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Issue 226

# ColdType

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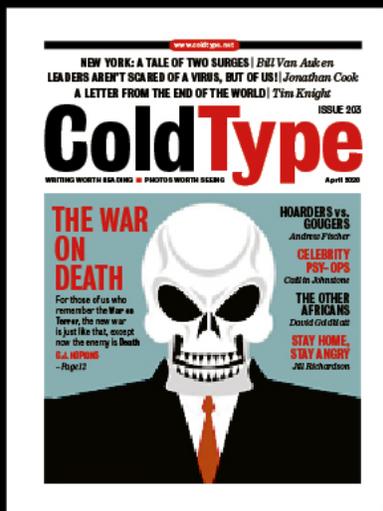
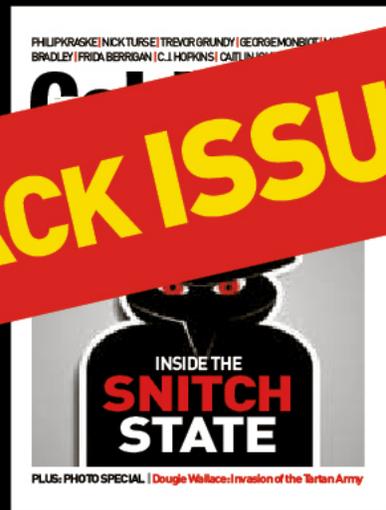
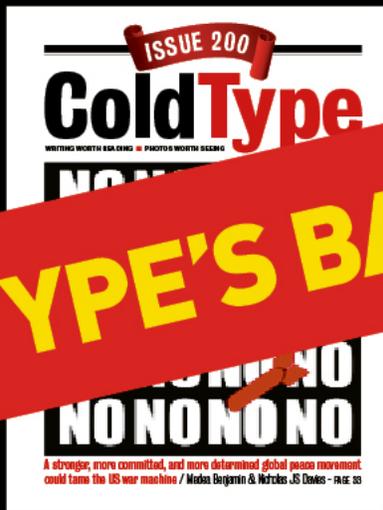
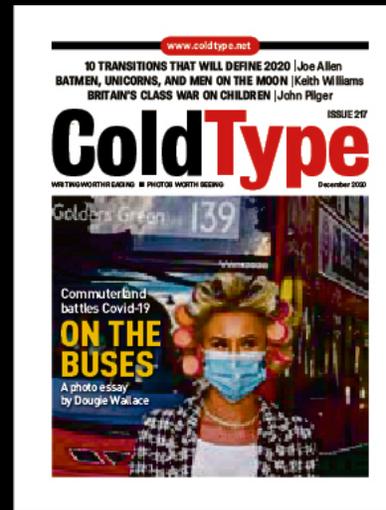
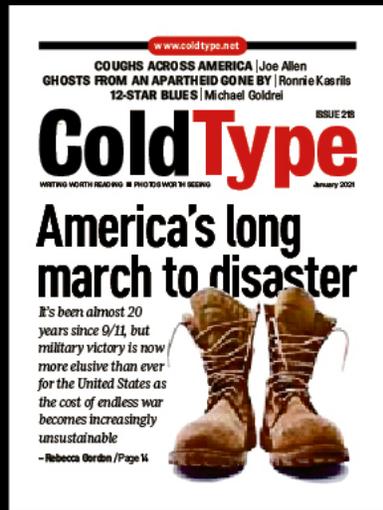
September 2021

## HOW FREEDOM DIES. AN ALPHABET OF STATE TYRANNY

Call it authoritarianism.  
Or fascism. Or oligarchy.  
Or a police state. The  
end result is the same

*By John W. Whitehead &  
Nisha Whitehead (Page 14)*





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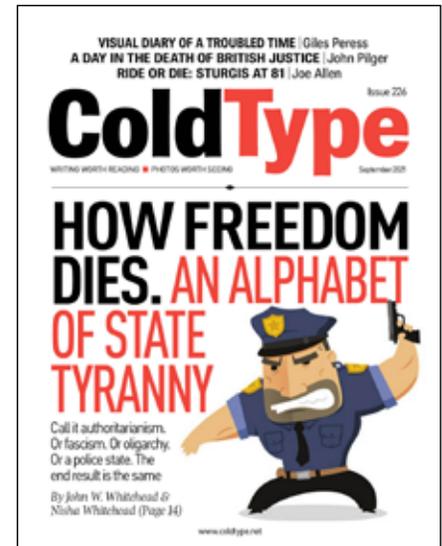
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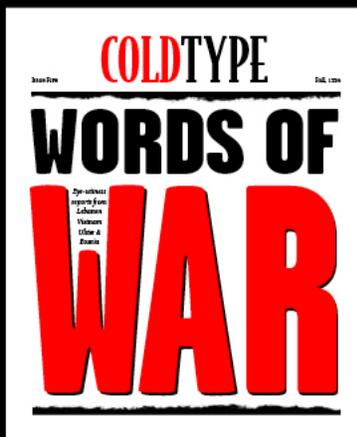
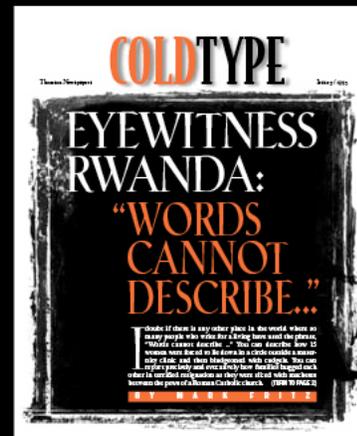
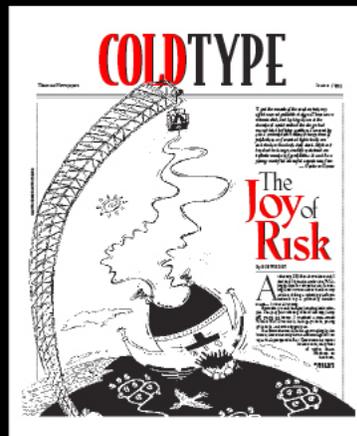
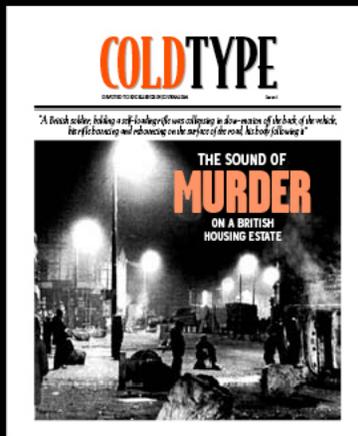
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NEWS | VIEWS | OPINIONS

# INSIGHTS

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SAM PIZZIGATI

## Borrowing their way to ever more fabulous fortune

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No widely acclaimed artist in the 20th-century baited and battled the rich with as much gusto as Diego Rivera. The Mexican painter's Great Depression-era confrontation with Nelson Rockefeller, then the 20-something grandson of the world's single richest individual, captured front-page real estate all across the United States – and far beyond.

The Rockefeller family had hired Rivera to paint the artistic centerpiece of the newly constructed Rockefeller Center in New York. Rivera's resulting mural contrasted the “debauched rich” with workers on the rise. Right-wingers went apoplectic. Young Nelson, getting hammered, asked Rivera to remove an image of Lenin from the mural. Rivera refused, offering



Diego Rivera, *Night of the Rich*, Secretariat of Public Education Main Headquarters, Mexico City, Mexico

instead to add a portrait of Lincoln.

The Rockefellers would eventually have Rivera's mural plastered over, but not before E.B. White, the beloved author of *Charlotte's Web*, penned “a classic of light verse” on the face-off for the *New Yorker*. His poem's most famous couplet had grandson Nelson excusing his censorship: *And tho your art I dislike to hamper,*

*I owe a little to God and Gramper.*

Today, some nine decades later, Rivera's artwork has a different sort of relationship with America's rich: His paintings are helping 21st-century American moguls live lives of tax-free luxury.

How can art like Rivera's be subsidising the super rich? These awesomely affluent are using their art collections – and any other assets they may hold, everything from classic car collections to shares of stock in the companies they run – as collateral for loans from America's biggest banks. Why would billionaires need loans? The simple answer: They don't need loans. They need tax breaks, and they can get them by borrowing – at exceedingly low interest rates – off their mountains of assets.

Take Elon Musk. In 2019, he took out \$61-million in mortgages on five properties he owned in California. About that time he also had some 40 percent of his personal shares in Tesla pledged as collateral for still other loans. Musk's millions in borrowed cash have been bankrolling his lavish lifestyle and new investments. These millions have also been providing a sweet end-run around Uncle Sam at tax time.

If Musk had sold some of his Tesla shares or surplus California properties to raise fresh cash, he would have owed capital gains tax on his sale earnings. But by bor-

# INSIGHTS

rowing for the cash, he let his Tesla and California property assets continue to increase in value and, at the same time, sidesteps any taxes.

Billionaires Clarissa and Edgar Bronfman have been playing the same borrowing game, only with their art collection. Diego Rivera's 1928 *Dance in Tehuantepec*, the *Architectural Digest* notes, sits at one end of their Park Avenue triplex living room. The Bronfmans have been using their Rivera – and other artworks – as collateral for their own borrowed cash.

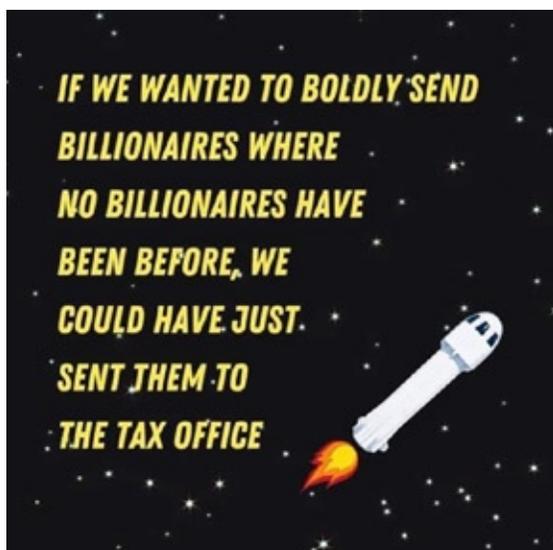
Billionaires like the Bronfmans can get loans these days at rates under 1 percent, and they've been rushing to take advantage. The "wealth management" departments at America's top banks – the offices that service America's most affluent – have now made loans that total over \$600-billion in value, a sum that's running 17.5 percent higher than the comparable total from the middle of last year. Loaning to the rich has essentially become a major part of the business that major banks do. These loans, the *Financial Times* observes, currently add up to "22.5 percent of the banks' total loan books, up from 16.3 percent in mid-2017".

"JPMorgan and Citi are now lending more to a small number of ultra-high net worth clients than to their millions of credit card customers", adds the *Financial Times* take. "A decade ago, JPMorgan was lending five times as much to credit card customers as it did to

private clients".

What makes banks like JPMorgan, Citi, and Morgan Stanley so eager to extend these billions in loans – to the rich – at such low interest rates? One reason: The loans come as close to risk-free as risk-free could be. A more important reason: Big banks cherish close relationships with extremely rich people. These rich often run

Art: Internet / source unknown



extremely large corporate empires and can steer their corporate banking business to the banks that cater to their personal needs. Elon Musk, for instance, has used Morgan Stanley, his personal lender, for Tesla stock and convertible-debt offerings.

"Providing mega-mortgages," a Bloomberg analysis sums up, "helps bank profit margins in the short run and is highly strategic long-term".

The only losers in all this loaning and borrowing: average Americans who pay their taxes while wealthy people avoid theirs. Working Americans pay the price for that avoidance. They depend on

public services that tax shortfalls cripple. Rich people, meanwhile, don't use public services. They live in private worlds made ever more comfortable by the "asset-backed loans" that have become, points out Institute for Policy Studies analyst Chuck Collins, "one of the principal tools the ultra-wealthy are using to game their tax obligations down to zero".

The best antidote to this gaming of the federal income tax? That may be the wealth tax legislation that Senator Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts introduced this past spring with Representatives Pramila Jayapal of Washington State and Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania. These lawmakers are proposing an annual wealth tax set at a mere 2 cents per dollar on wealth between \$50-million and \$1-billion and 3 cents per dollar on riches over \$1-billion. A wealth tax along these lines would have raised \$114-billion in taxes from billionaires alone in 2020. Just one of these billionaires, Jeff Bezos, would have faced a personal \$5.7-billion wealth tax bill.

Bezos and the rest of America's billionaires could easily afford Warren's proposed wealth tax freight. Their current combined fortune: \$4.7-trillion, up \$1.8-trillion since the pandemic began. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest 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

Photo: Tony Sutton / Adapted by Boynton



GEORGE MONBIOT

## The gift of time may help save the world

**W**e have a slow food movement and a slow travel movement. But we're missing something, and its absence contributes to our escalating crisis. We need a slow ecology movement, and we need it fast.

The majority of the world's species cannot withstand any significant disruption of their habitat by humans. Healthy ecosystems depend to a great extent on old and gnarly places, that might take centuries to develop, and are rich in what ecologists call "spatial heterogeneity": complex natural architecture. They need, for example, giant trees, whose knotty entrails are split and rotten; great reefs of coral or oysters or honey-

comb worms; braiding, meandering rivers full of snags and beaver dams; undisturbed soils reamed by roots and holes. The loss of these ancient habitats is one of the factors driving the global shift from large, slow-growing creatures to the small, short-lived species able to survive our onslaughts. Slow ecology would protect and create our future ancient habitats.

At the moment, we're going in the opposite direction. Self-serving nonsense cooked up by governments and their advisers, such as "natural capital accounting" and "biodiversity net gain" treat one habitat or feature as exchangeable for another. Don't lament the twisted old oak we're felling: we'll plant 10 saplings in plastic rabbit

guards in its place. Then we'll call it a "net gain".

But there's no substitute for an ancient tree, or an ancient anything else. Big old trees are the "keystone structures" of forests, on which many other species depend. The very trees that foresters have tended to weed out – forked, twisted, lightning-struck, rotten, dead – are those that harbour the most life. For example, a single species of bracket fungus, which grows on rotten branches (dryad's saddle), harbours 246 species of beetle.

Bats shelter in splits in the trunk. Forks hold tiny pools of water or pockets of soil. Jagged wounds where limbs have sheared, burrs and excrescences, scrapes from which resin bubbles, ivy, vines, lichens and mosses, tangles of twigs and derelict nests, peeling bark and fire scars are all crucial wildlife habitats. But the most important features of ancient trees – and many other habitats – are holes.

**B**etween 10 percent and 40 percent of the world's forest birds and mammals need holes in trees in which to nest or roost. Many other animals – amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates – depend on them. But these species suffer from a void of voids, an absence of absences.

Holes take many forms: hollow trunks or branches, galleries mined by insects, cavities dug by woodpeckers. Woodpeckers are keystone species, whose tunnelling makes homes for other nesting birds and mammals. They appear to spread fungal spores on their beaks in the same way that bees

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# INSIGHTS

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spread pollen, and this helps create the soft wood into which they can drill. The trees they need are big, old and rotten.

But almost everywhere, trees like this are disappearing. Research in Poland, France, Scandinavia, the Balkans and the Carpathians shows that forests unmanaged by people have far greater numbers of crucial features than even those whose trees are harvested in the most sensitive ways. In France, for example, the number of broken forks increased by nearly 300 percent in the 50 years since forests were last harvested, and holes made by woodpeckers by 500 percent.

A study in Australia showed that, following a major wildfire, the great majority of trees with holes were wiped out. It will take up to 120 years without further disturbance for their full ecological complexity to recover.

Our tidy-minded forestry and our habit of treating trees as interchangeable are devastating to wildlife. “Replacing” an old tree is no more meaningful than replacing an old master. The same applies to all ecosystems. When a trawler ploughs through biological structures on the seabed, they can take hundreds of years to fully recover. When a river is dredged and straightened, it becomes, by comparison to what it once was, an empty shell.

So what would a slow ecology movement look like? As Henry David Thoreau said, we are rich in proportion to the number of things we can afford to let alone. To the greatest extent possible, we

should allow our complex natural architectures to recover. This means keeping trawlers out of all the places farcically listed as “marine protected areas”, most of which are nothing but lines on the map. It would mean, in nature reserves, less reliance on grazing by livestock, which tend to keep living systems in a state of arrested development. It would mean letting rivers run free.

Wherever possible, we should allow the trees killed by ash dieback and other diseases to remain standing. If one good thing arises from these plagues, it could be an increase in the amount of standing and fallen dead wood, both of which are crucial habitats. “Salvage logging” – removing

dead or dying trees – is one of the most damaging human activities. Perhaps it also means a general preservation order for all trees, living or dead, greater than 100 years old: you would need express permission to fell one. It would mean a new and deeper respect for the entanglements of nature.

We need to create today the knurled and wizened ecosystems that only our grandchildren will see. Restoring the living world means restoring complexity, and complexity takes ages to develop. So it’s time we began. **CT**

*George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).*

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GREG PALAST

## Facing prison for fighting Chevron

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It was back in 2007, when I found Emergildo Criollo, Chief of the Cofan people of the Amazon in Ecuador, in his thatched stilt home in the rainforest. Criollo told me his 5-year-old son had jumped into a swimming hole, covered with an enticing shine. The shine was oil sludge, illegally dumped. His son came up vomiting blood, then dropped dead in the chief’s arms.

I followed him to the courthouse in the dusty roustabout town of Lago Agrio (Bitter Lake) where, with a sheaf of papers, Criollo



Cofan Chief Emergildo Criollo, Ecuador

sought justice for his son.

Behind Criollo, the court clerks, in their white shirts and ties, were giggling and grinning at each

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other, nodding toward this “indio” painted up and half naked, thinking he can file a suit against a giant. A giant named Chevron.

In 2011, they stopped laughing. That’s when an Ecuadorian court ordered Chevron to pay Criollo and other indigenous co-plaintiffs \$9.5- billion. The courts found that Chevron’s Texaco operation had illegally dumped 16-billion gallons of deadly oil waste.

What the gigglers didn’t know is that the Chief had a secret weapon: Steven Donziger, a US attorney, classmate of Barack Obama at Harvard law, who gave up everything – literally everything – to take on Criollo’s case.

It’s been a decade, and Chevron still hasn’t paid a dime. But Donziger has paid big time: For the last two years, he’s been under house arrest, longer than any American in history never convicted of a crime.

But weeks ago, he was convicted of contempt by a judge who denied him a jury. (The Constitution? Faggedaboutit.) And on October 8, this judge will sentence Donziger, and could put him behind bars.

Who was the prosecutor? Not the US government, but Chevron’s law firm. The first-ever criminal prosecution by a US corporation.

Say what?

I can’t make this up.

Chevron set out to destroy Donziger, to make an example of a human rights lawyer who dares take on the petroleum pirates.

They filed suits against Donziger and the Cofan and found a former tobacco industry lawyer judge Lewis Kaplan to find

Donziger in contempt for refusing to turn over his cellphone and computer to Chevron – an unprecedented attack on attorney-client privilege. To give Chevron the names of indigenous activists in South America can be a death sentence.

When Donziger said he’d appeal, the judge charged him with criminal contempt – that’s simply unprecedented. But a far more dangerous precedent was set. When federal prosecutors in New York laughed off and rejected Kaplan’s demand that they charge Donziger, the judge appointed Chevron’s



Steven Donziger with Indigenous clients.

lawyers, Gibson Dunn, to act as the prosecutors!

So far, 60 Nobel Laureates, several US Senators and Congresspeople, and a Who’s Who of human rights groups have publicly registered their horror at this new corporate prosecution.

Chevron also went after journalists, in one case, filing a complaint against the BBC television reporter who broke the story that Chevron had destroyed key evidence in the case. I was that reporter – and survived with my job after a year of hearings. But Chevron’s prosecu-

tion did a damn good job of scaring off other journalists.

Some were scared off; some bought off. PBS NewsHour wouldn’t touch the death-by-oil story. The official chief sponsor of the PBS NewsHour? Chevron.

Here’s the story – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1FIXwtfvBs> – broadcast by BBC and, in the US, by Democracy Now!, the story you won’t find on the Petroleum Broadcast System.

I’ve gone way out of my way to get ChevronTexaco’s side of the story. I finally chased them down in Ecuador’s capital, Quito. I showed them a study of the epidemic of childhood leukaemia centred on where their company dumped oil sludge. Here’s their reply:

“And it’s the only case of cancer in the world? How many cases of children with cancer do you have in the States?”

Texaco’s lawyer, Rodrigo Perez, was chuckling and snorting. “Scientifically, nobody has proved that crude causes cancer.”

OK, then. But what about the epidemiological study about children with cancer in the Amazon traced to hydrocarbons?

The parents of the dead kids, he said, would have some big hurdles in court: “If there is somebody with cancer there, they must prove it is caused by crude or by the petroleum industry. And, second, they have to prove that it is OUR crude”.

Perez leaned over with a huge grin, “Which is absolutely impossible.”

He grinned even harder.

Maybe some guy eating monkeys in the jungle can’t prove it. And maybe that’s because

Photo: AmazonWatch

# INSIGHTS

the evidence of oil dumping was destroyed.

Deliberately, by Chevron.

I passed the ChevronTexaco legal duo a document from their files labelled “Personal y confidential”. They read in silence. They stayed silent quite a while. Jaime Varela, Chevron’s lawyer, was wearing his tan golf pants and white shoes, an open shirt and bespoke blue blazer. He had a blow-dried bouffant hairdo much favoured by the ruling elite of Latin America and skin whiter than mine, a colour also favoured by the elite.

Jaime had been grinning, too. He read the memo. He stopped grinning. The key part says,

“Todos los informes previos deben ser sacados de las oficinas principales y las del campo, y ser destruidos.”

“... Reports ... are to be removed from the division and field offices and be destroyed”.

It came from the company boss in the States, “R. C. Shields, Presidente de la Junta”.

Removed and destroyed. That smells an awful lot like an order to destroy evidence, which in this case means evidence of abandoned pits of deadly drilling residue. Destroying evidence that is part of a court action constitutes fraud.

In the United States, that would be a crime, a jail-time crime. OK, gents, you want to tell me about this document?

“Can we have a copy of this?” Varela asked me, pretending he’d never seen it before in his life. I’ll pretend with them, if that gets me information. “Sure. You’ve never seen this?”

The ritual of innocence continued as they asked a secretary to make copies. “We’re sure there’s an explanation,” Varela said. I’m sure there is. “We’ll get back to you as soon as we find out what it is.”

I’m still waiting. **CT**

**Greg Palast** has been investigating vote suppression in Georgia for *Rolling Stone*, *Black Voters*

*Matter and, as of late, The Thom Hartmann Program. He is the author of The New York Times bestsellers, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy and Billionaires & Ballot Bandits, out as major motion non-fiction movie: The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: The Case of the Stolen Election, available on Amazon and Amazon Prime.*

FINIAN CUNNINGHAM

## Afghan lesson for Uncle Sam’s running dogs

Afghanistan is the most glaring proof of the American treachery. It’s a cautionary tale for others who incredibly still seem trusting in hitching their wagon to a US alliance.

US President Joe Biden said he has “no regrets” about pulling American forces out of Afghanistan as the Taliban militants look set to over-run the entire Central Asian country. The lesson here is: anyone acting as a running dog for Washington does so at the peril of ultimate US betrayal.

The US-backed puppet regime in Kabul has done Washington’s bidding for nearly two decades. After 20 years of futile war at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Afghan lives and trillions of dollars, Uncle Sam has decided to pack up, get out and leave the Afghans to their

miserable fate. As the Taliban take over one provincial capital after another, the US intelligence agencies are warning that the Kabul regime could fall within a month. And, callously, Biden told the Afghans they have to do their own fighting.

Whatever happened to lofty American vows of “nation-building”? Or “fighting terrorism”, “defending democracy”, “protecting women’s rights”?

It’s a sordid story with much historical precedent illustrating how at the drop of a hat Uncle Sam is liable to hang erstwhile “allies” out to dry. As American elder statesman Henry Kissinger once noted, the US doesn’t have permanent allies, it only has interests.

Some 46 years ago, the fall of Saigon saw the United States

# INSIGHTS

Photo: TV screenshot



**CHAOS:** Crowds of terrified Afghans flood the runway at Kabul airport as a US transport plane prepares begins its take off.

scurry away from a corrupt puppet regime it had propped up in South Vietnam as the North Vietnamese communists finally routed the redundant American pawns.

A more recent example of callous betrayal by Washington was the throwing of Kurdish militants to the mercy of Turkey when the latter invaded northern Syria during the Trump presidency. Anyone who accepts American patronage must know that the small print in the contract always reads: to be dumped at any time of Uncle Sam's choosing and convenience.

Afghanistan is the most glaring proof perhaps since the Fall of Saigon in 1975 of that American treachery. It's a cautionary tale for others who incredibly still seem trusting in hitching their wagon to a US alliance.

Ukraine, run by a venal regime in Kiev, appears slavishly willing

to place all its fate under Washington's whim. Centuries of common history with Russia are being sacrificed by the regime in Kiev all for the gain of Washington's military benevolence. A seven-year civil war bankrolled by \$2-billion in American military aid has destroyed the peace and prosperity of Ukraine as well as damage neighbourly relations with Russia. We can be sure that when the imperial planners in Washington realise that their use of Ukraine as a pawn against Russia has become futile, then the people of Ukraine will be dropped to sort out the chronic mess.

Likewise the American lackeys in the Baltic states. They act as running dogs for Washington to spoil relations between Russia and the European Union. For years, the Baltic countries have objected to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia, appealing instead for more expensive and environmentally

dirty US gas exports. Overnight, Washington has decided such a policy is untenable and not worth antagonising Germany and the rest of the EU. And just like that, the Baltic lackeys are left out in the cold looking like fools.

They never seem to learn though. This week Lithuania did Uncle Sam's bidding to provoke China by announcing it would recognise Taiwan. That move infuriated Beijing because it undercuts the international One China Policy of accepting Taiwan as under Beijing's sovereignty. China recalled its envoy from Vilnius and it has threatened punitive economic measures. As the EU's top trading partner, it is reckless and self-defeating to incur China's wrath. Lithuania and the rest of the EU could potentially be hit with economic losses – all for the sake of following Washington's geopolitical agenda of hostility towards China.

Currently, the biggest caution of US treachery must surely go to the renegade Chinese island territory of Taiwan. Beijing has warned that Washington's provocative arms sales are fomenting separatist factions on the island. China has declared the right to invade Taiwan militarily and take back control by force. Such a move could ignite a war between the United States and China since Washington has repeatedly vowed to "defend" Taiwan.

But as the Afghan debacle reminds us, the chances are that Washington will leave the Taiwanese to their fate in a military confrontation with

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mainland China. There would be Chinese blood spilled on both sides before Beijing asserts its authority.

Afghanistan demonstrates with brutal clarity that there is not an iota of principle in Washington's foreign policy and its military interventions. The lives of ordinary US citizens are as expendable as those of foreign people as long as Washington's interests of serving its corporate profits are deemed to

be met. When those interests stop then the lives lost are flushed down the toilet like a nasty turd. **CT**

*Finian Cunningham is Former editor and writer for major news media organizations. He has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. This article was first published by [www.strategic-culture.org](http://www.strategic-culture.org).*

also unleashed a mass migration from central Africa. Gaddafi's iron rule of Libya had been an effective barricade – the “cork in the bottle” according to Assange – holding back hordes of migrants and jihadists.

Now it was released and they crossed the Mediterranean in their thousands to get to Europe – or attempted to get there – in leaky boats and patched-up rubber dinghies. Inevitably, many of the poor souls died by drowning, desperately fleeing starvation and a war-torn country.

For all of this death and misery and wanton destruction, one person was the prime instigator and bears direct responsibility.

Hillary Rodham Clinton.

And yet once again, to prove that a graveyard sense of humour and total absence of moral and ethical principles are alive and flourishing in the UK, the arts complex HOME, based in Manchester in the north-west of England, has invited warmonger HRC to be interviewed on Zoom by Baroness Helena Kennedy QC. Here's their press release: “This week we announced brand new events for the Ripples of Hope Festival, a celebration of human rights .... And next week, tickets will go on sale for *In Conversation With Hillary Rodham Clinton*, a transatlantic discussion of Secretary Clinton's extraordinary life”.

But wait. We're not done. It gets better. Or worse.

Manchester is the city that in 2017 suffered a terrorist attack when a bomb was detonated at an Ariana Grande concert in the Manchester Arena. It killed 22 people, mainly children and teenagers,

TREVOR HOYLE

## Short memories of Hillary Clinton's war

The woman who destroyed a country and murdered its leader, unleashing a surge of migrants from Africa, is to be the honoured guest at a “celebration of human rights” by Manchester arts group HOME this month. Who said satire was dead?

“WE CAME.

WE SAW.

HE DIED”.

This was the ghoulish, gleeful response – accompanied by a triumphant chortle and beaming smile (watch it on YouTube\*) – of Hillary Rodham Clinton to a CBS interviewer after the demise of Muammar Gaddafi, dispatched with the business end of a bayonet up his rectum.

As Secretary of State to Barack Obama, Hillary Rodham Clinton

was a key player and the driving force in implementing regime change in Libya by disposing of its leader and bombing the country back into the desert.

In an interview with John Pilger, Julian Assange labelled it “Hillary Clinton's War”.

As he explained to Pilger, 1,700 leaked emails revealed the real reason for her zeal as a warmonger – to give her campaign a boost in the forthcoming election: “She perceived the removal of Gaddafi and the overthrow of the Libyan state as something that she would use to run in the general election, for president”.

As a result, an estimated 40,000 people, most of them civilians, died in the initial conflict. Apart from the destruction of the country, it

● See the Clinton video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlz3-0zcE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlz3-0zcE)

# INSIGHTS

and caused dreadful injuries and lifelong disabilities to a further 900 concert-goers and their families.

The perpetrator was 23-year old Salman Abedi. His rucksack carried the home-made bomb packed with nuts and bolts and shards of tin cut from empty cooking oil canisters. He was from Libya.

The Abedi family emigrated to Britain from Libya during the rule of Colonel Gaddafi, settling in the Fallowfield area of Manchester. The suicide bomber, Salman, his younger brother, and their father, were members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), whose sole aim and purpose was to overthrow Gaddafi.

In this they were aided and supported and funded by both branches of the British security services, MI5 and MI6. Another Libyan exile, Belal Younis, was told by an MI5 intelligence officer: “The British government have no problem with people fighting against Gaddafi”.

Not only was the government quite open and unashamed about it, they saw nothing wrong in seeking to destabilise another sovereign state and depose its leader. (“Britain and France are using Qatar to bankroll the Libyan rebels” – *The Times*, June 2011.)

Members of the Abedi family and other affiliates of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a proscribed terrorist organisation affiliated to ISIS, were allowed to travel back and forth between Libya and Manchester without hindrance. No questions asked.

This “Open Door” policy of the British government went on, although many of the Libyan exiles were known to the authorities and thought dangerous enough to be

kept under surveillance and have counter-terrorism control orders slapped on them.

David Cameron was prime minister at the time. The home secretary, under whose remit the intelligence services operate, was Theresa May, the next prime minister. Neither one has had to answer for their part – their crucial role – in giving free rein, plus material support, to an ideological jihadist cause which led ultimately, and tragically, to the terrorist attack on the Manchester Arena in which 22 young people died.

And neither has Hillary Rodham Clinton. A case could be made that by her direct instigation of the war on Libya, she shares the blame along with Cameron and May for the terrorist atrocities in Manchester.

The dots aren’t hard to follow, are they? Even a child could connect them:

- David Cameron and Theresa

May – facilitating the LIFG.

- The Abedi family, including the bomber, helped by MI5 and MI6.

- Hillary Rodham Clinton – cheer-leading for war on Libya.

- The Manchester Arena terrorist attack — causing 22 deaths, and multiple injuries.

But apparently it’s beyond the management committee that organises and runs the HOME arts complex. These folk must live in a bubble of wilful ignorance and rarefied privilege. Or is it that they know of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s murderous military adventuring but are just too bedazzled by her global celebrity to care? **CT**

**Trevor Hoyle’s** article on the connexion between Cameron, May, the British intelligence services and the Manchester Arena bombing appeared in *ColdType* – Find it (and all back issues) at: [www.coldtype.net/reader.html](http://www.coldtype.net/reader.html)

HURWITT’S EYE  
MARK HURWITT



JOHN W. WHITEHEAD & NISHA WHITEHEAD

# How freedom dies: An alphabet of state tyranny

Call it authoritarianism. Or fascism. Or oligarchy. Or a police state. The end result is the same

*“Plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures, and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny. By these practices and enticements the ancient dictators so successfully lulled their subjects under the yoke, that the stupefied peoples, fascinated by the pastimes and vain pleasures flashed before their eyes, learned subservience as natively, but not so creditably, as little children learn to read by looking at bright picture books.” – French philosopher Etienne de La Boétie*

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a convenient, traumatic, devastating distraction. The American people, the permanent underclass in America, have allowed themselves to be so distracted and divided that they have failed to notice the building blocks of tyranny being laid down right under their noses by the architects of the Deep State.

Biden, Trump, Obama, Bush, Clinton: they have all been complicit in carrying out the Deep State’s agen-

da. Frankly, it really doesn’t matter who occupies the White House, because it is a profit-driven, unelected bureaucracy – call it whatever you will: the Deep State, the Controllers, the masterminds, the shadow government, the corporate elite, the police state, the surveillance state, the military industrial complex – that is actually calling the shots

Our losses are mounting with every passing day, part of a calculated siege intended to ensure our defeat at the hands of a totalitarian regime. Free speech, the right to protest, the right to challenge government wrongdoing, due process, a presumption of innocence, the right to self-defence, accountability and transparency in government, privacy, media, sovereignty, assembly, bodily integrity, representative government: all of these and more are casualties in the government’s war on the American people.

Set against a backdrop of government surveillance, militarised federal police, SWAT team raids, asset forfeiture, overcriminalisation,

armed surveillance drones, whole body scanners, stop and frisk searches, and the like – all of which have been sanctioned by Congress, the White House and the courts – our constitutional freedoms are being steadily chipped away at, undermined, eroded, whittled down, and generally discarded.

As a result, the American people continue to be treated like enemy combatants, to be spied on, tracked, scanned, frisked, searched, subjected to all manner of intrusions, intimidated, invaded, raided, manhandled, censored, silenced, shot at, locked up, and denied due process. None of these dangers have dissipated in any way. They have merely disappeared from our televised news streams.

Thus, in the interest of liberty and truth, here’s an A-to-Z primer that spells out the grim realities of life in the American Police State that





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no one seems to be talking about anymore.

**A is for the AMERICAN POLICE STATE.** A police state “is characterised by bureaucracy, secrecy, perpetual wars, a nation of suspects, militarisation, surveillance, widespread police presence, and a citizenry with little recourse against police actions.”

**B is for our battered BILL OF RIGHTS.** In the militarised police culture that is America today, where you can be kicked, punched, tasered,

shot, intimidated, harassed, stripped, searched, brutalised, terrorised, wrongfully arrested, and even killed by a police officer, and that officer is rarely held accountable for violating your rights, the Bill of Rights doesn't amount to much.

**C is for CIVIL ASSET FORFEITURE.** This governmental scheme to deprive Americans of their liberties – namely, the right to property – is being carried out under the guise of civil asset forfeiture, a government practice wherein government agents (usually the police and now TSA agents) seize private property they “suspect” may be connected to criminal activity. Then, whether or not any crime is actually proven to have taken place, the government keeps the citizen's property and it's virtually impossible to get it back.

**D is for DRONES.** It was estimated that at least 30,000 drones are now airborne in American airspace, part of an \$80-billion industry. Although some drones may be used for benevolent purposes, many are also being equipped with lasers, tasers and scanning devices, among other weapons – all aimed at “we the people”.

**E is for EMERGENCY STATE.** From 9/11 to COVID-19, we have been the subjected to an “emergency state” that justifies all manner of government tyranny and power grabs in the so-called name of national security. The government's ongoing attempts to declare so-called national emergencies in order to circumvent the Constitution's system of checks and balances constitutes yet another

expansion of presidential power that exposes the nation to further constitutional peril.

**F is for FASCISM.** A study conducted by Princeton and Northwestern University concluded that the US government does not represent the majority of American citizens. Instead, the study found that the government is ruled by the rich and powerful, or the so-called “economic elite”. Moreover, the researchers concluded that policies enacted by this governmental elite nearly always favour special interests and lobbying groups. In other words, we are being ruled by an oligarchy disguised as a democracy, and arguably on our way towards fascism – a form of government where private corporate interests rule, money calls the shots, and the people are seen as mere economic units or databits.

**G is for GRENADE LAUNCHERS and GLOBAL POLICE.** The federal government has distributed more than \$18-billion worth of battlefield-appropriate military weapons, vehicles and equipment such as drones, tanks, and grenade launchers to domestic police departments across the country. As a result, most small-town police forces now have enough firepower to render any citizen resistance futile. Now take those small-town police forces, train them to look and act like the military, and then enlist them to be part of the United Nations' Strong Cities Network programme, and you not only have a standing army that operates beyond the reach of the Constitution but one that is part of a global police force.

**H is for HOLLOW-POINT BULLETS.** The government's efforts to militarise and weaponise its agencies and employees is reaching epic

proportions, with federal agencies as varied as the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration stockpiling millions of lethal hollow-point bullets, which violate international law. Ironically, while the government continues to push for stricter gun laws for the general populace, the US military's arsenal of weapons makes the average American's handgun look like a Tinkertoy.

**I is for the INTERNET OF THINGS**, in which internet-connected "things" monitor your home, your health and your habits in order to keep your pantry stocked, your utilities regulated and your life under control and relatively worry-free. The key word here, however, is control. This "connected" industry propels us closer to a future where police agencies apprehend virtually anyone if the government "thinks" they may commit a crime, driverless cars populate the highways, and a person's biometrics are constantly scanned and used to track their

Police officers can break into homes without a warrant, even if it's the wrong home as long as they think they may have a reason to do so

movements, target them for advertising, and keep them under perpetual surveillance.

**J is for JAILING FOR PROFIT.** Having outsourced their inmate population to private prisons run by private corporations, this profit-driven form of mass punishment has given rise to a \$70-billion private prison industry that relies on the complicity of state governments to keep their privately run prisons full by jailing large numbers of Americans for petty crimes.

**K is for KENTUCKY V. KING.** In an 8-1 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that police officers can break into homes without a warrant, even if it's the wrong home as long as they think they may have a reason to do so. Despite the fact that the police in question ended up pursuing the wrong suspect, invaded the wrong apartment and violated just about every tenet that stands between the citizenry and a police state, the Court sanctioned the warrantless raid, leaving Americans with little real protection in the face of all manner of abuses by law enforcement officials.

**L is for LICENSE PLATE READERS**, which enable law enforcement and private agencies to track the whereabouts of vehicles, and their occupants, all across the country. This data collected on tens of thousands of

innocent people is also being shared between police agencies, as well as with government fusion centres and private companies. This puts Big Brother in the driver's seat.

**M is for MAIN CORE.** Since the 1980s, the US government has acquired and maintained, without warrant or court order, a database of names and information on Americans considered to be threats to the nation. As *Salon* reports, this database, reportedly dubbed "Main Core", is to be used by the Army and FEMA in times of national emergency or under martial law to locate and round up Americans seen as threats to national security. There are at least 8-million Americans in the Main Core database.

**N is for NO-KNOCK RAIDS.** Owing to the militarisation of the nation's police forces, SWAT teams are now increasingly being deployed for routine police matters. In fact, more than 80,000 of these paramilitary raids are carried out every year. That translates to more than 200 SWAT team raids every day in which police crash through doors, damage private property, terrorise adults and children alike, kill family pets, assault or shoot anyone that is perceived as threatening – and all in the pursuit of someone merely suspected of a crime, usually possession of some small amount of drugs.

**O is for OVERCRIMINALISATION and OVERREGULATION.** Thanks to an overabundance of 4500-plus federal crimes and 400,000-plus rules and regulations, it's estimated that the average American actually commits three felonies a day without knowing it. As a result of this overcriminalisation, we're seeing an uptick in Americans being arrested and jailed for such absurd



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“violations” as letting their kids play at a park unsupervised, collecting rainwater and snow run-off on their own property, growing vegetables in their yard, and holding Bible studies in their living room.

**P is for PATHOCRACY and PRE-CRIME.**

When our own government treats us as things to be manipulated, manoeuvred, mined for data, manhandled by police and other government agents, mistreated, and then jailed in profit-driven private prisons if we dare step out of line, we are no longer operating under a constitutional republic. Instead, what we are experiencing is a pathocracy: tyranny at the hands of a psychopathic government, which “operates against the interests of its own people except for favouring certain groups”.

Couple that with the government’s burgeoning pre-crime programmes, which will use fusion centres, data collection agencies, behavioural scientists, corporations, social media, and community organisers and by relying on cutting-edge technology for surveillance, facial recognition, predictive policing, biometrics, and behavioural epigenetics in order to identify and deter so-called potential “extremists,” dissidents or rabble-rousers. Bear in mind that anyone seen as opposing the government – whether they’re Left, Right or somewhere in between – is now viewed as an extremist.

**Q is for QUALIFIED IMMUNITY.**

Qualified immunity allows police officers to walk away without paying a

Non-lethal weapons such as tasers, stun guns, and rubber pellets have been used by police as weapons of compliance more often and with less restraint

dime for their wrongdoing. Conveniently, those deciding whether a cop should be immune from having to personally pay for misbehaviour on the job all belong to the same system, all cronies with a vested interest in protecting the police and their infamous code of silence: city and county attorneys, police commissioners, city councils and judges.



**R is for ROADSIDE STRIP SEARCHES and BLOOD DRAWS.**

The courts have increasingly erred on the side of giving government officials – especially the police – vast discretion in carrying out strip searches, blood draws and even anal and vaginal probes for a broad range of violations, no matter how minor the offence. In the past, strip searches were resorted to only in exceptional circumstances where police were confident that a serious crime was in progress. In recent years, however, strip searches have become routine operating procedures in which everyone is rendered a suspect and, as such, is subjected to treatment once reserved for only the most serious of criminals.

**S is for the SURVEILLANCE STATE.**

On any given day, the average American going about his daily business will be monitored, surveilled, spied on and tracked in more than 20 different ways, by both government and corporate eyes and ears. A byproduct of the electronic concentration camp in which we live, whether you’re walking through a store, driving your car, checking email, or talking to friends and family on the phone, you can be sure that some government agency, whether the NSA or some other entity, is listening in and tracking your behaviour. This doesn’t even begin to touch on the corporate trackers that monitor your purchases, web browsing, Facebook posts and other activities taking place in the cyber sphere.

**T is for TASERS.**

Non-lethal weapons such as tasers, stun guns, rubber pellets and the like have been used by police as weapons of compliance more often and with less restraint – even against women and children – and in some instances, even causing death. These “non-lethal” weapons also enable police to aggress with the push of a button, making the potential for overblown confrontations over minor incidents that much more likely. A Taser Shockwave, for instance, can electrocute a crowd of people at the touch of a button.

**U is for UNARMED CITIZENS SHOT BY POLICE.**

No longer is it unusual to hear about incidents in which police shoot unarmed individuals first and ask questions later, often attributed to a fear for their safety. Yet the fatality rate of on-duty patrol officers is reportedly far lower than many other professions, including construction, logging, fishing, truck driving, and even trash collection.

**V is for VIRUSES and VACCINE PASSPORTS.** What started out as an apparent effort to prevent a novel coronavirus from sickening the nation (and the world) has become yet another means by which world governments (including the US) can expand their powers, abuse their authority, and further oppress their constituents. The road we are travelling is paved with lockdowns, SWAT team raids, mass surveillance, forced vaccinations, contact tracing, vaccine passports, and heavy fines and jail time for those who dare to venture out without a mask, congregate in worship without the government's blessing, or re-open their businesses without the government's say-so.

**W is for WHOLE-BODY SCANNERS.** Using either x-ray radiation or radio waves, scanning devices and government mobile units are being used not only to "see" through your clothes but to spy on you within the privacy of your home. While these mobile scanners are being sold to the American public as necessary security and safety measures, we can ill afford to forget that such systems are rife with the potential

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The reality we must come to terms with is that in the post-9/11 America we live in today, the government does whatever it wants, freedom be damned

for abuse, not only by government bureaucrats but by the technicians employed to operate them.

**X is for X-KEYSCORE,** one of the many spying programmes carried out by the National Security Agency that targets every person in the United States who uses a computer or phone. This top-secret program "allows analysts to search with no prior authorisation through vast databases containing emails, online chats and the browsing histories of millions of individuals."

**Y is for YOU-NESS.** Using your face, mannerisms, social media and "you-ness" against you, you are now be tracked based on what you buy, where you go, what you do in public, and how you do what you do. Facial recognition software promises to create a society in which every individual who steps out into public is tracked and recorded as they go about their daily business. The goal is for government agents to be able to scan a crowd of people and instantaneously identify all of the individuals present. Facial recognition programs are being rolled out in states across the country.

**Z is for ZERO TOLERANCE.** We have moved into a new paradigm in which young people are increasingly viewed as suspects and treated as criminals by school officials and law enforcement alike, often for

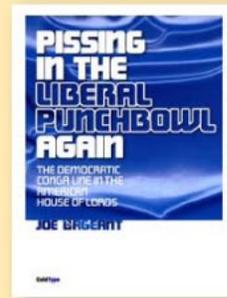
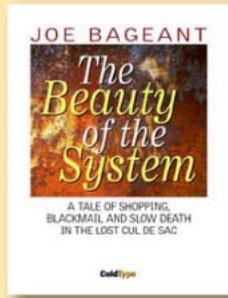
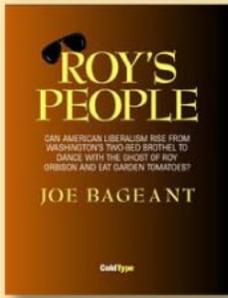
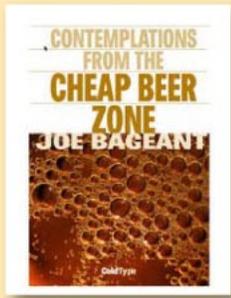
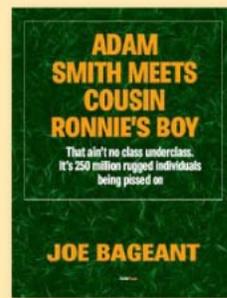
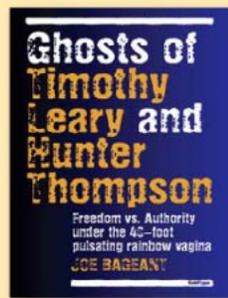
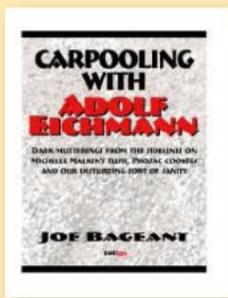
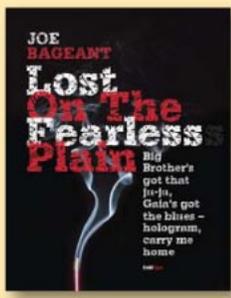
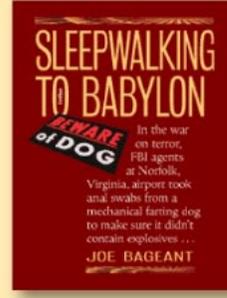
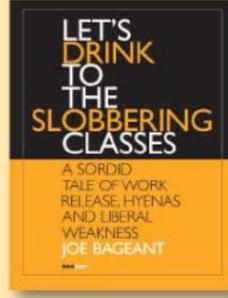
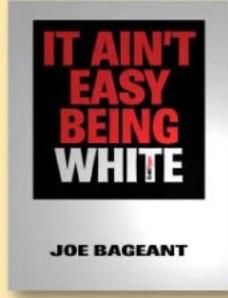
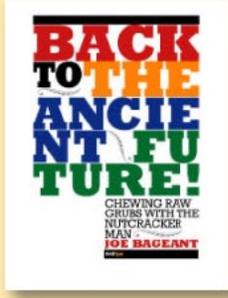
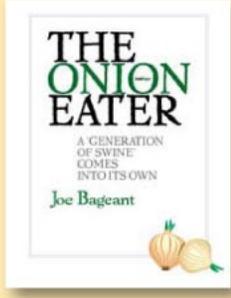
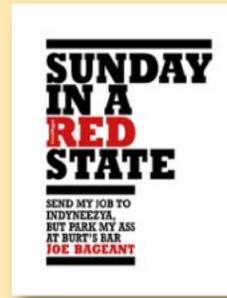
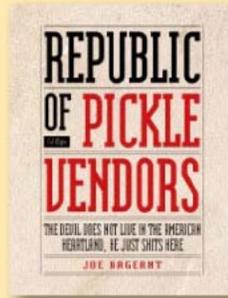
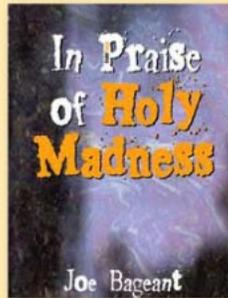
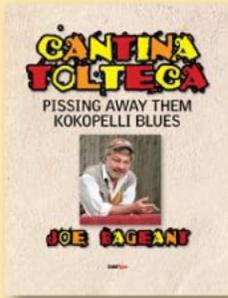
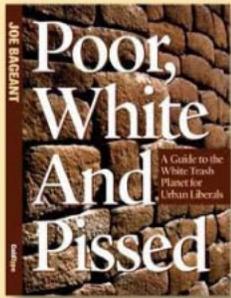
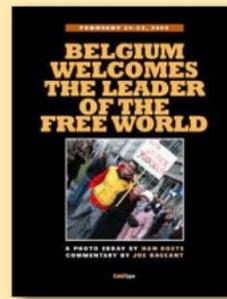
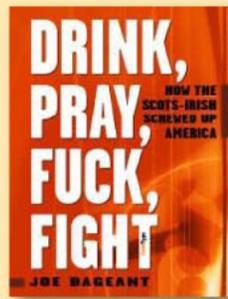
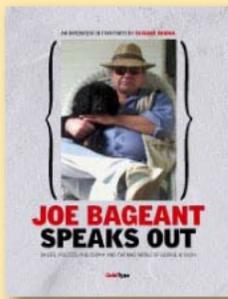
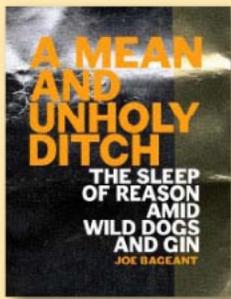
engaging in little more than childish behaviour or for saying the "wrong" word. In some jurisdictions, students have also been penalised under school zero tolerance policies for such inane "crimes" as carrying cough drops, wearing black lipstick, bringing nail clippers to school, using Listerine or Scope, and carrying fold-out combs that resemble switchblades. The lesson being taught to our youngest – and most impressionable – citizens is this: in the American police state, you're either a prisoner (shackled, controlled, monitored, ordered about, limited in what you can do and say, your life not your own) or a prison bureaucrat (politician, police officer, judge, jailer, spy, profiteer, etc.).

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the reality we must come to terms with is that in the post-9/11 America we live in today, the government does whatever it wants, freedom be damned.

We have moved beyond the era of representative government and entered a new age. You can call it the age of authoritarianism. Or fascism. Or oligarchy. Or the American police state. Whatever label you want to put on it, the end result is the same: tyranny. **CT**

**John W. Whitehead**, a constitutional lawyer and attorney, is founder and president the Rutherford Institute. His books *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State* are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). He can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org).

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RON FASSBENDER

# The agony of exile

Grieving Afghans angered by Western pullout and Taliban takeover after 20-year war

Exiled Afghans and their supporters took to the London streets on August 21 in a hastily organised protest days after the rapid takeover of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, by the Taliban which consolidated their control of most of the country. Protesters said they had been 'abandoned' by the UK when it followed the US troop withdrawal implemented by President Biden (and first agreed by Donald Trump in his February 2020 peace deal with the Taliban).

The protesters called for the UK to help uphold human rights under the new regime, especially those of women and girls who suffered severe restrictions when the Taliban were last in power. They also called for the UK to grant asylum for those fleeing the country. The UK government says it may take in 5,000 refugees in one year, in stark contrast to Pakistan and Iran, which have accepted millions of people fleeing from the decades of conflict endured by the Afghan people. – RF





"We deserve peace in Afghanistan", is the message from a large group of London protesters who said they had been let down by the actions of the UK government after last month's handover of their country to the Taliban.



## THE PHOTOGRAPHER

**Ron Fassbender** is a London-based documentary photographer.

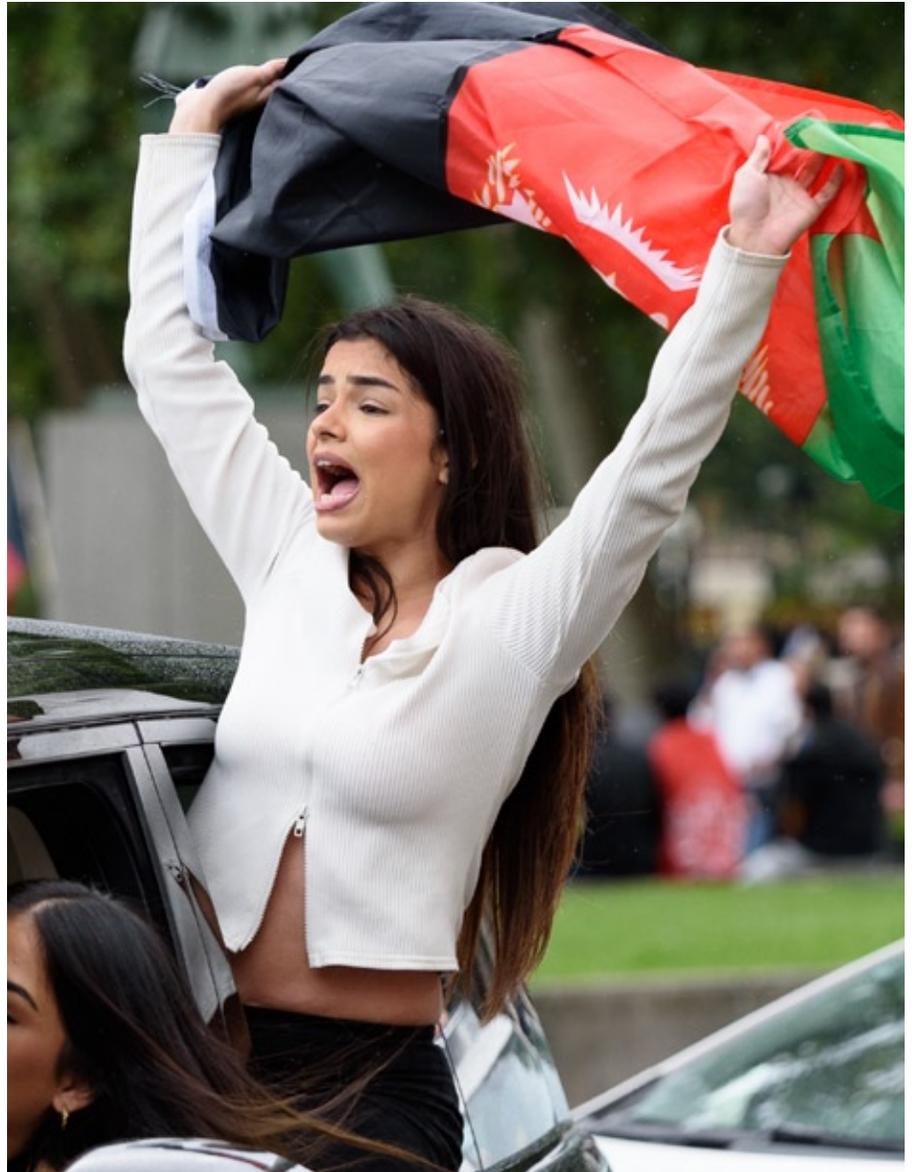
See more of his work at

**[www.ronfassbender.com](http://www.ronfassbender.com)**

and find him on Twitter at

**[www.twitter.com/TheWeeklyBull](https://www.twitter.com/TheWeeklyBull)**





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YVES ENGLER

# A war based on lies. Will the militarists apologise?

The collapse of Afghanistan's US- and Canadian-backed Afghan military and government shows how propaganda and lies should never again be trusted

**T**he quick collapse of the US-backed government in Afghanistan has revealed how little ordinary people should trust Canada's military, arms industry and associated ideological supporters. Their justifications for war, their claims of progress and then victory have proved to be no more than propaganda and lies.

In Canada's biggest military deployment since World War II, more than 40,000 Canadian troops fought in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Canada spent \$20-billion on the military operations and related aid mission and more than 200,000 Afghan civilians and combatants were killed in two decades of fighting. Canada also engaged in significant violence and war crimes in the central Asian country. Canadian special forces participated in highly unpopular night-time assassination raids and a JTF2 member said he felt his commanders "encouraged" them to commit war crimes in Afghanistan.

The reasons presented for Canada's war in Afghanistan were to fight fundamentalists, build democracy and support women's rights. These rationales never added out. Just before Canada ramped up its fighting in Kandahar in 2006 Canadian

troops invaded Haiti to overthrow the elected government there. Five hundred Canadian soldiers backed violent rebels – Haiti's Taliban, if you like – who employed rape as a means of political control. A study in the prestigious *Lancet* medical journal revealed there were 35,000 rapes in the Port-au-Prince area in the 22 months after the overthrow of the elected government. So much for advancing women's rights.

**T**he other supposed motivation for the invasion and occupation was to weaken Al Qaeda and Jihadist forces. As Canadian troops wound down their occupation of Afghanistan a half dozen Canadian fighter jets bombed Libya. With a Canadian general overseeing the war and Canadian naval vessels helping out, NATO helped rebels in the east of the country opposed to

Muammar Gadhafi's secular government. A year and a half before the war a Canadian intelligence report described eastern Libya as an "epicentre of Islamist extremism" and said "extremist cells" operated in the anti-Gadhafi stronghold. In fact, during the bombing, noted *Ottawa Citizen* military reporter David Pugliese, Canadian air force members privately joked they were part of "al-Qaida's air force". Lo and behold, hardline Jihadists were the major beneficiaries of the war, taking control of significant portions of the country.

If fighting Jihadists, building democracy and defending women's rights were not Canada's main objectives in Afghanistan what was?

Supporting the US was the main reason Canada was fighting. "Washington's reactions tended to be the exclusive consideration in almost all of the discussions about Afghanistan", explains *The Unexpected War: Canada In Kandahar*. "The political problem, of course, was how to support Washington in its war on terror without supporting the war in Iraq. The answer to the problem was the so-called 'Afghan solution.'" Former Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham explained, "there was no question, every time we talked about the Afghan mission, it gave us cover for

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If Barack Obama thinks the buying of a new mansion is proof of his stability and strength – which obviously he does – then he is a deluded fool

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not going to Iraq”.

But there's more to it than that. The military saw the conflict in Afghanistan as a way to increase its profile. There was a surge of martial patriotism in Canada with initiatives such as Highway of Heroes and Project Hero. In the mid-2000s every province adopted a special licence plate to signify the driver is a veteran.

The military saw Afghanistan as a way to assert its warfighting bonafides. As Chief of the Defence Staff Rick Hillier infamously proclaimed, “We are going to Afghanistan to actually take down the folks that are trying to blow up men and women ... we're not the public service of Canada, we're not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people”.

The Canadian Forces have a predilection for war. As basically all but Canadian special forces had been withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Chief of the Defence Staff publicly demanded a new war. “We have some men and women who have had two, three and four tours and what they're telling me is ‘Sir, we've got that bumper sticker. Can we go somewhere else now?’ ” General Walter Natynczyk told Canadian Press in 2012. “You also have the young sailors, soldiers, airmen and women who have just finished basic training and they want to go somewhere and in their minds it was going to be Afghanistan. So, if not Afghanistan, where's it going to be? They all want to serve”.

Various think tanks and militarist organisations such as the Conference of Defense Associations as well as academics writing on military issues benefited from millions of dollars in public funds. The war

The US used its advanced drones to assassinate the Taliban leaders, but for each leader that it killed, another half dozen emerged

justified an increase in the size of the military and a major spike in military spending.

Private security firms did well in Afghanistan. Conflict in that country helped propel Montréal's Garda's to become the biggest privately held security firm in the world with 80,000 employees today.

Military service contractors such as SNC Lavalin and ATCO also expanded their involvement with the Canadian Forces. During the war in Afghanistan, Canadian Commercial Corporation president Marc Whittingham wrote in the *Hill Times*, “there is no better trade show for defence equipment than a military mission”. The crown corporation has expanded its role in the international weapons trade.

On August 16 *The Intercept* reported that the stock price of the top five US arms firms rose 97 percent since US President George W Bush signed the Authorization for Use of Military Force on September 18, 2001. In “\$10,000 Invested in Defense Stocks When Afghanistan War Began Now Worth Almost \$100,000”, Jon Schwarz notes that these companies' stock prices increase was 58 percent greater than the gains of the overall New York Stock Exchange.

Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics all have Canadian subsidiaries. The US-based firms are not simply branch plants. They

do research in Canada, have offices near Parliament Hill and hire former top Canadian military officials. A number of them do international business through their Canadian divisions. General Dynamics Canada, for instance, has the largest ever Canadian export contract selling light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia. Tracing its Canadian history to 1948, General Dynamics has ties to Canadian educational institutions, politicians and the CF. It has more than 2,000 employees and does research and development work.

The stock price of the biggest Canadian-based arms firm, CAE, has also risen sharply since 2001. It trains US pilots as well as the operators of Predator and Reaper drones. The Montréal-based company openly talks about profiting from increased US military spending. “Le patron de CAE veut profiter de la hausse des budgets de l'armée américaine” (CAE boss wants to take advantage of rising US military spending), read a 2018 *La Presse* headline.

The war in Afghanistan was good for the arms industry. It also bolstered the Canadian military. But the quick unravelling of 20-years of war and occupation ought to sap some of the power of Canada's military, arms companies and associated ideological institutions. The quick collapse of the US- and Canadian-backed Afghan military and government proves they should not be trusted. Their primary goal is, and always has been, to benefit the military-industrial complex, not to improve the lives of people in other countries. Or to tell the truth to Canadians. **CT**

**Yves Engler** is the author of 11 books. *His Stand on Guard For Whom?: A People's History of the Canadian Military* has just been published.

◆  
JOE ALLEN

# Ride or die: Sturgis at 81 (or is it actually 80?)

Humans move faster than the dinosaurs,  
but we're all heading the same direction

In mid-August, we wandered around Sturgis, South Dakota, watching bikes roar past. The soundtrack was like a classic rock station coming out of a DeWalt boombox on a construction site. The best was an AC/DC cover band whose stocky frontman and lanky schoolboy guitarist were the spitting images of Brian Johnson and Angus Young. The crowd rippled with the most energetic white people boogie you've ever seen.

The sense of brotherhood was intense. At our hotel in nearby Deadwood, I met people from Michigan, Colorado, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, North Carolina, Missouri, and two rich guys from California wearing American flag regalia. They're all pissed about the current liberal regime – weary under the weight of its oppressive Iron Rainbow – but they're happy to be around like minds here in South Dakota.

Me too, to be honest.

The median age of the crusty crowd was somewhere between a

first pacemaker and retirement. That's not to say that young people aren't attracted to biker culture or that the tradition isn't being passed down. It definitely is. But the question is whether there will be enough survivors in 20 years to sustain this annual neopagan orgy.

Gobbling over-priced street tacos, I noticed that the formerly independent vendors have largely been replaced by Hot Leathers corporate tents. As I counted gray mullets, a 7ft tall 77-year-old Native American wearing blue denim and a wry grin ambled down the sidewalk with a red camera dangling from his neck. He looked happy, but hardly ecstatic. His expression said, "It could be worse – and it may get worse before too long."

There were tons of T-shirts on sale that read "BUCK FIDEN" and "CANCEL CANCEL CULTURE" and "Communists Have No Class!" One had a stick-man throwing a PPE mask away with the caption "Go Fauci Yourself!" There were a dozen





Photos: Joe Allen

Above: "I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names".

- Rev. 17:3

Left: "The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast".

- Rev. 13:3

Main photo previous page: "Look, baby! More white people!"

stalls selling engraved switchblades and a couple of 20lb war hammers and more dead cow skin than you could shake a prosthetic dick at.

There *were* floppy prosthetic dicks on sale, too, which will jump to attention at the press of a button. Not kidding.

One out-of-the-way stall had a ballcap with a swastika on the front. If you flip the bill up, it says “FUCK YOUR FEELINGS!”

That slogan sums up the attitude out here, including the handful of black, Latino, and Injun bikers ripping into the desolate void.

There were skull-covered do-rags and discount tattoos. There were draft beers in plastic cups and stacks of vest patches. There were die-cut rings in the shape of Thor hammers and iron crosses and scorpions. There were even two plaster statues of the Whore of Babylon riding a Scarlet Beast and the other blasphemous Beast which shall emerge from the sea to give us all smartphones.

The very first Sturgis biker rally was held here in South Dakota in August of 1938. The event was founded by “Pappy” Hoel, a member of the Jackpine Gypsies. The rally featured motorcycle stunts, hill climbs, and speed races. God knows how many limbs got lost and tossed to the wayside as the fun unfolded.

This year marks the 81st rally. Sort of. This occasion is important to the Hell’s Angels, on a numerological level, because H=8 and A=1. The thing is, this isn’t technically the 81st rally. The event skipped a year during WWII, but after that, the bikers got tired of doing the math and so they synchronised the rally number to the date, so that 1995 was Sturgis 65 and 2015 was 75, and so on. (2015 was the biggest year ever, with something like 739,000 attendees.)



Photo: Dan Fleurette

So really, this is number 80.

But who cares?

The energy is enormous after the Covidian lull last year. These motherfuckers aren’t about to have their good time spoiled by any Delta

If they’re willing to get splattered on the highway for their tradition, they’re willing to cough up a mountain of lung dumplings if that’s what it takes to party

variant or Rainbow babies or 24/7 commie propaganda. If they’re willing to get splattered on the highway for their tradition, they’re willing to cough up a mountain of lung dumplings if that’s what it takes to party in Sturgis. Hell, I’m not sure many of them believe germs even exist.

What I’m saying is these guys are brimming with down home ’Merican vitality, and I’d take any one of these burping bikers over a thousand masked Karens. This leather-clad tribe is all about fun and freedom. Most of them worked their entire lives to come out here to the Black Hills and blow off some steam.



Photo: Dan Fleurette

Above: Once an ocean, now a dinosaur graveyard. The Badlands are a badass pile of dirt.

Left: A proto-cyborg fused to his two-wheeled gas-guzzler like a detachable centaur.

long periods of grazing, fighting, and breeding before the next disaster.

Down in the gulleys, the first layers of silt, limestone, mud, and volcanic ash – tinted red and yellow by various minerals – were deposited around 75 million years ago. The strata end at the top around 28 million. Water erosion exposed this story a half million years ago. If weather patterns persist, the storybook will be closed in another half million years when the last layers are washed away.

Staring out into this rugged void yields the same lessons one gets from reading tree rings, Hesiod, or *Hell's Angels* by Hunter S. Thompson. Our lives are a thin layer of lunacy over-

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Our lives are a thin layer of lunacy overlaying a series of victories and folly. You won't win every time, but you won enough times to get this far

laying an endless series of victories and folly. You won't win every time, but you won enough times to get this far. Might as well go all in before the tables close.

Reading the Badlands stratigraphy from the bottom of the page to the top – like an old Chinese pseudo-history – we move from the aquatic dinosaurs to mammalian megafauna. At the end, it says we live in the greatest country on Earth, largely because it's ours. The last sentence reads so slowly, it never ends. If you read between the lines, though, it hints that one day 'Merica will be no more.

If the 'rona doesn't find you, geo-history will.

So ride hard, assholes. Get your kicks while you're still kickin'. You can't see the end of the road from here, but you'd better believe we'll get there soon enough. **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz).*

So fuck your feelings, Karen. Fuck 'em with a rubber dick, if that's what it takes. This is still 'Merica, motherfuckers! For now...

After a long jaunt through the chaos of bikes and dead cowhide, we left the noise behind for the silence of the Badlands. If you focus on the bison, prairie dogs, pronghorns, and big-horn sheep – and ignore the gawking tourists – ancient patterns emerge in the striped buttes.

As with any exposed geological formation, the Badlands offer a continuous story that goes back millions of years. Drought, deluge, and then



Gilles Peress, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*: from the chapter, *The First Day*



Gilles Peress, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*: from the chapter, *The First Day*





GILLES PERESS

# Visual diary of a troubled time

Massive book is a show of affection for those who suffered during civil war in Northern Ireland



TEXT: ROY GREENSLADE

I can see the beads of sweat on the courier's forehead as he hauls a large box from his van to my door. A grunt, and he drops it gratefully at my feet. On the side, in large letters, it says: *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*. I am baffled. I've been expecting a book with that title, but there must be some mistake. This is ... well, what?

By the time I have lifted the box up to my apartment, I am out of breath. And this former tabloid journalist cannot help himself: As I reach for a penknife, I also reach for a pun. Must be a weighty tome, eh? Inside, immaculately packed, I find the "book". It is three separate volumes, two of which are inside a decorated tote bag, plus an explanatory magazine and the publisher's hard-covered promotional brochure.



Gilles Peress, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*: from the chapter, The First Day



Gilles Peress, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*: from the chapter, The First Day

Intrigued by the weight I lift them on to the scales: almost 12 kilos (26 lbs). No expense has been spared. Two of the books are large format productions, crafted on high quality paper and bound by a special technique that enables them to lay flat. These are not books, but *objets d'art*.

If you think this an odd way to start a book review, then please understand that this is no ordinary book or, as I say, books plural. So, before dealing with the content, it was necessary to explain its dimensions, its exterior, the lavish wrapping around a true labour of love. For that's what this is – an endearingly extravagant show of affection for the people in the north of Ireland who endured

so many years of blood, sweat and tears.

Before I tell you what's inside, I need to introduce the author, Gilles Peress, French by birth, but long a resident in the United States. As a 26-year-old, in 1972, he was in Derry on Bloody Sunday, working for Magnum Photos. He witnessed the massacre, narrowly missed being shot, and took the pictures of 31-year-old Paddy Doherty moments before he was killed while trying to crawl to safety in front of the Rossville flats. Pictures that helped to prove Paddy's innocence.

Peress, now professor of human rights and photography at a private New York college, returned to Ireland in 1979, and was also around

at the beginning of the 1981 hunger strike, to take many hundreds of pictures, the kind that rarely, if ever, appeared in the newspapers of the time. He has collated the results – 979 photographs, almost all in black and white, in this gargantuan double volume running to more than 1,000 with barely 70y words of text.

He calls *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing* a work of “documentary fiction”, an attempt to portray – or, as he prefers, “to articulate” – the unfolding of people's lives throughout a seemingly never-ending conflict. It is not chronological, or even logical, but it is strangely fascinating to turn the pages and take a sort of behind-the-scenes look at our history.

Volume One opens with a sky darkened by a murmuration of starlings followed by a glimpse of rural beauty and a burst of urban squalor in 1970s Derry. A long sequence of Apprentice Boys' marchers, with scenes of piety, drunkenness and clumsy smooching, leads into the horror of Bloody Sunday. Down the years, we think we have got used to these images, but they still retain the power to shock.

Then there is a surreal shot of two rifle-toting British soldiers stretched out in a front garden watched from the doorway by a gaggle of young boys as an auld fella sits unconcernedly reading his newspaper. Even as lives are taken, life goes on.

Skipping forward ten years, our attention is grabbed by wall art and the graffiti marking the heroic sacrifice of Bobby Sands and his hunger-striking comrades. The familiar sights – bonfires, balaclavas, bin lids, youthful bravado and bad haircuts – are juxtaposed with a tableau of sporting activities: a cricket match, bowls and riding to hounds. Bizarre as well to see the 1981 Miss Belfast winner pictured atop the Europa, the world's most bombed hotel.

Even more bizarre is the devotion of the concluding 40-page section, headlined *The Informer*, about Denis Donaldson. This jarring note, which doesn't fit with the rest of the material, is explained by his having been Peress's closest friend in the north. It appears that the photographer is trying to come to terms with betrayal, both political and personal.

Volume Two is dominated by death, an explicit representation of Peress's accompanying statement about



Gilles Peress, from *Annals of the North*

the book being “dedicated to the victims of the conflict and their families”. Here are haunting images of funerals, graveyards and the blank faces of the bereaved. Another thread, which runs throughout both volumes, displays non-events, “where nothing happens”, those so-called “boring days”. But I couldn't help but groan at a section featuring a photo of Ian Paisley at a microphone, inappropriately headlined “The Day They Say No.” Days

surely? Day after day. Year after no-surrendering year.

Having failed on the first read-through to find a unifying meaning to the collection, I scanned the pictures a second time and came to accept that there is no single theme. That clearly wasn't Peress's intention. He is at pains to tell us what the book is not. Neither art nor journalism but, just maybe, in some space between.

“I wanted to do work that is beyond categories, in a no-man's land beyond labels”, he writes. So he prefers to call it “an experiment in visual language using photographs”. It is such a unique, possibly unprecedented, approach to Ireland's troubles that it cannot be compared to anything else. It stands alone. Unconventional, ambitious, a touch crazy. A vanity project possibly, but one with a special resonance to the communities of Belfast and Derry.



**WHATEVER YOU SAY, SAY NOTHING**

Gilles Peress

US\$ 48.0 / Can \$650 / UK £380

**ANNALS OF THE NORTH**

is also available separately

US\$ 85 / Can \$119 / UK £65

Published by Steidl [www.steidl.de](http://www.steidl.de)

And then there is *Annals of the North*, 904 pages with more than 200 photos, and interwoven with illustrations, maps, charts, documents,



Gilles Peress, from *Annals of the North*

essays and lists, the memorabilia of struggle. Peress calls it an almanac rather than an academic history. Again, although there is a welter of information, it is deliberately lacking in a coherent chronology.

This book – which can be bought separately for US\$85 or £65 – is complementary to *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*. I found it something of a hotch-potch, but with odd moments of insight. There is another lengthy section on Donaldson as Peress explores the motivations of his late friend. From villain to hero, we also come across excerpts from Bobby Sands’s prison diary.

Some of the documents have a very modern relevance indeed. For example, a letter sent in 1980 by the then attorney-general Michael Havers to the defence minister, Francis Pym, is eye-opening. Havers, who was concerned about the “increasing number of incidents” where firearms were being used at vehicle

checkpoints, wrote: “My anxiety is that sooner or later we may have to institute criminal proceedings against a member or members of the security forces”.

Three anecdotes stand out. The first involves Peress witnessing Martin McGuinness as he organised the funeral of one of the three Provisional volunteers shot by the army in Strabane in February 1985. Aware that the army was closing in to prevent a proper republican funeral, Martin improvised and Peress was able to record the ritual volley over the casket (photo above).

The second involves him drinking with the *Sunday Times*’s reporter, Murray Sayle, who filed copy stating unequivocally that the parachute regiment had murdered innocents on Bloody Sunday in a “special operation that went disastrously wrong”. The paper refused

to publish his story and he quit.

And the third is very personal. After Peress had photographed Paddy Doherty’s murder, he realised the army might confiscate his film. He spotted a tall blonde standing with her friends, still in shock from the shootings. He mumbled his fears to her, handed her six canisters of film, all of which she quickly concealed in her underwear. He arranged to see her that evening at a hotel. She arrived as promised and he sped off into the night to drive to Dublin airport, sending his sensational photos safely to Paris. He never saw the girl again. **CT**

**Roy Greenslade** is an editor, author and commentator. Among his works are *Press Gang* (2003), *Maxwell’s Fall* (1992), and *Goodbye to the Working Class* (1976). This review was first published in the *Andersonstown News* – [www.belfastmedia.com](http://www.belfastmedia.com).

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EDWARD CURTIN

# The houses of dead and crooked souls

The house of propaganda is built on unanimity. When one person says no, the foundation starts to crumble

*“A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.”*  
– **Gaston Bachelard**, *The Poetics of Space*

**T**here is a vast and growing gulf between the world’s rich and poor. An obscene gulf. If we can read houses, they will confirm this. They offer a visible lesson in social class.

Houses stand before us like books on a shelf waiting to be read, and when the books are missing, as they are for a vast and growing multitude of the homeless exiled wandering ones and those imprisoned, their absence serves to indict the mansion-dwelling wealthy and to a lesser extent those whose homes serve to shield them from the truth of the ill-begotten gains of the wealthy elites who create the world’s suffering through their avarice, lies, and war making.

Many regular people want to say with Edmund in Eugene O’Neill’s play, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*:

“The fog is where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can’t see this house. You’d never know it was here. Or any of the other places down

the avenue. I couldn’t see but a few feet ahead. I didn’t meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That’s what I wanted – to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself... Who wants to see life as it is, if they can help it?”

Yet the rich don’t hide or give a damn. They flaunt their houses. They know they are crooks and creators of illusions. Their nihilism is revealed in their conspicuous consumption and their predatory behaviour; they want everyone else to see it too. So they rub it in their faces. Their wealth is built on the blood and suffering of millions around the world, but this is often hidden knowledge.

For many regular people prefer the fog to the harsh truth. It shields them from intense anger and the

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If Barack Obama thinks the buying of a new mansion is proof of his stability and strength – which obviously he does – then he is a deluded fool

realisation that the wealthy elites who run the world and control the media lie to them about everything and consider them beneath contempt. That would demand a response commensurate with the propaganda – rebellion. It would impose the moral demand to look squarely at the houses of death with their tiny cells in which the wealthy elites and their henchmen imprison and torture truth tellers like Julian Assange, an innocent man in a living hell; to make connections between wealth and power and the obscene flaunting of the rich elite’s sybaritic lifestyles in houses where every spacious room testifies to their moral depravity.

**T**he recent news of Barack Obama’s vile selfie birthday celebration for his celebrity “friends” at his 29-acre estate and mansion (he has another \$8-million mansion in Washington, DC) on Martha’s Vineyard is an egregious recent case in point. If he thinks this nauseating display is proof of his stability and strength – which obviously he does – then he is a deluded fool. But those who carry water for the military-intelligence-media complex are amply rewarded and want to tell the world that this is



Searle's Castle in Great Barrington, Mass, bought by New York City artist Hunt Slonem.

so. It's essential for the Show. It must be conspicuous so the plebians learn their lesson.

Obama's Vineyard mansion stands as an outward sign of his inner disgrace, his soullessness.

Trump's golden towers and his never-ending self-promotion or the multiple million-dollar mansions of high-tech, sports, and Hollywood's superstars send the same message.

Take Bill Gates' \$63-million mansion, Xanadu, named after William Randolph Hearst's estate in Citizen Kane, that took seven years to build.

Take the house up the hill from where I live in an erstwhile working-class town that sold for one million plus and now is being expanded to double its size with a massive swimming pool that leaves no grass uncovered. Every week, three black window-tinted SUVs arrive with New Jersey plates to join two white expensive sedans to oversee the progress in this small western Massachusetts town where McMansions

rise throughout the hills faster than summer's weeds.

Take the blue dolomite stone Searles Castle with its 60 acres, 40 rooms, and "dungeon" basement down the hill on Main St that was recently bought by a NYC artist who also owns seven grand estates around the country that he showcases as examples of his fine artistic taste. "All these houses have endless things to do – it's just mind-boggling", he has said. The artist, Hunt Slonem, calls himself a "glamouriser", and his "exotica" paintings, inspired by Andy Warhol's repetition of soup cans and Marilyn Monroe, hang in galleries, museums, cruise ships, and the houses of film celebrities. Like his showcase houses, his exotica must have endless things to do.

What would Vincent van Gogh say? Perhaps what he wrote to his brother Theo: that the greatest people in painting and literature "have

always worked against the grain" and in sympathy with the poor and oppressed. That might seem "mind-boggling" to Slonem.

Such ostentatious displays of wealth and power clearly reveal the delusions of the elites, as if there are no spiritual consequences for living so. Even if they read Tolstoy's cautionary tale about greed, *How Much Land Does A Man Need?*, it is doubtful that its truth would register. Like Tolstoy's protagonist Pahóm, they never have enough. But like Pahóm, the Devil has them in his grip, and like him, they will get their just rewards, a small room, a bit of land to imprison them forever.

"His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahóm to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed".

Where does the money for all these estates, not just Slonem's, come from? Who wants to ask?

Getting to the roots of wealth involves a little digging. Slonem's

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castle was originally commissioned in the late 1800s by Mark Hopkins for his wife. Hopkins was one of the founders of the Central Pacific Railroad, which was built by Irish and Chinese immigrants. Labour history is quite illuminating on the ways immigrants have always been treated, in this case “the dregs of Asia” and the Irish dogs. Interestingly enough, the great black scholar and radical, W.E.B. Du Bois, a town native, worked at the castle’s construction site as a young man. No doubt it informed his future work against racism, capitalism, and economic exploitation.

Wealthy urbanites flooded this area after September 11, 2001, and now, in their terror of disease and death, they have bought every house they could find. Their cash-filled pockets overflow with blood-money and few ask why. To suggest that massive wealth is almost always ill-begotten is anathema. But innocence wears many masks, and the Show demands washed hands and no questions asked.

It is rare that one becomes super-wealthy in an honest and ethical way. The ways the rich get money almost without exception lead downward, to paraphrase Thoreau from his essay, “Life Without Principle.”

Since the corona crisis began, investment firms such as the Blackstone Group have been gobbling up vast numbers of houses across the United States as their prices have gone through the roof. The lockdowns – an appropriate prison term – have set millions of regular people back on their heels as the wealthiest have gotten exponentially wealthier. Poverty and starvation have increased around the world. This is not an accident. Despair and depression are widespread.

## The super-wealthy do not get sick. They are sick. For they revel in their depravity and push it in the faces of regular people

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There is a taboo in life in general and in journalism: Do not ask where people’s money comes from. Thoreau was so advised long ago:

“Do not ask how your bread is buttered; it will make you sick...”

But the super-wealthy do not get sick. They are sick. For they revel in their depravity and push it in the faces of regular people, many who envy them and wish to become super-rich and powerful themselves. Of course there are the blue bloods whose method is understatement, but it takes many decades to enter their theatre of deception. In many ways, these people are worse, for their personae have been crafted over decades of play-acting and public relations so their images are laundered to smell fresh and benevolent. They often wear the mask of philanthropy, while the history of their wealth lies shrouded in an amnesiac fog.

Yet soul murder includes suicide, and while the old and new moneyed ones smoothly justify their oppression of the vast majority, many regular people kill the best in themselves by envying the rich.

Years ago, I discovered some documents that showed that one of this country’s most famous philosophers, known for his lofty moral pronouncements, owned a lot of stock in companies that were doing evil things – war making, poisoning and killings huge numbers with chemicals, etc. But his image was one of Mr

Clean, Mr Good Guy. I suspect this is typical and that there are many such secrets in the basements and attics of the rich.

But let us also ask where the writers and presenters of the mainstream and alternative media get their money. Although “to follow the money” is a truism, few do. If we do, we will learn that money talks and those who take it toe the line, nor do they live in shacks by the side of the road or rent like so many others. They invest with Black Rock and their ilk and have money managers who can increase their wealth while shielding them from the ways that money is made on the backs of the poor and working people. And they lie about people like Assange, Daniel Hale, Reality Winner, Craig Murray, et al, all imprisoned for daring to reveal the depredations of the power elites, the violence at the heart of predatory capitalism.

Yes, houses speak. But few ever speak of where their money comes from. Those that are on the take – which has multiple meanings – always plead innocent. Yes, I can hear you say that I am being too harsh; that there are exceptions. That is obvious. So let’s skip the exceptions and focus on the general principle. There is a Buddhist principle that right livelihood is a core ethic in earning money. Jesus had another way of putting it but was of course in agreement, as were so many others whom people hold in highest esteem.

Thoreau wrote: “If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications.”

The truth is that for most people, work, if they can find it, is drudgery and hard, a matter of survival. The late great Studs Terkel called it hell and rightly said that most jobs are

not big enough for people because they crush the soul, they lack meaning. And behind all ledgers of great wealth lie crushed souls. This reality is so obvious and goes by many names, including class warfare, that further commentary would be redundant.

A few years ago, I visited Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut. It is advertised as "a house with a heart and a soul." It is not a house but a mansion, and it was an ostentatious display in Twain's time. Similar or worse than Obama's mansion on Martha's Vineyard today. It has no soul or heart. It was built with Twain's wife's family money. Her father was an oil and coal tycoon from upstate New York. Twain revelled in opulent respectability. He lived the life of a Gilded Age tycoon, an American magnate. It is not a pretty story, but the Twain myth says otherwise. Not that he catered to popular tastes to please the crowd and his domineering wife and that he lived in luxury, but that he was a radical critic of the establishment. This is false. For he withheld for the most part the publication of his withering take on American imperialism until after his death. He committed soul murder. But his mansion impressed his neighbours and his humour distracted from his luxurious lifestyle. His house still stands as a cautionary tale for those who will read it.

Baudelaire once said that in palaces "there is no place for inti-



Mark Twain's house in Hartford, CT.

macy." This is no doubt why in people's dreams small, simple houses with a light in the window loom large. Bachelard says, "When we are lost in darkness and see a distant glimmer of light, who does not dream of a thatched cottage or, to go more deeply still into legend, of a hermit's hut." For here man and God meet in solitude; here human intimacy is possible. "The hut can receive none of the riches 'of this world.' It possesses the felicity of intense poverty; indeed, it is one of the glories of poverty; as destitution increases, it gives access to absolute refuge."

He is not espousing actual poverty, but the oneiric depths of true desire, the dreams of hope, reconciliation, and simple living that run counter to the amassing of wealth to prove one's power and majesty. A humble house of truth, not a mansion of lies. This, to borrow the title

of William Goyen's novel, is "the house of breath" where the spirit can live and pseudo-stability gives way to faith, for insecurity is the essence of life.

There is such a hermit's hut where the light shines. It is the tiny cell in Belmarsh Prison where Julian Assange hangs onto his life by a thread. His witness for truth sends an inspiring message to all those lost in the world's woods to look to his fate and not turn away. To follow to their sources the money that greases the palms of all the so-called journalists and politicians who want him dead or imprisoned for life, who tell their endless lies, not just about him, but about everything.

The house of propaganda is built on unanimity. When one person says no, the foundation starts to crumble. The houses of the rich dead and crooked souls, erected to project the stability of their bloody illusions, start to crumble into sand when people dissent one by one.

Soon the fog lifts and there is no hiding any more. At the end of the path, you can see the vultures circling overhead as their prey go running out of their mansions in terror.

Sing Hallelujah!

CT

**Edward Curtin's** new book, *Seeking Truth in a Litany of Lies: Critical and Lyrical Essays*, is available from Clarity Press – [www.claritypress.com](http://www.claritypress.com). Price \$18 (e-book) \$26-95 (paperback).

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JOHN PILGER

# A day in the death of British justice

The reputation of British justice now rests on the shoulders of the High Court in the life or death case of Julian Assange

I sat in Court 4 in the Royal Courts of Justice in London on August 11 with Stella Moris, Julian Assange's partner. I have known Stella for as long as I have known Julian. She, too, is a voice of freedom, coming from a family that fought the fascism of Apartheid. On August 12, her name was uttered in court by a barrister and a judge, forgettable people were it not for the power of their endowed privilege.

The barrister, Clair Dobbin, is in the pay of the regime in Washington, first Trump's then Biden's. She is America's hired gun, or "silk," as she would prefer. Her target is Julian Assange, who has committed no crime and has performed an historic public service by exposing the criminal actions and secrets on which governments, especially those claiming to be democracies, base their authority.

For those who may have forgotten, WikiLeaks, of which Assange is founder and publisher, exposed the secrets and lies that led to the invasion of Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the murderous role of the Pentagon in dozens of countries, the blueprint for the 20-year catastrophe in Afghanistan, the attempts by Washing-

ton to overthrow elected governments, such as Venezuela's, the collusion between nominal political opponents (Bush and Obama) to stifle a torture investigation and the CIA's Vault 7 campaign that turned your mobile phone, even your TV set, into a spy in your midst.

WikiLeaks released almost a million documents from Russia which allowed Russian citizens to stand up for their rights. It revealed the Australian government had colluded with the US against its own citizen, Assange. It named those Australian politicians who have "informed" for the US. It made the connection between the Clinton Foundation and the rise of jihadism in American-armed states in the Gulf.

There is more: WikiLeaks disclosed the US campaign to suppress

wages in sweatshop countries like Haiti, India's campaign of torture in Kashmir, the British government's secret agreement to shield "US interests" in its official Iraq inquiry and the British Foreign Office's plan to create a fake "marine protection zone" in the Indian Ocean to cheat the Chagos islanders out of their right of return.

In other words, WikiLeaks has given us real news about those who govern us and take us to war, not the preordained, repetitive spin that fills newspapers and television screens. This is real journalism; and for the crime of real journalism, Assange has spent most of the past decade in one form of incarceration or another, including Belmarsh prison, a horrific place.

Diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, he is a gentle, intellectual visionary driven by his belief that a democracy is not a democracy unless it is transparent, and accountable.

On August 11, the United States sought the approval of Britain's High Court to extend the terms of its appeal against a decision by a district judge, Vanessa Baraitser, in January to bar Assange's extradition. Baraitser accepted the deeply disturbing evidence of a

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For the crime of real journalism, Assange has spent most of the past decade in one form of incarceration or another



Julian Assange: Committed no crime and performed an historic public service.

number of experts that Assange would be at great risk if he were incarcerated in the US's infamous prison system.

Professor Michael Kopelman, a world authority on neuropsychiatry, had said Assange would find a way to take his own life – the direct result of what Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations Rapporteur on Torture, described as the craven “mobbing” of Assange by govern-

ments – and their media echoes.

Those of us who were in the Old Bailey last September to hear Kopelman's evidence were shocked and moved. I sat with Julian's father, John Shipton, whose head was in his hands. The court was also told about the discovery of a razor blade in Julian's Belmarsh cell and that he had made desperate calls to the Samaritans and written notes and much else that filled us with more than sadness.

Watching the lead barrister acting for Washington, James Lewis – a man from a military background who deploys a cringingly theatrical “aha!” formula with defense witnesses – reduce these facts to “malingering” and smearing witnesses, especially Kopelman, we were heartened by Kopelman's revealing response that Lewis's abuse was “a bit rich” as Lewis himself had sought to hire Kopelman's expertise in another case.

Lewis's sidekick is Clair Dobbin, and August 11 was her day. Completing the smearing of Professor Kopelman was down to her. An American with some authority sat behind her in court.

Dobbin said Kopelman had “misled” Judge Baraitser in September because he had not disclosed that Julian Assange and Stella Moris were partners, and their two young children, Gabriel and Max, were conceived during the period Assange had taken refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

The implication was that this somehow lessened Kopelman's medical diagnosis: that Julian, locked up in solitary in Belmarsh prison and facing extradition to the US on bogus “espionage” charges, had suffered severe psychotic depression and had planned, if he had not already attempted, to take his own life.

For her part, Judge Baraitser saw no contradiction. The full nature of the relationship between Stella and Julian had been explained to her in March 2020, and Professor Kopelman had made full reference to it in his report in August 2020. So the judge and the court knew all about it before the main extradition hearing last September. In her judgment in

January, Baraitser said this:

“[Professor Kopelman] assessed Mr Assange during the period May to December 2019 and was best placed to consider at first-hand his symptoms. He has taken great care to provide an informed account of Mr Assange’s background and psychiatric history. He has given close attention to the prison medical notes and provided a detailed summary annexed to his December report. He is an experienced clinician and he was well aware of the possibility of exaggeration and malingering. I had no reason to doubt his clinical opinion.”

She added that she had “not been misled” by the exclusion in Kopelman’s first report of the Stella-Julian relationship and that she understood that Kopelman was protecting the privacy of Stella and her two young children.

In fact, as I know well, the family’s safety was under constant threat to the point when an embassy security guard confessed he had been told to steal one of the baby’s nappies so that a CIA-contracted company could analyse its DNA. There has been a stream of unpublicised threats against Stella and her children.

For the US and its legal hirelings in London, damaging the credibility of a renowned expert by suggesting he withheld this information was a way, they



Stella Moris speaking outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London.

no doubt reckoned, to rescue their crumbling case against Assange. In June, the Icelandic newspaper *Stundin* reported that a key prosecution witness against Assange has admitted fabricating his evidence. The one “hacking” charge the Americans hoped to bring against Assange if they could get their hands on him depended on this source and witness, Sigurdur Thordarson, an FBI informant.

Thordarson had worked as a volunteer for WikiLeaks in Iceland between 2010 and 2011. In 2011, as several criminal charges were brought against him, he contacted the FBI and offered to become an informant in return for immunity from all prosecu-

If you can unravel the arcane logic of this, you have a better grasp than I who have sat through this case from the beginning

tion. It emerged that he was a convicted fraudster who embezzled \$55,000 from WikiLeaks, and served two years in prison. In 2015, he was sentenced to three years for sex offences against teenage boys. The *Washington Post* described Thordarson’s credibility as the “core” of the case against Assange.

On August 11, Lord Chief Justice Holroyde made no mention of this witness. His concern was that it was “arguable” that Judge Baraitser had attached too much weight to the evidence of Professor Kopelman, a man revered in his field. He said it was “very unusual” for an appeal court to have to reconsider evidence from an expert accepted by a lower court, but he agreed with Ms. Dobbin it was “misleading” even though he accepted Kopelman’s “understandable human response” to protect the privacy of Stella and the children.

If you can unravel the arcane logic of this, you have a better grasp than I who have sat through this case from the beginning. It is clear Kopelman misled nobody. Judge Baraitser – whose hostility to Assange personally was a presence in her court – said that she was not misled; it was not an issue; it did not matter. So why had Lord Chief Justice Holroyde spun the language with its weasel legalese and sent Julian back to his cell and its nightmares? There, he now waits for

the High Court’s final decision in October – for Julian Assange, a life or death decision.

And why did Holroyde send Stella from the court trembling with anguish? Why is this case “unusual”? Why did he throw the gang of prosecutor-thugs at the Department of Justice in Washington -- who got their big chance under Trump, having been rejected by Obama – a life raft as their rotting, corrupt case against a principled journalist sunk as surely as Titanic?

This does not necessarily mean that in October the full bench of the High Court will order Julian to be extradited. In the upper reaches of the masonry that is the British judiciary there are, I understand, still those who believe in real law and real justice from which the term “British justice” takes its sanctified reputation in the land of the Magna Carta. It now rests on their eroded shoulders whether that history lives on or dies.

I sat with Stella in the court’s colonnade while she drafted words to say to the crowd of media and well-wishers outside in the sunshine.

“We have a right to live, we have a right to exist and we have a right for this nightmare to come to an end once and for all”

Clip-clopping along came Clair Dobbin, spruced, ponytail swinging, bearing her carton of files: a figure of certainty: she who said Julian Assange was “not so ill” that he would consider suicide. How does she know?

Has Ms. Dobbin worked her way through the medieval maze at Belmarsh to sit with Julian in his yellow arm band, as Professors Koppelman and Melzer have done, and Stella has done, and I have done? Never mind. The Americans have now “promised” not to put him in a hellhole, just as they “promised” not to torture Chelsea Manning, just as they promised. ...

And has she read the WikiLeaks’ leak of a Pentagon document dated March 15, 2009? This foretold the current war on journalism. US intelligence,

it said, intended to destroy WikiLeaks’ and Julian Assange’s “center of gravity” with threats and “criminal prosecution.” Read all 32 pages and you are left in no doubt that silencing and criminalising independent journalism was the aim, smear the method.

I tried to catch Ms. Dobbin’s gaze, but she was on her way: job done.

Outside, Stella struggled to contain her emotion. This is one brave woman, as indeed her man is an exemplar of courage. “What has not been discussed today,” said Stella, “is why I feared for my safety and the safety of our children and for Julian’s life. The constant threats and intimidation we endured for years, which has been terrorising us and has been terrorizing Julian for 10 years. We have a right to live, we have a right to exist and we have a right for this nightmare to come to an end once and for all.” **CT**

*John Pilger is an award-winning journalist, filmmaker, and author. Read his full biography at [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com), and follow him on Twitter: @JohnPilger. This article was produced by Globetrotter.*

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KEN LIGHT

# State of the nation

Images from a decade of mounting tension in a polarised America, from Wall Street to the rural heartland

A decade ago, Ken Light travelled across the United States photographing the country, an empire he realised was the most fragile of organisms. The photographs of the earlier years in his new book, *Course of the Empire*, published this month by Steidl, create the context for understanding how America lost its way.

Light reached all four corners of the country to document people across race, class and political lines, documenting the seismic changes that erupted across America as the country descended into an age of crisis. He photographed protests and Washington politicians in Congress and the White House, climate change disasters and environmental defenders, the rise of the regime of Donald Trump, the Trump rallies and America's reactions to it all.

Light comprehensively probed the fractured social and economic



Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, \$120-million at auction, New York City.



Women's March, San Francisco.



Tubb's Fire, Coffey Park, Santa Rosa, California.



Century City, Los Angeles



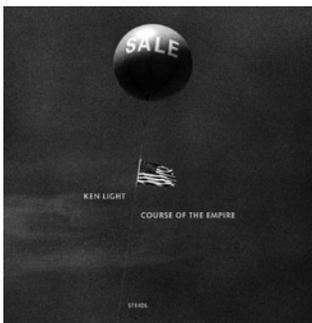
Theatre, Oakland



Impeachment march, San Francisco.



Alt-Right rally, Sacramento.



**COURSE OF THE EMPIRE**  
 Ken Light / Published by Steidl  
 US\$ 65.00 / Cdn \$88.00 / UKE40

condition, going beyond the tropes of inequality we all recite by heart to create a visual portrait of a country mired in calamity, its people deeply splintered, angry and in pain.

The resulting portrait is a riveting record of a complicated country in a complicated time, a compelling, account of an age that historians and citizens will be scrutinising for generations to come.

**CT**

**Ken Light** is a social documentary photographer with a particular focus on America. His nine books include *To The Promised Land* (1988), *Texas Death Row* (1997) and *Valley of Shadows and Dreams* (2012). Light has exhibited internationally. He is the *Reva and David Logan Professor of Photojournalism at the University of California, Berkeley.*



Impeachment march, San Francisco.

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KELLY DENTON-BORHAUG

# Moral injury and forever wars

Closing our ears to the veterans who have been on the front lines means ignoring the truths of those wars as well

This summer, it seemed as if we Americans couldn't wait to return to our traditional July 4th festivities. Haven't we all been looking for something to celebrate? The church chimes in my community rang out battle hymns for about a week. The utility poles in my neighbourhood were covered with "Hometown Hero" banners hanging proudly, sporting the smiling faces of uniformed local veterans from our wars. Fireworks went off for days, sparklers and cherry bombs and full-scale light shows filling the night sky.

But all the flag-waving, the home-spun parades, the picnics and military bands, the flowery speeches and self-congratulatory messages can't dispel a reality, a truth that's right under our noses: All is not well with our military brothers and sisters. The starkest indicator of that is the rising number of them who are taking their own lives.

A new report by Brown University's Costs of War Project calculates that, in the post-9/11 era so far, four times as many veterans and active-duty military have committed suicide as died in war operations.

While July 4th remembrances across the country focused on the

symbols and institutions of war and militarisation, most of the celebrants seemed far less interested in hearing from current and former military personnel. After all, less than 1 percent of Americans have been burdened with waging Washington's wars in these years, even as taxpayers have funded an ever-more enormous military infrastructure.

As for me, though, I've been seeking out as many of those voices as I could for a long, long time. And here's what I've learned: the truths so many of them tell sharply conflict with the remarkably light-hearted and unthinking celebrations of war we experienced this July and so many Julys before it. I keep wondering why so few of us are focusing on one urgent question: Why are so many of our military brothers and sisters taking their own lives?

## The moral injuries of war

The term moral injury is now used in military and healthcare settings to identify a deep existential pain destroying the lives of too many active-duty personnel and vets. In these years of forever wars, when the moral consciences of such individuals collided with the brutally harsh realities of militarisation and killing, the

result has been a sharp, sometimes death-dealing dissonance. Think of moral injury as an invisible wound of war. It represents at least part of the explanation for that high suicide rate. And it's implicated in more than just those damning suicides: an additional 500,000 troops in the post-9/11 era have been diagnosed with debilitating, and not fully understood, symptoms that make their lives remarkably unliveable.

I first heard the term moral injury about 10 years ago at a conference at Riverside Church in New York City, where Jonathan Shay, the renowned military psychologist, spoke about it. For decades he had provided psychological care for veterans of the Vietnam War who were struggling with unremitting resentment, guilt, and shame in their post-deployment lives. They just couldn't get on with those very lives after their military experiences. They had, it seemed, lost trust in themselves and anyone else.

Still, Shay found that none of the typical mental-health diagnoses seemed to fit their symptoms. This wasn't post-traumatic stress disorder – a hyper-vigilance, anxiety, and set of fears arising from traumatic experience. No, what came to be known as moral injury seemed to result from a sense that the very



centre of one's being had been assaulted. If war's intent is to inflict physical injury and destruction, and if the trauma of war afflicts people's emotional and psychic well-being, moral injury describes an invisible wound that burns away at a person's very soul. The Iraq War veteran and writer Kevin Powers describes it as "acid seeping down into your soul, and then your soul is gone".

A central feature of moral injury is a sense of having betrayed one's own deepest moral commitments, as well as of being betrayed morally by others. People who are suffering from moral injury feel there's

nothing left in their world to trust, including themselves. For them, any notion of "a shared moral covenant" has been shattered. But how does anyone live in a world without moral guideposts, even flawed ones? The world of modern war, it seems, not only destroys the foundations of life for its targets and victims, but also for its perpetrators.

### Difficult truths

For civilians like me, there's no way to understand moral injury without listening to those afflicted with it. I've been doing so to try to make sense of

our culture of war for years now. As a religious studies scholar, I've been especially concerned about the ways in which so many of us give American-style war a sacred quality. Think, for instance, about the meme that circulates during national holidays like the recent July 4th, or Veterans Day, or Memorial Day: "Remember that only two forces ever agreed to die for you: Jesus Christ and the American soldier. One died for your freedom, the other for your soul; pass it on!"

How, I wonder, do such messages further shame and silence those already struggling with moral injury whose experiences have led them to see war as anything but sacred?

It's been years since I first heard Andy, a veteran of the Iraq War, testify in the most personal way about moral injury at a Philadelphia church. He's part of a family with a long military history. His father and grandfather both served in this country's wars before, at 17, he enlisted in the Air Force in 1999. He came to work in military intelligence and would eventually be deployed to Iraq.

But all was most definitely not well with Andy when, after 11 years in the Army, he returned to civilian life. He found himself struggling in his relationships, unable to function, a mess, and eventually suicidal. He bounced from one mental healthcare provider to the next for eight years without experiencing the slightest sense of relief. On the verge of ending his life, he was referred to a new "Moral Injury Group" led by chaplain Chris Antal and psychologist Peter Yeomans at the Crescenz VA Hospital in Philadelphia. At that moment, Andy decided this would be his last effort before calling it quits and ending his life. Frankly, given what I now know, I'm amazed that he was willing to take that one last chance after so many years of suf-

fering, struggle, and pain to so little purpose.

The professionals who lead that particular group are remarkably blunt about what they call “the work avoidance” of most citizens – the way that the majority of us fail to take any responsibility for the consequences of the endless wars we’ve been fighting in this century. People, they’ve told me, regularly deflect responsibility by adopting any of three approaches to veterans: by valorising them (think of the simplistic “thank you for your service/sacrifice” or the implicit message of those “hometown heroes” banners); by pathologising them (seeing vets as mentally ill and irreparably broken); or by demonising them (think of the Vietnam-era “baby-killers” moniker). Each of these approaches essentially represses what those veterans could actually tell us about their experiences and our wars.

So, the leaders of the Crescenz VA Moral Injury Group developed an unorthodox approach. They assured Andy that he had an important story to tell, one the nation needed to hear so that civilians could finally “bear the brunt of the burden” of sending him to war. Eight years after leaving the military and a few weeks into that program, he finally revealed for the first time to those caregivers and vets, the event at the root of his own loss of soul. While deployed in Iraq, he had participated in calling in an airstrike that ended up killing 36 Iraqi men, women, and children.

I’ll never forget watching Andy testify about that very moment in the Philadelphia church on Veterans Day before an audience that had expressly indicated its willingness to listen. With palpable anguish, he told how, after the airstrike, his orders were to enter the bombed structure.



While deployed in Iraq, he had participated in calling in an airstrike that ended up killing 36 Iraqi men, women, and children

He was supposed to sift through the bodies to find the supposed target of the strike. Instead, he came upon the lifeless bodies of, as he called them, “proud Iraqis”, including a little girl with a singed Minnie Mouse doll. Those sights and the smell of death were, he told us, “etched on the back of his eyelids forever”. This was the “shame” he carried with him always, an “unholy perpetration”, as he described it.

The day of that attack, he said, he felt his soul leave his body. Over years of listening to veterans’ stories, I realise that I’ve heard similar descriptions again and again. It may seem extreme to speak about one’s very soul being eviscerated, but it shouldn’t be treated as an exaggeration. After all, how can we even imagine what the deaths of so many men, women, and children may have meant for the Iraqi families and communities whose loved ones perished that day?

Andy’s story clarifies a reality Americans badly need to grasp: the destruction of war goes far beyond its intended targets. In the end, its violence is impossible to control. It doesn’t stay in those distant lands where this country has been fighting for so many fruitless years. Andy is the proof of that. His “loss of soul” almost had the direst of consequences, as his own suicidal impulses began to take over. Of that moment and his seemingly eternal imprisonment in the hell of war, he said: “I relive this alone, the steel cylinder heavy with the .38, knowing that to drive one into my own face will free me from this prison, these sights and smells.”

### Against the grain

Valorising, pathologising, and demonising vets are all ways of refusing to listen to the actual experiences of those who carry out our wars. And for them, returning home often just adds to their difficulties, since so much of what they might say goes against the grain of national culture.

We’re generally brought up to see ourselves as a nation whose military gets the job done, despite the “forever wars” of the last nearly 20 years. Through national rituals, holidays, and institutions, hot embers of intense pride are regularly stoked, highlighting our military as the fiercest and strongest in the world.

Many of us identify what it means to be a citizen with belonging to the most feared and powerful armed forces on the planet. As a result, people easily believe that, when the US goes to war, what we’re doing is, almost by definition, moral.

But those who dare to pay attention to the morally injured will find them offering inconvenient and uncomfortable truths that sharply con-

flict with exactly those assumptions. Recently, I listened to another group of military veterans and combat correspondents who gathered their courage to tell their stories publicly in a unique fashion for The Moral Injuries of War project. Here are just three small examples:

● “The military just teaches you don’t ask questions, and if you figure it out, it really isn’t your business anyway. That part, that probably is the biggest thing, having to do things you wonder about, but you can’t ask a question”.

● “The cynical part of me wants the public to understand that it’s your fault; we are all complicit in all of this horror. I don’t need other people to experience my pain, I need other people to understand that they are complicit in my pain”.

● “People want to say thank you for your service, wave a flag, but you’re left with these experiences that leave you feeling deeply shameful. I burned through any relationship in my life with anybody who loved me. I have this feeling in my gut that something really bad is going to happen. God’s shoe was going to fall on me, I can’t breathe”.

I remember how struck I was at the Veterans Day gathering in that Philadelphia church where I first heard Andy speak, because it was so unlike most such celebrations and commemorations. Instead of laying wreaths or planting crosses in the ground; instead of speeches extolling vets as “the spine of the nation” and praising them for their “ultimate sacrifice”, we did something different. We listened to them tell us about the soul-destroying nature of what actually happened to them during their military service (and what’s happened to them ever since). And in addition to civilians like me, other vets were in those church pews listening, too.



The chaplain suggested we simply stand in silence for a minute, looking into each other’s eyes. You can’t imagine how slowly that minute passed

After the testimonies, the VA chaplain leading the ceremony asked us all to come to the front of the church. There, he directed the vets to form a circle facing outwards. Then, he asked the civilians to form a circle around them and face them directly. What happened next challenged and moved me. The chaplain suggested we simply stand in silence for a minute, looking into each other’s eyes. You can’t imagine how slowly that minute passed. More than a few of us had tears running down our cheeks. It was as if we were all holding a painful, sharp, unforgiving reality – but doing it together.

Moral injury is a flashpoint that reveals important truths about our wars and the war-culture that goes with it. If focused on, instead of ignored, it raises uncomfortable questions. In the United States, military service often is described as the epitome of citizenship. Leaders

and everyday folks alike claim to value veterans as our most highly esteemed citizens.

I wonder, though, if this isn’t just another way of avoiding a real acknowledgment of the disaster of this country’s 21st-century wars. Closing our ears to the veterans who have been on their front lines means ignoring the truths of those wars as well.

If this nation truly esteemed them, wouldn’t we do more to avoid placing them in just the kind of circumstances Andy faced? Wouldn’t our leaders work harder to find other ways of dealing with whatever dangers we confront? Wouldn’t everyday citizens raise more questions about the pervasive “innocent” celebrations of violence on national holidays that only sacralise war-culture as a crucial aspect of what it means to be an American citizen?

For Andy, that Moral Injury Group at the Crescenz VA was the place where his “screaming soul” could be heard. Instead of being “imprisoned by guilt”, he described how he began to feel “empowered” by it to tell the truth about our wars to the rest of us. He hopes that the nation will somehow learn to “bear its brunt of the burden” of those wars and the all-American war-culture that accompanies them in a way that truly matters – a new version of reality that would start with finally listening. **CT**

**Kelly Denton-Borhaug** has long been investigating how religion and violence collide in American war-culture. She teaches in the global religions department at Moravian University. She is the author of two books, *US War-Culture, Sacrifice and Salvation* and, more recently, *And Then Your Soul is Gone: Moral Injury and US War-Culture*.

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