actually a person. It was an elephant named Topsy, and honestly, I believe he was falsely convicted. But we'll get back to that in a moment.

With a quarter of a million Americans either killed or seriously maimed by Covid-19 and a US drone bomb being dropped overseas roughly every 12 minutes, President Donald Trump's Justice Department recently thought to themselves, "You know what we need in this country? More killing. There aren't enough murders going on". I guess I can't blame their logic. If you're headed for hell anyway, why not make it worth it? Swing for the fences.

So in the quest for more deaths, the federal government recently carried out their first official execution in close to 20 years. (That number does not, of course, include the thousands of innocent men, women and children they obliterate overseas every year.) But they couldn't partake in their execution fun-time without the tacit approval of the Supreme Court. SCOTUS, as

it's called, cleared the way for the execution by declining to hear a case.

This first execution in 17 years was performed by lethal injection because hanging has a bad rep these days – it feels too Wild West, though it is carbon neutral. And electrocution has been on the outs because I imagine the environmentalists were furious the electricity was coming from coal power plants. (Don't quote me on that.)

I mean, if you're going to turn a guy into a shish kabob, don't use dirty energy to do it, okay? Maybe he could pedal a bike that powers his own murder. That's eco-friendly. Or how about death by wind turbine? I'm sure if you got a guy close enough to one of those things, the blades would knock his head clean off. That would be completely environmentally sustainable and fun for the whole family.

Quick tangent: The electric chair owes its existence to Thomas Edison being an asshole. Edison funded the creation of the first e-chair in order to crush his business rival, George Westinghouse. The famed inventor refused to take Nikola

Tesla's advice that alternating current was the way of the future.

As *Business Insider* reported, "Edison decided that there was only one thing to do: to prove that Westinghouse's [alternating current] generators were more dangerous than Edison's direct current. In order to prove his claim, Edison held public executions – oftentimes in front of reporters – of animals such as dogs and horses".

At one such event in Coney Island, NY, he zapped and killed an adult circus elephant named Topsy. (To this day many believe Topsy was framed.) So, if you're a teenager and you kill a squirrel, they call you a Satanist and send you to juvie. But Edison deep-fried a fucking elephant and he's an esteemed inventor?

Edison also sought to prove his wonderful new toy worked on a human. Convicted murderer William Kemmler was the lucky contestant for this particular episode of "What's That Burning Smell?" After they sent a few thousand volts through him, Arthur Southwick, the creator of the electric chair – which Edison helped fund – spoke to the crowd. "...just as

Southwick announced: ‘This is the culmination of ten years’ work and study. We live in a higher civilisation today,’ everyone noticed that Kemmler was still alive”.

As the poor man groaned in pain, Southwick thought, “Oh Shit! We didn’t cook him long enough!” They proceeded to electrocute him for many more minutes until his head started smoking.

Welcome to higher civilisation. Please ignore the stench of burning hair.

Anyway, we basically don’t use the electric chair anymore. Now we use the highly civilised lethal injection. There’s only one problem. We can’t get our hands on the drugs to murder people because the EU banned export of the lethal-injection drugs we need. The countries that manufacture the drugs don’t want them used for our barbaric medieval experiments in human indecency.

But the Trump administration will not be deterred. Certainly not. When it comes to bailing out average Americans struggling during a pandemic, Trump gives up pretty easy. But when it comes to killing people, his motto is “If at first they can still breathe, try again!”

So these recent federal executions mark, as Reuters reported, “the culmination of a three-year campaign to line up a secret supply chain to make and test lethal injection drugs”.

To obtain the murder drugs you need. Because every nation is trying to stop you.

Isn’t it a strong sign you’re an alcoholic when your friends start hiding the alcohol from you? Well, what is it when your friends are hiding the murder cocktails from you? “Hey, buddy, don’t you think

you’ve killed enough people this week? Yes, I know you can stop anytime you want. Of course. But why don’t you just take a break? See how one night feels without killing someone, you know?”

Apparently, the administration has been working on this secret protocol since 2017, and it’s designed to obscure who supplies and tests the drugs – but many of the sources have now been uncovered. As the Reuters investigation noted, “In some cases, even the companies involved in testing the deadly pentobarbital said they didn’t know its intended purpose. ... All three firms told Reuters the Justice Department did not hire them directly, saying they were contracted by a compounding pharmacy ...”

Here’s a hint you might be on the wrong side of history – when your government officials have to pretend to be someone else when contracting with chemical companies that make killer cocktails because if those companies found out the purpose of the drugs, they would refuse to work with you on moral grounds.

One of the companies testing Trump’s new murder cocktail is called DynaLabs. And the co-founder, Michael Pruett, would like you to know that your government testing murder-chemicals is truthfully a heartwarming story. He said quote, “I’d rather know, if someone I knew was being put to death with lethal injection, that the injection was tested by a qualified laboratory”.

Yes, if a friend of mine were being murdered, I’d like to know the chemicals were really top notch. I want my buddy to enjoy the Grey

Goose of death. Spare no expense if you’re killing my pals! Kinda like if I were watching my best mate strangled to death, I would want it to be strong professional hands – you know, like an auto mechanic or a drummer of a moderately successful rock band. (They wouldn’t have to play stadiums, but they should have a Twitter account with more than 10,000 followers.)

Here are a few other fun facts before we close the book on this horror show: Careful estimates by the National Academy of Sciences find that more than 4 percent of those executed are innocent. A much larger number are severely mentally ill. So really America has simply created a reliable procedure for executing mentally disabled people. That’s lovely. Maybe we should add a verse about that to the National Anthem.

And then there’s the racist aspects of capital punishment. The No. 1 determinant of whether someone is sentenced to the death penalty is race of the victim – meaning killing a white person is a much bigger deal in our society than killing a black person.

Anyway, in the interest of avoiding a 32-page column, I won’t go through all the other reasons the death penalty remains an idiotic, barbaric, flawed, pointless waste of human life. But on the plus side, at least the elephants now understand who’s boss. **CT**

*Lee Camp is the host of the hit comedy news show Redacted Tonight. His book Bullet Points and Punch Lines is available at [www.LeeCampBook.com](http://www.LeeCampBook.com) and his stand-up comedy special can be streamed for free at [www.LeeCampAmerican.com](http://www.LeeCampAmerican.com).*

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John Pilger

# Another Hiroshima if we don't act now

*The attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified by lies that form the bedrock of 21st-century US war propaganda against a new target – China*

When I first went to Hiroshima in 1967, the shadow on the steps was still there. It was an almost perfect impression of a human being at ease: legs splayed, back bent, one hand by her side as she sat waiting for a bank to open.

At a quarter past eight on the morning of August 6, 1945, she and her silhouette were burned into the granite.

I stared at the shadow for an hour or more, then I walked down to the river where the survivors still lived in shanties.

I met a man called Yukio, whose chest was etched with the pattern of the shirt he was wearing when the atomic bomb was dropped. He described a huge flash over the city, “a bluish light, something like an electrical short”, after which wind blew like a tornado and black rain fell. “I was thrown on the ground and noticed only the stalks of my flowers were left. Everything was still and quiet, and when I got up, there were people naked, not saying anything. Some of them had no skin or hair. I was

certain I was dead”.

Nine years later, I returned to look for him and he was dead from leukaemia.

“No radioactivity in Hiroshima ruin”, said the *New York Times* front page on 13 September, 1945, a classic of planted disinformation. “General Farrell”, reported William H. Lawrence, “denied categorically that [the atomic bomb] produced a dangerous, lingering radioactivity”.

Only one reporter, Wilfred Burchett, an Australian, had braved the perilous journey to Hiroshima in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing, in defiance of the Allied occupation authorities, which controlled the “press pack”.

“I write this as a warning to the world,” reported Burchett in the London *Daily Express* of September 5, 1945. Sitting in the rubble with his Baby Hermes typewriter, he described hospital wards filled with people with no visible injuries who were dying from what he called “an atomic plague”.

For this, his press accreditation was withdrawn, he was pilloried and smeared. His witness to the

truth was never forgiven.

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an act of premeditated mass murder that unleashed a weapon of intrinsic criminality. It was justified by lies that form the bedrock of America's war propaganda in the 21st-century, casting a new enemy, and target – China.

During the 75 years since Hiroshima, the most enduring lie is that the atomic bomb was dropped to end the war in the Pacific and to save lives.

“Even without the atomic bombing attacks”, concluded the United States Strategic Bombing Survey of 1946, “air supremacy over Japan could have exerted sufficient pressure to bring about unconditional surrender and obviate the need for invasion. “Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that ... Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war [against Japan] and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated”.

# DAILY EXPRESS

No. 11,119      Lighting-up: 8.39 pm to 5.20 am      WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 5 1945      Weather: Dull, cool      One Penny

30th DAY in Hiroshima: Those who escaped begin to die, victims of—

## THE ATOMIC PLAGUE

‘I write this as a warning to the world’

### DOCTORS FALL AS THEY WORK

**Poison gas fear: All wear masks**

Express Staff Reporter PETER BURCHETT

was the first Allied reporter to enter the atom-bomb city. He travelled 400 miles from Tokyo alone and obtained, against odds, the atomic bomb—food is almost unobtainable in Japan—a black umbrella, and a typewriter. Here is his story.

**HIROSHIMA, Tuesday.**

IN Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly—people who were uninjured in the cataclysm— from an unknown something which I can only describe as the atomic plague.

Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write

The big switch: ‘Over by spring’

By TREVOR EVANS

UNDER present demobilisation plans it is expected that industry’s switch from war to peace conditions will not be

4.30 a.m. LATEST

PRISONERS RUN JAP CITIES

KYOTO, Tuesday—A batch of atomic war prisoners arrived here

THE PICTURE THAT DOES NOT TELL THE WHOLE STORY



**WARNING TO THE WORLD:** How Wilfred Burchett reported the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

The National Archives in Washington contains documented Japanese peace overtures as early as 1943. None was pursued. A cable sent on May 5, 1945 by the German ambassador in Tokyo and intercepted by the US made clear the Japanese were desperate to sue for peace, including “capitulation even if the terms were hard”. Nothing was done.

The US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, told President Truman he was “fearful” that the US Air Force would have Japan so “bombed out” that the new weapon would not be able “to show its strength”. Stimson later admitted that “no effort was made, and none was seriously considered, to achieve surrender merely in order not to have to use the [atomic] bomb”.

Stimson’s foreign policy colleagues – looking ahead to the post-war era they were then shaping “in our image”, as Cold War

planner George Kennan famously put it – made clear they were eager “to browbeat the Russians with the [atomic] bomb held rather ostentatiously on our hip”. General Leslie Groves, director of the Manhattan Project that made the atomic bomb, testified: “There was never any illusion on my part that Russia was our enemy, and that the project was conducted on that basis”.

The day after Hiroshima was obliterated, President Harry Truman voiced his satisfaction with the “overwhelming success” of “the experiment”.

The “experiment” continued long after the war was over. Between 1946 and 1958, the United States exploded 67 nuclear bombs in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific: the equivalent of more than one Hiroshima every day for 12 years.

The human and environmental consequences were catastrophic.

During the filming of my documentary, *The Coming War on China*, I chartered a small aircraft and flew to Bikini Atoll in the Marshalls. It was here that the United States exploded the world’s first hydrogen bomb. It remains poisoned earth. My shoes registered “unsafe” on my Geiger counter. Palm trees stood in unworldly formations. There were no birds.

I trekked through the jungle to the concrete bunker where, at 6.45 on the morning of March 1, 1954, the button was pushed. The sun, which had risen, rose again and vaporised an entire island in the lagoon, leaving a vast black hole, which from the air is a menacing spectacle: a deathly void in a place of beauty.

The radioactive fall-out spread quickly and “unexpectedly”. The official history claims “the wind changed suddenly”. It was the first of many lies, as declassified docu-



**MUSHROOM RISING:** The United States began using Bikini Atoll as a nuclear test site in 1946.

ments and the victims’ testimony reveal.

Gene Curbow, a meteorologist assigned to monitor the test site, said, “They knew where the radioactive fall-out was going to go. Even on the day of the shot, they still had an opportunity to evacuate people, but [people] were not evacuated; I was not evacuated... The United States needed some guinea pigs to study what the effects of radiation would do”.

Like Hiroshima, the secret of the Marshall Islands was a calculated experiment on the lives of large numbers of people. This was Project 4.1, which began as a scientific study of mice and became an experiment on “human beings exposed to the radiation of a nuclear weapon”.

The Marshall Islanders I met in 2015 – like the survivors of Hiroshima I interviewed in the 1960s

*The sun, which had risen, rose again and vaporised an entire island in the lagoon, leaving a vast black hole*

and 70s – suffered from a range of cancers, commonly thyroid cancer; thousands had already died. Miscarriages and stillbirths were common; those babies who lived were often deformed horribly.

Unlike Bikini, nearby Rongelap atoll had not been evacuated during the H-Bomb test. Directly downwind of Bikini, Rongelap’s skies darkened and it rained what first appeared to be snowflakes. Food and water were contaminated; and the population fell victim to cancers. That is still true today.



Photo: John Pilger

**NUCLEAR VICTIM:** Marshall Islander Nerje Joseph with a photograph of her as a child soon after the H-Bomb exploded on March 1, 1954

I met Nerje Joseph, who showed me a photograph of herself as a child on Rongelap. She had terrible facial burns and much of her hair was missing. “We were bathing at the well on the day the bomb exploded”, she said. “White dust started falling from the sky. I reached to catch the powder. We used it as soap to wash our hair. A few days later, my hair started falling out”.

Lemoyo Abon said, “Some of us were in agony. Others had diarrhoea. We were terrified. We thought it must be the end of the world”.

US official archive film I included in my film refers to the islanders as “amenable savages”. In the wake of the explosion, a US Atomic Energy Agency official is seen boasting that Rongelap “is by far the most contaminated place on earth”, adding, “it will be interesting to get a measure of human uptake when people live in a contaminated environment”.

American scientists, including medical doctors, built distinguished careers studying the “human uptake”. There they are in flickering film, in their white coats, attentive with their clipboards. When an islander died in his teens, his family received a sympathy card from the scientist who studied him.

I have reported from five nuclear “ground zeros” throughout the world – in Japan, the Marshall Islands, Nevada, Polynesia and Maralinga in Australia. Even more than my experience as a war correspondent, this has taught me about the ruthlessness and immorality of great power: that is, imperial

## ***When an islander died in his teens, his family received a sympathy card from the scientist who studied him***

power, whose cynicism is the true enemy of humanity.

This struck me forcibly when I filmed at Taranaki Ground Zero at Maralinga in the Australian desert. In a dish-like crater was an obelisk on which was inscribed: “A British atomic weapon was test exploded here on 9 October 1957”. On the rim of the crater was this sign:

**WARNING: RADIATION HAZARD**  
Radiation levels for a few hundred metres around this point may be above those considered safe for permanent occupation.

For as far as the eye could see, and beyond, the ground was irradiated. Raw plutonium lay about, scattered like talcum powder: plutonium is so dangerous to humans that a third of a milligram gives a 50 percent chance of cancer.

The only people who might have seen the sign were Indigenous Australians, for whom there was no warning. According to an official account, if they were lucky “they were shooed off like rabbits”.

Today, an unprecedented campaign of propaganda is shooing us all off like rabbits. We are not meant to question the daily torrent of anti-Chinese rhetoric, which is rapidly overtaking the torrent of

anti-Russia rhetoric. Anything Chinese is bad, anathema, a threat: Wuhan ... Huawei. How confusing it is when “our” most reviled leader says so.

The current phase of this campaign began not with Trump but with Barack Obama, who in 2011 flew to Australia to declare the greatest build-up of US naval forces in the Asia-Pacific region since World War II. Suddenly, China was a “threat”. This was nonsense, of course. What was threatened was America’s unchallenged psychopathic view of itself as the richest, the most successful, the most “indispensable” nation.

What was never in dispute was its prowess as a bully – with more than 30 members of the United Nations suffering American sanctions of some kind and a trail of the blood running through defenceless countries bombed, their governments overthrown, their elections interfered with, their resources plundered.

Obama’s declaration became known as the “pivot to Asia”. One of its principal advocates was his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who, as WikiLeaks revealed, wanted to rename the Pacific Ocean “the American Sea”.

Whereas Clinton never concealed her warmongering, Obama was a maestro of marketing”. I state clearly and with conviction”, said the new president in 2009, “that America’s commitment is to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”.

Obama increased spending on nuclear warheads faster than any president since the end of the Cold War. A “usable” nuclear weapon was developed. Known as the B61 Model 12, it means, according to

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General James Cartwright, former vice-chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that “going smaller [makes its use] more thinkable”.

The target is China. Today, more than 400 American military bases almost encircle China with missiles, bombers, warships and nuclear weapons. From Australia north through the Pacific to South-East Asia, Japan and Korea and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India, the bases form, as one US strategist told me, “the perfect noose”.

A study by the RAND Corporation – which, since Vietnam, has planned America’s wars – is entitled *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*. Commissioned by the US Army, the authors evoke the infamous catch cry of its chief Cold War strategist, Herman Kahn – “thinking the unthinkable”. Kahn’s book, *On Thermonuclear War*, elaborated a plan for a “winnable” nuclear war.

Kahn’s apocalyptic view is shared by Trump’s Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, an evangelical fanatic who believes in the “rapture of the End”. He is perhaps the most dangerous man alive. “I was CIA director”, he boasted, “We lied, we cheated, we stole. It was like we had entire training courses”. Pompeo’s obsession is China.

The endgame of Pompeo’s extremism is rarely if ever discussed in the Anglo-American media, where the myths and fabrications about China are standard fare, as were the lies about Iraq. A virulent racism is the sub-text of this propaganda. Classified “yellow” even though they were white, the Chinese are the only ethnic group to have been banned by an “exclusion act” from entering the United

## **“For centuries, China’s threat to the myth of Western superiority has made it an easy target for race-baiting”**

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States, because they were Chinese. Popular culture declared them sinister, untrustworthy, “sneaky”, depraved, diseased, immoral.

An Australian magazine, *The Bulletin*, was devoted to promoting fear of the “yellow peril” as if all of Asia was about to fall down on the whites-only colony by the force of gravity.

As the historian Martin Powers writes, acknowledging China’s modernism, its secular morality and “contributions to liberal thought threatened European face, so it became necessary to suppress China’s role in the Enlightenment debate .... For centuries, China’s threat to the myth of Western superiority has made it an easy target for race-baiting”.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, tireless China-basher Peter Hartcher described those who spread Chinese influence in Australia as “rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows”. Hartcher, who favourably quotes the American demagogue Steve Bannon, likes to interpret the “dreams” of the current Chinese elite, to which he is apparently privy. These are inspired by yearnings for the “Mandate of Heaven” of 2,000 years ago. Ad nauseam.

To combat this “mandate”, the Australian government of Scott Morrison has committed one of the most secure countries on earth, whose major trading partner is China, to hundreds of billions of dollars’ worth of American missiles that can be fired at China.

The trickledown is already evident. In a country historically scarred by violent racism towards Asians, Australians of Chinese descent have formed a vigilante group to protect delivery riders. Phone videos show a delivery rider punched in the face and a Chinese couple racially abused in a supermarket. Between April and June, there were almost 400 racist attacks on Asian-Australians.

“We are not your enemy”, a high-ranking strategist in China told me, “but if you [in the West] decide we are, we must prepare without delay”. China’s arsenal is small compared with America’s, but it is growing fast, especially the development of maritime missiles designed to destroy fleets of ships.

“For the first time”, wrote Gregory Kulacki of the Union of Concerned Scientists, “China is discussing putting its nuclear missiles on high alert so that they can be launched quickly on warning of an attack... This would be a significant and dangerous change in Chinese policy...”

In Washington, I met Amitai Etzioni, distinguished professor of international affairs at George Washington University, who wrote that a “blinding attack on China” was planned, “with strikes that could be mistakenly perceived [by the Chinese] as pre-emptive attempts to take out its nuclear weapons, thus cornering them into a terrible use-it-or-lose-it dilemma



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C.J. Hopkins

# Invasion of the New Normals

*This glimpse into the future should terrify and anger you enough to rise up against it before it is too late. Take heed and act now*

**T**hey're here! No, not the pod people from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. We're not being colonised by giant alien fruit. I'm afraid it is a little more serious than that. People's minds are being taken over by a much more destructive and less otherworldly force ... one that transforms them overnight into aggressively paranoid, order-following, propaganda-parroting totalitarians.

You know the people I'm talking about. Some of them are probably your friends and family, people you have known for years, and who had always seemed completely rational, but who are now convinced that we need to radically alter the fabric of human society to protect ourselves from a virus that causes mild to moderate flu-like symptoms (or absolutely no symptoms at all) in over 95 percent of those infected, and that over 99.6 percent survive, which, it goes without saying, is totally insane.

I've been calling them "corona-totalitarians", but I'm going to call them the "New Normals" from now on, as that more accurately evokes the pathologised-totali-

tarian ideology they are systematically spreading. At this point, I think it is important to do that, because, clearly, their ideological programme has nothing to do with any actual virus, or any other actual public health threat. As is glaringly obvious to anyone whose mind has not been taken over yet, the "apocalyptic coronavirus pandemic" was always just a Trojan horse, a means of introducing the "New Normal", which they've been doing since the very beginning.

**T**he official propaganda started in March, and it reached full intensity in early April. Suddenly, references to the "New Normal" were everywhere, not only in the leading corporate media (eg, CNN, NPR, CNBC, the New York Times, the Guardian, the Atlantic, Forbes, et al), the IMF and the World Bank Group, the WEF, UN, WHO, CDC (the list goes on), but also on the blogs of athletic organisations, global management consulting firms, charter school websites, and random YouTube videos.

The slogan has been relentlessly repeated (in a textbook totalitarian

"big lie" fashion) for going on the past six months. We have heard it repeated so many times that many of us have forgotten how insane it is, the idea that the fundamental structure of society needs to be drastically and irrevocably altered on account of a virus that poses no threat to the vast majority of the human species.

And, make no mistake, that is exactly what the "New Normal" movement intends to do. "New Normalism" is a classic totalitarian movement (albeit with a pathological twist), and it is the goal of every totalitarian movement to radically, utterly transform society, to remake the world in its monstrous image.

That is what totalitarianism is, this desire to establish complete control over everything and everyone, every thought, emotion, and human interaction. The character of its ideology changes (ie, Nazism, Stalinism, Maoism, etc), but this desire for complete control over people, over society, and ultimately life itself, is the essence of totalitarianism ... and what has taken over the minds of the New Normals.



In the New Normal society they want to establish, as in every totalitarian society, fear and conformity will be pervasive. Their ideology is a pathologised ideology (as opposed to, say, the racialised ideology of the Nazis), so its symbolism will be pathological. Fear of disease, infection, and death, and obsessive attention to matters of health will dominate every aspect of life. Paranoid propaganda and ideological conditioning will be ubiquitous and constant.

Everyone will be forced to wear medical masks to maintain a constant level of fear and an omnipresent atmosphere of sickness and death, as if the world were one big infectious disease ward. Everyone will wear these masks at all times, at work, at home, in their cars, everywhere. Anyone who fails or refuses to do so will be

deemed “a threat to public health”, and beaten and arrested by the police or the military, or swarmed by mobs of New Normal vigilantes.

Cities, regions, and entire countries will be subjected to random police-state lockdowns, which will be justified by the threat of “infection”. People will be confined to their homes for up to 23-hours a day, and allowed out only for “essential reasons”. Police and soldiers will patrol the streets, stopping people, checking their papers, and beating and arresting anyone out in public without the proper documents, or walking or standing too close to other people, as they are doing in Melbourne, Australia, currently.

The threat of “infection” will be used to justify increasingly insane

and authoritarian edicts, compulsory demonstration-of-fealty rituals, and eventually the elimination of all forms of dissent. Just as the Nazis believed they were waging a war against the “subhuman races”, the New Normals will be waging a war on “disease”. and on anyone who “endangers the public health” by challenging their ideological narrative. Like every other totalitarian movement, in the end, they will do whatever is necessary to purify society of “degenerate influences” (ie, anyone who questions or disagrees with them, or who refuses to obey their every command).

They are already aggressively censoring the Internet and banning their opponents’ political protests, and political leaders and the corporate media are systematically stigmatising those of us who

dare to challenge their official narrative as “extremists”, “Nazis”, “conspiracy theorists”, “Covidiot”, “coronavirus deniers”, “anti-vaxxers,” and “esoteric” freaks. One German official even went so far as to demand that dissidents be deported ... presumably on trains to somewhere in the East.

Despite this increasing totalitarianisation and pathologisation of virtually everything, the New Normals will carry on with their lives as if everything were ... well, completely normal. They will go out to restaurants and the movies in their masks. They will work, eat, and sleep in their masks. Families will go on holiday in their masks, or in their “Personal Protective Upper-Body Bubble-Wear”.

They will arrive at the airport eight hours early, stand in their little colour-coded boxes, and then follow the arrows on the floor to the “health officials” in the hazmat suits, who will take their temperature through their foreheads and shove ten-inch swabs into their sinus cavities.

Parents who wish to forego this experience will have the option to preventatively vaccinate themselves and their children with the latest experimental vaccine (after signing a liability waiver, of course) within a week or so before their flights, and then present the officials with proof of vaccination (and of their compliance with various other “health guidelines”) on their digital Identity and Public Health Passports, or subdermal biometric chips.

Children, as always, will suffer the worst of it. They will be terrorised and confused from the moment they are born, by their parents, their teachers, and by

## ***The New Normals will carry on with their lives as if everything were ... well, completely normal***

society at large. They will be subjected to ideological conditioning and paranoid behavioural modification at every stage of their socialisation ... with fanciful reusable corporate plague masks branded with lovable cartoon characters, paranoia-inducing picture books for toddlers, and paranoid “social distancing” rituals, among other forms of psychological torture.

This conditioning (or torture) will take place at home, as there will be no more schools, or rather, no public schools. The children of the wealthy will attend private schools, where they can be cost-effectively “socially-distanced”. Working class children will sit at home, alone, staring into screens, wearing their masks, their hyperactivity and anxiety disorders stabilised with anti-depressant medications.

And so on ... I think you get the picture. I hope so, because I don't have the heart to go on.

I pray this glimpse into the New Normal future has terrified and angered you enough to rise up against it before it is too late. This isn't a joke, folks. The New Normals are serious. If you cannot see where their movement is headed, you do not understand totalitari-

anism. Once it starts, and reaches this stage, it does not stop, not without a fight. It continues to its logical conclusion. The way that usually happens is, people tell themselves it isn't happening, it can't be happening, not to us. They tell themselves this as the totalitarian programme is implemented, step by step, one seemingly harmless step at a time. They conform, because, at first, the stakes aren't so high, and their conformity leads to more conformity, and the next thing they know they're telling their grandchildren that they had no idea where the trains were going.

If you have made it through to the end of this essay, your mind hasn't been taken over yet ... the New Normals clicked off around paragraph two. What that means is that it is your responsibility to speak up, and to do whatever else you can, to stop the New Normal future from becoming a reality. You will not be rewarded for it. You will be ridiculed and castigated for it. Your New Normal friends will hate you for it. Your New Normal family will forsake you for it. The New Normal police might arrest you for it. It is your responsibility to do it anyway ... as, of course, it is also mine. **CT**

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Conn Hallinan

# India and China: Behind the conflict

*Colonialism may be gone, but its effects live on in the escalating dispute between India and China over Himalayan borderland*

Chinese and Indian forces have pulled back from their confrontation in the Himalayas, but the tensions that set off the deadly encounter this past June – the first on the China/India border since 1975 – are not going away. Indeed, a combination of local disputes, regional antagonisms and colonial history have brewed up a poisonous elixir that could pose a serious danger to peace in South Asia.

In part, the problem is Britain’s colonial legacy. The “border” in dispute is an arbitrary line drawn across terrain that doesn’t lend itself to clear boundaries. The architect, Henry McMahon, drew it to maximise British control of a region that was in play during the 19th-century “Great Game” between England and Russia for control of Central Asia. Local concerns were irrelevant.

The treaty was signed between



**DISPUTED TERRITORY:** Border tensions between India and China could pose serious danger of conflict in South Asia.

Tibet and Britain in 1914. While India accepts the 550-mile McMahon Line as the border between Indian and China, the Chinese have never recognised it.

Sir Mortimer Durand, Britain’s lead colonial officer in India, drew

a similar “border” in 1893 between Pakistan (then India’s “Northern Territories”) and Afghanistan that Kabul has never accepted, and which is still the source of friction between the two countries. Colonialism may be gone, but its effects still linger.

While the target for the McMahon Line was Russia, it has always been a sore spot for China, not only because Beijing’s protests were ignored, but also because the Chinese saw it as a potential security risk for its western provinces.

If Britain, which had already humiliated China in the two Opium Wars, as well as by seizing Shanghai and Hong Kong, could lop off Tibet – which China sees as part of its empire – so might another country: Like India.

Indeed, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi unilat-

Map: CIA / Flickr.com

erally revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and absorbed Kashmir and Jammu in 2019, the Chinese saw the grab as a threat to the security of Tibet and its restive western province of Xinjiang. The area in which the recent fighting took place, the Galwan Valley, is close to a road linking Tibet with Xinjiang.

The nearby Aksai Chin, which China seized from India in the 1962 border war, not only controls the Tibet-Xinjiang highway, but also the area through which China is building an oil pipeline. The Chinese see the pipeline – which will go from the Pakistani port of Gwadar to Kashgar in Xinjiang – as a way to bypass key choke points in the Indian Ocean controlled by the US Navy.

The \$62-billion project is part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a piece of the huge Belt and Road Initiative to build infrastructure and increase trade between South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and China.

China moves 80 percent of its oil by sea and is increasingly nervous about a budding naval alliance between the US and Beijing's regional rivals, India and Japan. In the yearly Malabar exercises the three powers war game closing the Malacca Straits through which virtually all of China's oil passes. The Pakistan-China pipeline oil will be more expensive than tanker supplied oil – one estimate is five times more – but it will be secure from the US.

In 2019, however, India's Home Minister, Amit Shah, pledged to take back Aksai Chin from China, thus exposing the pipeline to potential Indian interdiction.

From China's point of view the

bleak landscape of rock, ice and very little oxygen is central to its strategy of securing access to energy supplies.

The region is also part of what is called the world's "third pole", the vast snowfields and glaciers that supply the water for 11 countries in the region, including India and China. Both countries make up a third of the world's population but have access to only 10 percent of the globe's water supplies. By 2030, half of India's population – 700 million people – will lack adequate drinking water.

The "pole" is the source of 10 major rivers, most of them fed by the more than 14,000 glaciers that dot the Himalayas and Hindu Kush. By 2100, two-thirds of those glaciers will be gone, the victims of climate change. China largely controls the "pole", which may be stony and cold, but is lifeblood to 11 countries in the region.

The recent standoff has a history. In 2017, Indian and Chinese troops faced-off in Doklam – Dongland to China – the area where Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim come together. There were fist fights and lots of pushing and shoving, but casualties consisted of black eyes and bloody noses. But the 73-day confrontation apparently shocked the Chinese. "For China, the Doklam stand-off raised fundamental questions regarding the nature of India's threat", says Yun Sun, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington.

Doklam happened just as relations with the Trump administration were headed south, although tensions between Washington and Beijing date back to the 1998-99

Taiwan crisis. Then US President Bill Clinton sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area, one of which traversed the Taiwan Straits between the island and the mainland. The incident humiliated China, which re-tooled its military and built up its navy in the aftermath.

In 2013, US President George W. Bush wooed India to join Japan, South Korea and Australia in a regional alliance aimed at "containing" China. The initiative was only partly successful, but it alarmed China. Beijing saw the Obama administration's "Asia pivot" and the current tensions with the Trump administration as part of the same strategy.

If ones adds to this US anti-missile systems in South Korea, the deployment of 1500 Marines to Australia, and the buildup of American bases in Guam and Wake, it is easy to see why the Chinese would conclude that Washington had it out for them.

China has responded aggressively, seizing and fortifying disputed islands and reefs, and claiming virtually all of the South China Sea as home waters. It has rammed and sunk Vietnamese fishing vessels, bullied Malaysian oilrigs, and routinely violated Taiwan's air space.

China has also strengthened relations with neighbours that India formally dominated, including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives, initiatives which India resents. In short, there are some delicate diplomatic issues in the region, ones whose solutions are ill served by military posturing or arms races.

Was the dust-up in the Galwan Valley an extension of China's

growing assertiveness in Asia? Partly, but the Modi government has also been extremely provocative, particularly in its illegal seizure of Kashmir and Jammu. In the Galwan incident, the Indians were building an airfield and a bridge near the Chinese border that would have allowed Indian armour and modern aircraft to potentially threaten Chinese forces.

There is a current in the Indian military that would like to erase the drubbing India took in its 1962 border war. The thinking is that the current Indian military is far stronger and better armed than it was 58 years ago, and it has more experience than China's Peoples' Liberation Army. The last time the Chinese army went to war was its ill-fated invasion of Vietnam in 1979.

But that is dangerous thinking. India's "experience" consists

mainly of terrorising Kashmiri civilians and an occasional fire fight with lightly armed insurgents. In 1962, India's and China's economies were similar in size. Today, China's economy is five times larger and its military budget four times greater.

China is clearly concerned that it might face a two-front war: India to its south, the US and its allies to the west. That is not a comfortable position, and one that presents dangers to the entire region. Pushing a nuclear-armed country into a corner is never a good idea.

China needs to accept some of the blame for the current tensions. Beijing has bullied smaller countries in the region and refused to accept the World Court's ruling on its illegal occupation of a Philippine reef. Its heavy-handed approach to Hong Kong and Tai-

wan, and its oppressive treatment of its Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang, is winning it no friends, regionally and internationally.

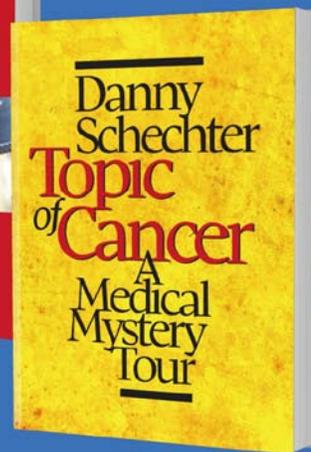
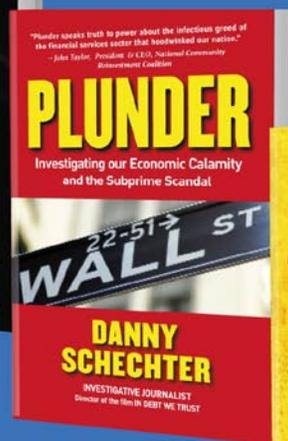
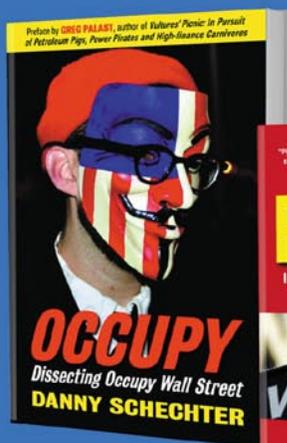
There is no evidence that the US, India and China want a war, one whose effect on the international economy would make Covid-19 look like a mild head cold. But since all three powers are nuclear armed, there is always the possibility – even if remote – of things getting out of hand.

In reality, all three countries desperately need one another if the world is to confront the existential danger of climate change, nuclear war, and events like pandemics. It is a time for diplomacy and cooperation, not confrontation. **CT**

*Conn Hallinan can be read at [dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com](http://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com) and at [middleempireseries.wordpress.com](http://middleempireseries.wordpress.com)*

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Carly Osborn

# P.G. Wodehouse in a pandemic

*Wit and perfect prose to restore the soul in a time of stress*

There is a genre of novel that I have relied upon for many years. Some people call it “airport fiction”, or “beach reading”. The name implies a reassuring effort-to-pleasure ratio. It includes young adult novels about teenage girls kicking arse in post-apocalyptic dystopias, low-stakes relationship dramas and action-thrillers full of weapon specifications.

These are the books I turn to when my emotional capacity is near nil. When I am exhausted by life, by working and parenting and waiting on hold and all the other activities that make me feel as wilted as a wet sock.

It’s a pleasure to curl up with a cup of tea and a novel of escapist silliness. For a few hours I’m distracted and entertained. But lately I have been worse than wilted. Fear and uncertainty have become a constant background sensation. Grief and despair flow in and out of my consciousness like a grim tide.

I don’t need mere distraction. I need real, potent pleasure to offset the horrible news of the day. I

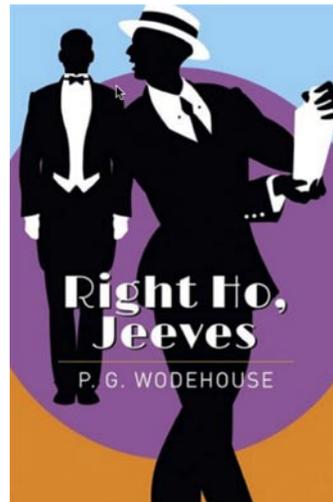
lack the resilience to cope with the minor irritants of poor prose style and shoddy plot holes that so often come with the “light read” genre.

What I need is something that will demand nothing of me, but which is, in every other respect, absolutely perfect. And so I pick up P.G. Wodehouse.

Contrived plots, two-dimensional characters, ridiculous resolutions: check. Yet the master of comic novels takes all of those elements and spins them into shining gold. Wodehouse is the thing to read when anything less than the utterly sublime is too much to bear.

Wodehouse wrote 71 novels. For those new to him, I recommend you start with *Right Ho, Jeeves*. It is a delight.

His contrived plots are contrived so artfully that they seem as natural as birdsong. Misplaced



**BOO CHOICE:** Cover of the perennial P.G. Wodehouse favourite, *Right Ho, Jeeves*.

antiques and mistaken betrothals weave around one another like Bach’s counterpoints, complex yet perfectly balanced, resolving harmoniously into a neat final chord that makes you sigh with satisfaction.

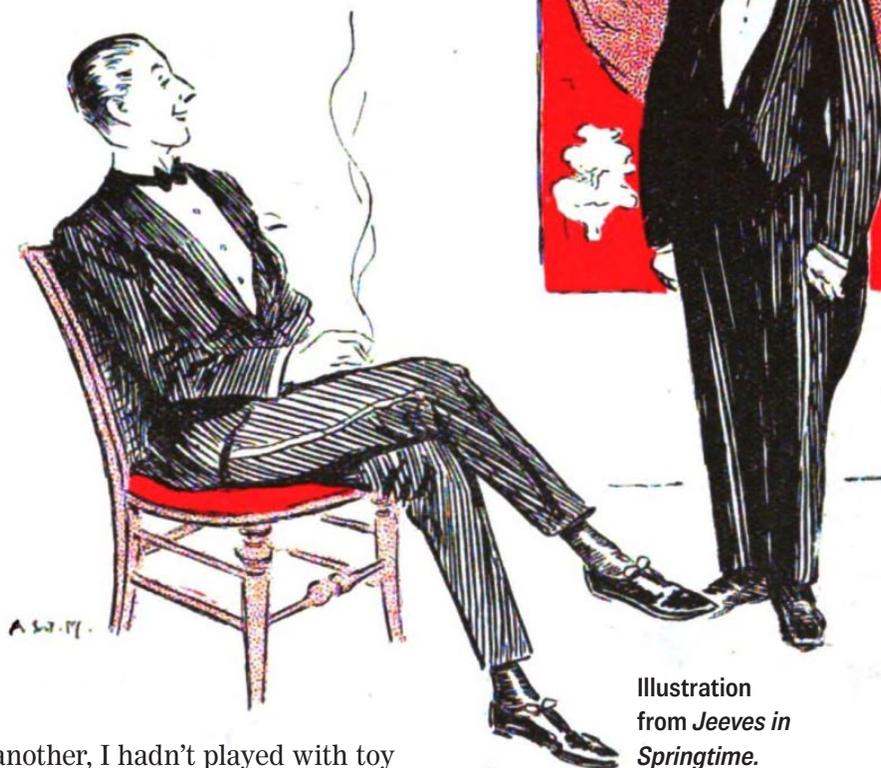
Characters that in lesser hands would be caricatures become some of the sharpest and funniest fictional persons ever created. Aunt Dahlia,

Bobbie Wickham, Psmith (“the P is silent”), Jeeves and Wooster, and Lord Emsworth are my favourites.

It is customary, when praising Wodehouse, to include some quotes that illustrate his unparalleled deftness with the English language.

Anyone who loves Wodehouse knows the impossibility of choosing, but this one seems appropriate for those finding solace in small things today:

“The discovery of a toy duck in the soap dish, presumably the property of some former juvenile visitor, contributed not a little to this new and happier frame of mind. What with one thing and



Art: Wikimedia

Illustration from *Jeeves in Springtime*.

another, I hadn't played with toy ducks in my bath for years, and I found the novel experience most invigorating. For the benefit of those interested, I may mention that if you shove the thing under the surface with the sponge and then let it go, it shoots out of the water in a manner calculated to divert the most careworn. Ten minutes of this and I was enabled to return to the bedchamber much more the old merry Bertram”.

Wodehouse's words are as pristine as poetry. His similes delight me:

“She looked like an aunt who had just bitten into a bad oyster”.

“He sprung round with a sort of guilty bound, like an adagio dancer surprised while watering the cat's

milk”.

“He looked like a sheep with a secret sorrow”.

Wodehouse and Jane Austen are my go-to writers when I need the balm of perfect prose style. But while few have accused Austen's novels of being too grim, the stakes are often real: enough money to live on, a happy marriage. Even the trials of Marianne Dashwood are enough to send me into a slump these days. By contrast, the stakes in Wodehouse couldn't even make my four-year-old cry, and she cries when Shaun the Sheep loses his farmer.

Bertie's millionaire Uncle has lost his favourite milk jug. A

houseguest at Blandings Castle has been throwing eggs at the gardener. These are high dramas I can invest in, safe in the knowledge that the milk jug will be found, the errant houseguest thwarted – and none of it really matters anyway.

This was quite intentional on Wodehouse's part, as he famously said: “I believe there are only two ways of writing a novel... one is mine,

making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right down deep into life, and not caring a damn”.

Wodehouse wrote at a time when his contemporaries – James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley – were forging Great Works of Literature. I love those books, and the ways they go “right down deep into life”.

I suspect Wodehouse could have written such novels with the best of them. But I'm so grateful he knew that the human soul also needs simple joy. His books lead me beside quiet waters, and restore my soul.

And I will never not giggle when Bertie Wooster, offended to the core, takes his leave of his cousin Angela:

“Very good”, I said coldly. “In that case, tinkerty tonk.

“And I meant it to sting”. **CT**

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*This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*

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*Medea Benjamin & Nicolas J. S. Davies*

# Cold War policy will isolate US, not China

*The US must stop pursuing its counterproductive effort to undermine China, and instead work with its neighbours on this small planet*

Tensions between the United States and China are rising as the US election nears, with tit-for-tat consulate closures, new US sanctions and no less than three US aircraft carrier strike groups prowling the seas around China. But it is the United States that has initiated each new escalation in US-China relations. China's responses have been careful and proportionate, with Chinese officials such as Foreign Minister Wang Yi publicly asking the US to step back from its brinkmanship to find common ground for diplomacy.

Most of the US complaints about China are long-standing, from the treatment of the Uighur minority and disputes over islands and maritime borders in the South China Sea to accusations of unfair trade practices and support for protests in Hong Kong. But the answer to the "Why now?" question seems obvious: the approaching US election.

Danny Russel, who was Obama's top East Asia expert in the National Security Council and then at the State Department, told

the BBC that the new tensions with China are partly an effort to divert attention from Trump's bungled response to the Covid-19 pandemic and his tanking poll numbers, and that this "has a wag the dog feel to it".

Meanwhile, Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden has been going toe-to-toe with Trump and Secretary Pompeo in a potentially dangerous "tough on China" contest, which could prove difficult for the winner to walk back after the election.

Elections aside, there are two underlying forces at play in the current escalation of tensions, one economic and the other military. China's economic miracle has lifted hundreds of millions of its people out of poverty, and, until recently, Western corporations were glad to make the most of its huge pool of cheap labor, weak workplace and environmental protections, and growing consumer market. Western leaders welcomed China into their club of wealthy, powerful countries with little fuss about human and civil rights or China's

domestic politics.

So what has changed? US high-tech companies like Apple, which were once only too glad to outsource American jobs and train Chinese contractors and engineers to manufacture their products, are finally confronting the reality that they have not just outsourced jobs, but also skills and technology. Chinese companies and highly skilled workers are now leading some of the world's latest technological advances.

The global rollout of 5G cellular technology has become a flashpoint, not because the increase and higher frequency of EMF radiation it involves may be dangerous to human health, which is a real concern, but because Chinese firms like Huawei and ZTE have developed and patented much of the critical infrastructure involved, leaving Silicon Valley in the unfamiliar position of having to play catch-up.

Also, if the US's 5G infrastructure is built by Huawei and ZTE instead of AT&T and Verizon, the US government will no longer be able to require "back doors" that the NSA can use to spy on us all,



**MILITARY MIGHT:** The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan takes part in Exercise Valiant Shield 2018, one of the largest United States military war games held in the Pacific Ocean.

so it is instead stoking fears that China could insert its own back doors in Chinese equipment to spy on us instead. Left out of the discussion is the real solution: repeal the Patriot Act and make sure that all the technology we use in our daily lives is secure from the prying eyes of both the US and foreign governments.

China is investing in infrastructure all over the world. As of March 2020, a staggering 138 countries have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive plan to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks. China's international influence will only be enhanced by its success, and the US's failure, in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the military front, the

Obama and Trump administrations have both tried to "pivot to Asia" to confront China, even as the US military remains bogged down in the Middle East. With a war-weary public demanding an end to the endless wars that have served to justify record military spending for nearly 20 years, the US military-industrial complex has to find more substantial enemies to justify its continued existence and budget-busting costs. Lockheed Martin is not ready to switch from building billion-dollar warplanes on cost-plus contracts to making wind turbines and solar panels.

The only targets the US can find to justify a \$740-billion military budget and 800 overseas military bases are its familiar old Cold War enemies: Russia and China. They both expanded their modest military budgets after 2011, when

the US and its allies hi-jacked the Arab Spring to launch covert and proxy wars in Libya, where China had substantial oil interests, and Syria, a long-term Russian ally. But their increases in military spending were only relative. In 2019, China's military budget was just \$261-billion compared to the US's \$732-billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The US still spends more on its military than the ten next largest military powers combined, including Russia and China.

Russian and Chinese military forces are almost entirely defensive, with an emphasis on advanced and effective anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems. Neither Russia nor China has invested in carrier strike groups to sail the seven seas or US-style expeditionary forces to attack or invade countries on the other side of the planet. But they do have the forces and weapons they need to defend themselves and their people from any US attack and both are nuclear powers, making a major war against either of them a more serious prospect than the US military has faced anywhere since World War II.

China and Russia are both deadly serious about defending themselves, but we should not misinterpret that as enthusiasm for a new arms race or a sign of aggressive intentions on their part. It is US imperialism and militarism that are driving the escalating tensions. The sad truth is that 30 years after the supposed end of the Cold War, the US military-industrial complex has failed to reimagine itself in anything but Cold War terms, and its "New" Cold War is

just a revival of the old Cold War that it spent the last three decades telling us it already won.

The US and China do not have to be enemies. Just a year ago, 100 US business, political and military leaders signed a public letter to President Trump in the *Washington Post* entitled “China Is Not an Enemy”. They wrote that China is not “an economic enemy or an existential national security threat,” and US opposition “will not prevent the continued expansion of the Chinese economy, a greater global market share for Chinese companies and an increase in China’s role in world affairs”.

They concluded that, “US efforts to treat China as an enemy and decouple it from the global economy will damage the United States’s international role and reputation and undermine the eco-

## World governments are collaborating with China to stop the spread of coronavirus and share the solutions

conomic interests of all nations”, and that the US “could end up isolating itself rather than Beijing”.

That is precisely what is happening. Governments all over the world are collaborating with China to stop the spread of coronavirus and share the solutions with all who need them. The US must stop pursuing its counterproductive effort to undermine China, and instead work with all our neigh-

bours on this small planet. Only by cooperating with other nations and international organisations can we stop the pandemic – and address the coronavirus-sparked economic meltdown gripping the world economy and the many challenges we must all face together if we are to survive and thrive in the 21st-century. **CT**

*Medea Benjamin is cofounder of CODEPINK for Peace, and author of several books, including Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran.*

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# Andrew Fischer's Random Thoughts

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## Let there be lights, but not too many

Why do police cars need all those flashing red and blue lights? Sure, they make the vehicles highly visible from miles away, but their strobe-light effect could cause seizures in the legally blind. Police cars used to have a single “rotating bubble gum machine” on the roof, sometimes with two smaller fixed lights. Now there are lights all over the place – the roof, hood, grill, rear. Big ones, small ones, blue, red, blue, red – flashing, like an Xmas tree gone mad!

Apparently the colours of the lights serve various purposes. “Red lights signify an immediate

emergency. Blue lights define police presence and can be spotted easily from a great distance. White lights are used by night-shift officers to brighten dark areas or to shine on suspects who are travelling on foot or being interviewed. Yellow lights warn approaching vehicles that patrol cars are slowing down or parked on busy roads. All lights may be used at the same time”. [source: [legalbeagle.com](http://legalbeagle.com)]

All well and good, I suppose.... But why do school buses need strobe-lights on their roofs? Who can miss those enormous, yellow elephants – even at night?

## Fetishes of the rich and famous

After reading about **Johnny Depp's** “wild lifestyle” during his recent libel trial in London, I poked around the web looking for crazy stuff about other celebrities. I found more than I expected, to wit....

● **Eva Longoria** “loves being the submissive one in the bedroom and being tied up with silk scarves”.

● **Carmen Electra** “loves collecting the naughtiest lingerie, the kinkiest of handcuffs and enjoys being spanked with coat hangers”. Preferably the heavy, wooden type!

● **Matthew McConaughey's** “sense of taste is his strongest

sense and that can easily result in him getting sexually aroused by a wonderful meal”. Just don't feed him any pickles.

● **Scarlett Johansson** “finds that car sex is a major turn on”. No Mini-Coopers need apply.

● **Justin Timberlake** “likes to pull his wife, Jessica Biel to the side in the midst of concerts for a quick ‘one, two punch knockout’ before returning to the stage”. Down for the (10-second) count!

● **Read more**, some of which are definitely not suitable for readers with delicate constitutions, at [www.the richest.com](http://www.the richest.com) and at [www.jellyshare.com](http://www.jellyshare.com).

## A farewell to movies ...

To movies in theatres, to be specific, a Covid casualty. It may take a decade or so, but it will happen. Why would anyone want to sit in a crowded theatre possibly infested with a deadly virus? Where strangers suck on soft drinks? Chat on their cell phones? And converse as if they were in their own living rooms?

Try telling someone to “please be quiet” these days, and you'll likely regret it, since civility has gone out the window and selfishness is the order of the day.

The shift from movie theatres has been in the cards since the advent of HDTV when it became clear that TV screens would soon be large enough and cheap enough to sound the death knell of the “big screen”. That day is getting close.

Why spend \$25 for two tickets when a few months later you can own a movie digitally for \$15, or wait a little longer and rent it for \$6? You can sit in your own home, eat your own snacks, pause the film and control its sound. You can even take a bathroom break without tripping over someone else's popcorn while dashing to the toilet! **CT**

*Andrew Fischer's collection of short stories, Purgastories, is available at amazon.com. at no charge from [www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com).*

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