

**BLOCKING ROADS ISN'T CRAZY | JONATHAN COOK**  
**DON'T TALK ABOUT THE POOR OR PEACE | W.J. ASTORE**  
**MEMORIES OF A RACIST PAST | GORDON PARKS**

Issue 240

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

December 2022

**Stella Assange**, the wife of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, tells how he is surviving his fourth year inside Belmarsh prison – and how his case threatens the very core of freedom

“**UK EXECUTIVE  
IS WINING  
AND DINING  
WITH PEOPLE  
PLOTTING THE  
ASSASSINATION  
OF MY  
HUSBAND**”

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Aisdare Hickson / Flickr

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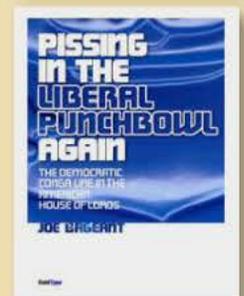
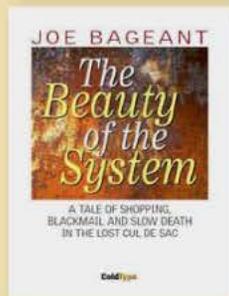
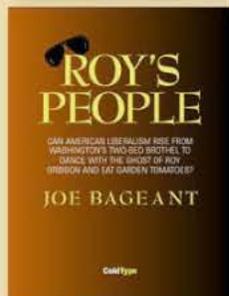
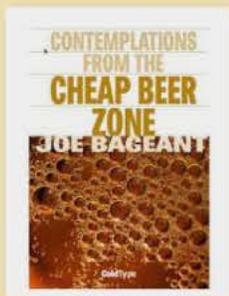
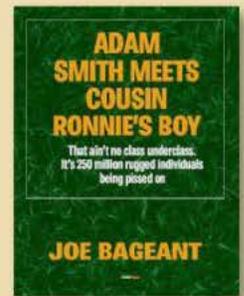
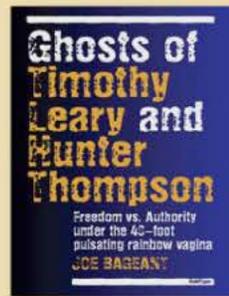
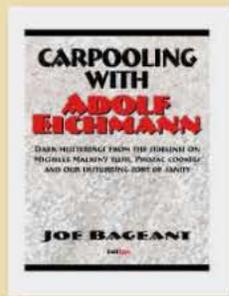
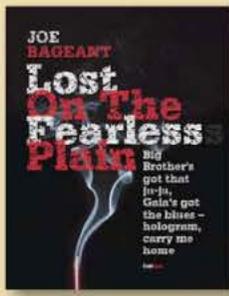
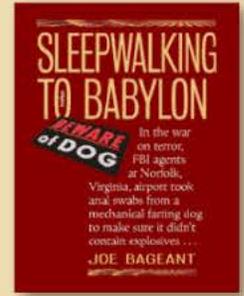
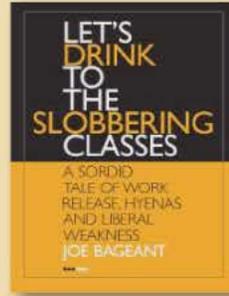
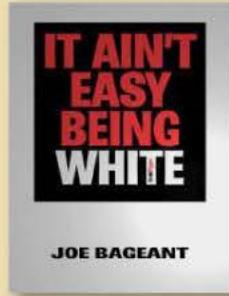
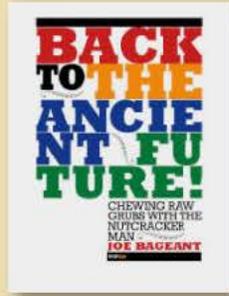
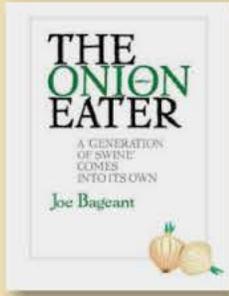
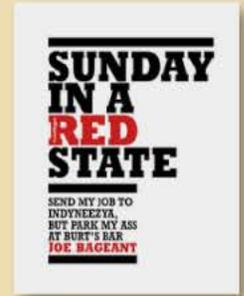
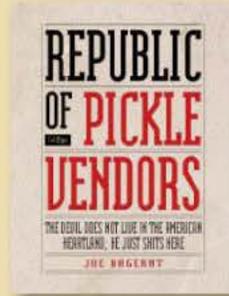
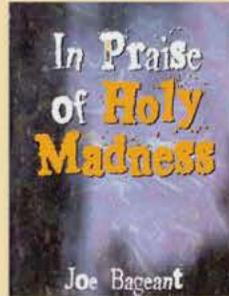
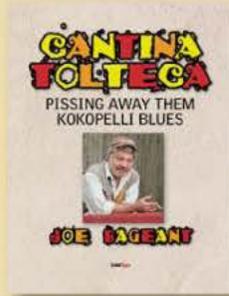
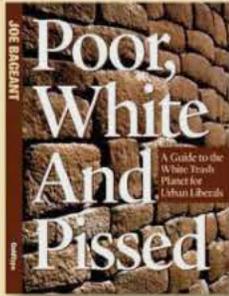
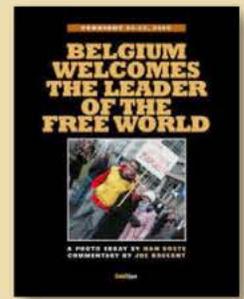
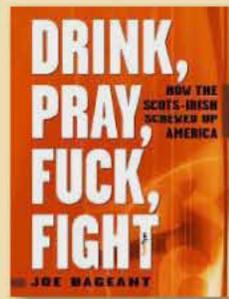
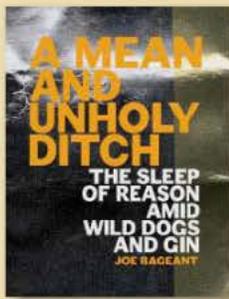
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NEWS | VIEWS | OPINIONS

# INSIGHTS

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CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

## The self-licking boot of American militarism

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A recent *Bloomberg* article titled “‘Sloppy’ US Talk on China’s Threat Worries Some Sceptical Experts” discusses the dangerous cycle in which pressures in the US political establishment to continually escalate hostilities with Beijing provokes responses that are then falsely interpreted as Chinese aggression.

Bloomberg’s Iain Marlow writes: “The hawkish narrative ‘limits room for manoeuvre in a crisis’, said M. Taylor Fravel, director of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Any effort to defuse tension could be characterized as ‘conciliatory or not tough enough’, he said.

China has been consistent on Taiwan and there’s little public evidence to suggest it’s sped up the timeline to take Taiwan, said a former senior US official who worked on China policy but asked not to be identified.

“The former official said

the hawkish tone in DC has contributed to a cycle where the US makes the first move, interprets Chinese reactions as a provocation, and then escalates further.”

Bloomberg quotes Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund, who says this cycle of self-reinforcing escalation could “end up provoking the war that we seek to deter.”

We just saw this same self-perpetuating cycle of military escalation exemplified against North Korea, where tensions have again been flaring after a long pause. The US and South Korea initiated a pro-

vocative military drill designed to menace the DPRK, Pyongyang responded by launching missiles in its own show of strength, and the Pentagon announced an extension of the drills in response to that response.

Antiwar’s Dave DeCamp explains: “The US and South Korea are extending massive aerial war games after North Korea put on a massive show of force in response to the drills.

“Washington and Seoul started their Vigilant Storm exercises on Monday, which were initially scheduled to run 24 hours a day for five days. This year’s Vigilant Storm is the largest-ever iteration of the drills, involving nearly 100 American warplanes and 140 South Korean aircraft, and about 1,600 planned sorties.

“Pyongyang made it clear it would respond to the Vigilant Storm drills, and it launched 23 missiles on Wednesday, which is said to be the most North Korea has fired in a single day. North Korea also fired over 100 artillery rounds on the same day and launched six more missiles on Thursday.

“Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the extension of Vigilant Storm after a meeting with his South Korean counterpart, Lee Jong-sup. ‘I’ve consulted with Minister Lee and we’ve decided to extend



Caitlin Johnstone

# INSIGHTS

Vigilant Storm, which is our long-scheduled combined training exercise, to further bolster our readiness and interoperability”, Austin said.

“So they launch these war games, provoke a bunch of North Korean missile launches and then say they have to extend the war games because of the missile launches”, tweeted DeCamp.

DeCamp quotes another DPRK official who warns that the extension of the US-ROK war games may provoke further escalations, saying “The irresponsible decision of the US and South Korea is shoving the present situation, caused by provocative military acts of the allied forces, to an uncontrollable phase.”

We’ve been seeing this same cycle repeated year after year: US military expansionism and aggression in a given part of the world receives pushback from the people who live there, and the US responds to that pushback with more military expansionism and aggression. The official narrative is that the US is responding to unprovoked aggressions from the other side, conveniently omitting its own antecedent aggressions and provocations – a manipulation tactic the western media are always happy to facilitate.

In reality it’s not hard to determine who the aggressor is when one party is flying to the other side of the planet to menace the borders and security interests of the other, especially when ramping up militarism in more and more parts of the world facilitates both the US military-industrial complex and the unipolarist objectives of US empire managers. But because the US empire has the most sophis-

ticated narrative control system ever devised, enough people in enough places that matter swallow the official story despite its self-evident absurdity.

A system which perpetuates and exacerbates itself while pretending to solve the problems it creates is often called a self-licking ice cream cone. Because that type of system is promoted by those serving the most powerful and belligerent power structure on earth, one might call US militarism a self-licking boot.

We’ve been watching the self-licking boot of US militarism exemplified for decades in the “war on terror” scam, where US military interventionism destabilises geostrategically crucial parts of the world and makes the locals who’ve suffered under US bombings want to harm their persecutors, and the response is to ramp up military expansionism in those parts of the world in the name of fighting terrorists and protecting US troops.

We been watching it in Ukraine, where US aggressions provoked an invasion by a government the US empire has long targeted for destruction, and that invasion is now being used to advance longstanding US strategic objectives while continually expanding US military involvement in the region.

And we’ll be sure to see more and more of it as the US accelerates toward global conflict on two fronts simultaneously while mainstream media pundits cheer it on, despite all available evidence indicating that we are witnessing something profoundly stupid and crazy. The US will continue ramping up aggressions against Moscow and Beijing, those governments will respond, and we will be told that the US must respond to these outrageous provocations by ramping up aggressions.

Repeat ad nauseum.

Lick, lick. **CT**

*Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Read more of her work at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com).*

JUAN COLE

## UN issues starkest climate warning yet

The past eight years have been the eight hottest on record, in further evidence that human-caused global heating is accelerating rapidly and

dangerously. So reports the World Meteorological Organization in tandem with the COP27 Climate Summit in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

# INSIGHTS

The report argues that we can see rapid heating both in the climate disasters that have struck earth over the past year and in the statistics for ice lost, sea level rise, and the heating of the oceans' surface water.

As for the climate disasters, I have reported on some of them. on my *Informed Comment* blog. For instance, we had the massive rains in Pakistan in August and September that left a third of the country underwater and created a temporary new sea, 67 miles across, that won't drain for six months. 33 million Pakistanis have been affected and nearly 8 million have been displaced. Severe heat in July had set up a low pressure zone in the Arabian Sea that produced water-heavy clouds that dumped their water on Pakistan. The economic losses are over \$15 billion.

Both China and the American Southwest have been thrown into long-term droughts, leaving famous rivers frighteningly low. Europe suffered record heat and wildfires.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas lamented that “We have such high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere now that the lower 1.5°C of the Paris Agreement is barely within reach.”

This year, parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached 418, compared to the 260-270 that had been common in the Holocene, the era of the past 10,000 years. By burning coal, petroleum and fossil gas, human beings are rapidly changing the face of the earth in a way that only big asteroids and massive volcano

eruptions did in the past. Professor Taalas is saying that there is so much carbon dioxide being put into the atmosphere annually still, with 36 billion tons having been spewed up there last year alone, that keeping extra heating above preindustrial norms to 1.5° C. (2.7° F.) is becoming less and less likely. Climate scientists are worried that if we heat the earth more than that, some weather systems will become chaotic and advanced technological civilization will be difficult to retain.

Consistent worldwide temperature records only go back to the nineteenth century, but ice cores and marine life skeletons indicate that the earth is not only hotter than at any time in the past century and a half, it is hotter than it

has been in millions of years.

The WMO notes that the signs of the climate emergency are clearly visible. For instance, the rate of sea level rise, caused by the melting of ice on land and by the bloating of sea water caused by warmer water temperatures, has doubled just since 1993. Just since January 2020, the average global rise in sea level was 10 millimetres.

The Greenland ice sheet and glaciers in the Alps are melting with increasing rapidity. Greenland is warming up so much that it rained there in September rather than snowing. Both the Arctic and the Antarctic lost a million and a million-and-a-half square kilometers of sea-ice extent, respectively.

As for the Alps, their glaciers lost 3 to 4 yards of ice thickness so

## Cuba Libre ... almost

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On November 30, for the 30th year in a row, almost every country on Earth voted at the United Nations to oppose the six-decade US blockade of Cuba. The UN voting board (above) shows 185 in favour, with just two countries – the US and Israel – voting against, and two abstentions – Brazil and Ukraine. An internal US government memo admits its goal is to “deny money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government”. **CT**

# INSIGHTS

far in 2022, beating a record set in 2003. Just in one year, 2021, 6% of the glacier ice volume evaporated in Switzerland. This past summer no new snow lasted into the fall, meaning that there was no building up of fresh ice. Just in this century, the volume of glacier ice in Switzerland has shrunk from 77 to 49 cubed kilometers, so there is fully a third less ice than there was in 2020.

Turning to the oceans, over half

of their surface suffered through at least one marine heatwave this year. Cold waves, in contrast, are declining, with only 22% of the oceans' surface being affected by cold waves this year. **CT**

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Not celebrating will be the families of the migrant workers – most from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – who died to make the event possible in the first place.

Migrant workers have played an important role in transforming Qatar ever since it was controversially awarded the World Cup hosting rights in 2010. The stadiums where the games will be held this November-December are built on the blood, sweat and tears of thousands of migrant workers from Asia and Africa. Some reports put the death toll of migrant workers who built the eight stadiums (along with a new airport, metro system and associated infrastructure) at 6500. Qatari authorities say 37 died.

Qatar's summer is hot. So hot that FIFA made the unprecedented decision to move the tournament from its traditional slot in June to November, despite the havoc it has wreaked on the multi-billion dollar world of domestic football. But while organisers felt the summer conditions were too extreme for professional athletes to run out 90-minute matches, it's alleged they subjected their workers – largely migrants – to 18 hour days.

Football is huge in Nepal. Many young Nepalese football fans will be glued to television screens to watch their heroes – Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylian Mbappé – in the stadiums built on the blood and bones of thousands just like them, who died in Qatar's gruelling working conditions.

The reality is conditions for

Matt Keiffer / Flickr



The Al Wakra stadium: Built especially for the Qatar World Cup.

SUMAN MANDAL

## Migrant red card for Qatar World Cup

The reverberations of Qatar's migrant worker deaths will linger over the upcoming World Cup. Whether it leads to real change rests with a few foreign powers.

When the captain of the win-

ning team lifts the FIFA World Cup trophy above his head in Qatar's Lusail stadium on December 19, football fans will celebrate another sporting success story. There will be heroes and villains, missed opportunities and glorious goals.

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families of Nepali migrant workers who have died in Qatar have worsened after losing the main breadwinner. Migrants often have to pay high recruitment fees to both Nepalese and Qatari recruitment agencies. The fees could be as high as US\$2000, which is often a loan they take from a local money lender at an exorbitant interest rate. When most construction workers are paid only US\$200-\$300 per month, several months of their wage goes to repaying the loan.

For those who die, the burden of paying the loan back falls on surviving family members. In most cases, another adult family member or a teenage son awaits to migrate. This cycle traps them in a debt spiral.

Questions linger over the deaths of migrant workers. Most families are told that their loved ones died in their sleep, with very few proper investigations into worker deaths. *Sutda sutdai maryo* (in Nepali, roughly translates to died in his sleep) has become a colloquial phrase among migrants in the Gulf. The phrase characterises the helplessness families of migrant workers feel when they are neither properly compensated for a loved one's death, nor provided with a more plausible cause of death.

Healthy young men, mostly aged between 22 and 35, were dying within a year of arriving in Qatar to work. Death certificates often stated they died either of "cardiac arrest", "respiratory failure" or "natural causes".

Ratna Mani Gajurel, a consultant cardiologist based in Kath-

mandu is sceptical about such causes of deaths. All migrant workers go through a mandatory health check up from a Nepalese government-authorized lab or hospital before a labour permit is granted. Defenders of the Qatari regime point to the reforms introduced since 2018, abolishing the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, limiting work hours when temperatures rise beyond 32°C and banning work in summer. But reports by various human rights



**FIFA WORLD CUP  
Qatar 2022**

organisations including Human Rights Watch and Transparency International reveal continuous apathy by recruiting companies and Qatari authorities.

A joint letter by rights organisations to FIFA president Gianni Infantino says the football body knew or should have known of Qatar's poor human rights records, and yet it did not do much for the migrant labour. Infantino's comments since – including that workers should feel "dignity and pride" for the work they have done – have not been helpful. In Nepal, there is a feeling of hopelessness among migrant workers as they do not receive much support overseas. Embassies are poorly

staffed and with frequent changes of government in Kathmandu, the functioning of Nepali foreign missions is affected, ambassadors often recalled.

The Gulf region needs migrant labour as much as migrants need jobs. They are indispensable for the region's development. While it may be too late to protect the migrant workers who built Qatar's World Cup facilities, it's not too late for the countries where those workers came from to be more proactive in securing relief and protection of their citizens.

Negotiations with host countries such as Qatar to periodically adjust minimum wages in line with inflation would help improve the material circumstances of migrant workers. And future major projects would be safer if there was a stronger focus on sourcing and sending skilled workers – along with training provided by recruiting companies.

Pressing these issues as matters of labour diplomacy could prompt the best outcome for all: safe, sustainable employment for migrant workers, a large pool of labour for expanding economies, and stronger bilateral ties within the region among nations.

But no matter how well nations improve from here, the legacy of this World Cup will always be affected by the modern slavery-like conditions that marred its lead-up.

Australia's national team, the Socceroos, released a video ahead of the tournament to condemn Qatar's human rights record, including the treatment of migrant workers. Now, the pressure turns

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# INSIGHTS

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to heads of state to ensure conditions improve. **CT**

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rations about consumption.

The other omission is even starker. Livestock is mentioned in only three agreements, and the only action each of them proposes is “management”. Nowhere is there a word about reduction. It’s as though nuclear non-proliferation negotiators had decided not to talk about bombs. You cannot address an issue if you will not discuss it.

Andy Wright / Flickr



Sheep graze on an English farm. Researchers say that livestock farming accounts for between 16 and 28 percent of all greenhouse gas pollution.

GEORGE MONBIOT

## Silence of the lambs

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There are just two actions needed to prevent catastrophic climate breakdown: leave fossil fuels in the ground and stop farming animals. But, thanks to the power of the two industries, both aims are officially unmentionable. Neither of them has featured in any of the declarations from the 26 climate summits concluded so far.

Astonishingly, the sectors themselves are seldom mentioned. I’ve worked through every final agreement produced by the summits since they began. Fossil

fuels are named in only six of them. Just one hints at using less overall: the others propose only to improve efficiency (which, as we have known since the 19th-century, can often paradoxically increase fossil fuel use), attempt technical fixes or, in the case of last year’s agreement in Glasgow, phase down “unabated” coal burning, while saying nothing about reducing oil or gas. Not one of them suggests extracting less. If fossil fuels are removed from the ground, they will be used, regardless of governments’ vague decla-

The call to stop farming animals should be as familiar as the call to leave fossil fuels in the ground. But it is seldom heard. Livestock farming, a recent paper in the journal *Sustainability* estimates, accounts for between 16.5 percent and 28 percent of all greenhouse gas pollution. The wide range of these figures is an indication of how badly this issue has been neglected. As the same paper shows, the official figure (14.5 percent), published by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, is clearly wrong. Everyone in the field knows it, yet few attempts have been made to update it.

Even if the minimum number (16.5 percent) applies, this is greater than all the world’s transport emissions. And it is growing fast. In the 20 years to 2018, global meat consumption rose by 58 percent. A paper in *Climate Policy* estimates that, by 2030, greenhouse gases from livestock farming could use half the world’s entire carbon budget, if we want to avoid more than 1.5C of global heating.

An analysis by *Our World in Data* shows that even if greenhouse gas pollution from every other sector were eliminated to-

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day, by 2100 food production will, on its current trajectory, bust the global carbon budget two or three times over. This is largely because of animal farming, which accounts for 57 percent of greenhouse gases from the food system, though it provides just 18 percent of the calories.

This issue has become even more urgent now we know the heating impact of methane is rising. Livestock farming is the world's greatest source of methane released by human activities. Yet there is no mention of it in the Global Methane Pledge launched at last year's climate summit.

Governments have not ignored these issues by accident; they have resolutely looked away. A new analysis for Chatham House finds that only 12 nations name emissions from farm animals in their official climate commitments, and none seeks to reduce livestock production. Only two nations (Costa Rica and Ethiopia) mention dietary change: arguably the most important of all environmental actions, as animal farming is also the world's greatest cause of habitat destruction and wildlife loss.

What accounts for this determined silence? I think there are several reasons. The livestock sector's cultural power greatly outweighs its economic power. Our connection to food is more personal than our connection to energy sources. Most fossil fuel is consumed at a distance. When we use electricity, for example, we don't think about where it comes from, as long as the lights stay on. But we think and feel a great deal about the food we eat. And, by comparison with the denial spon-

sored by the fossil fuel industry, the misleading claims of the livestock industry have scarcely been challenged in the media.

A scandal broke last month about an academic centre at the University of California, Davis, which turns out to have been founded and funded by livestock lobby groups. It has downplayed the impact of livestock farming, in ways that other scientists have described as highly misleading.

But this is just one aspect of the problem. Like the fossil fuel industry, livestock corporations have been ploughing money into public persuasion, using tactics first developed by tobacco companies. Some of this greenwashing has been highly effective, especially the industry's claims about "regenerative ranching" and the false assertion that pasture-fed meat farming sequesters more greenhouse gases than it releases.

In reality, grass-fed meat is by far the most damaging component of our diets, as a result of its massive land requirement, greenhouse gas emissions, and carbon and ecological opportunity costs. Despite a plethora of claims, there is no empirical evidence that carbon storage in grazing land can compensate for the greenhouse gases livestock produce, let alone for the carbon stocks destroyed when wild ecosystems are converted to pasture.

A paper in *Nature Sustainability* found that if permanent livestock pasture in just the rich nations were returned to wild ecosystems, their recovery would draw down 380-billion tonnes of

carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, equivalent to 12 years of global carbon emissions. The UK government's Climate Change Committee reports that, in England, "transitioning from grassland to forestland would increase the soil carbon stock by 25 tonnes of carbon per hectare ... This is additional to the large amounts of carbon that would be stored in the biomass of the trees themselves".

Slowly and painfully we have become energy-numerate. Large numbers of people have begun to "do the math" on fossil fuel emissions. Now we need to become food-numerate. An extraordinary feature of this debate is that when you present data, your opponents respond with pictures, generally bucolic images of cows or sheep.

Popular food writing is dominated by a disastrous combination of aesthetics and elite tastes. Famous authors propose that everyone eats the food that they like, promoting diets that couldn't be scaled unless we had several planets and no space on any of them for wild ecosystems. They

## School daze



Source / twitter.com

# INSIGHTS

urge us to use a Neolithic production system (grazing) to feed a 21st-century population, with catastrophic results.

We urgently need to put these foolish things aside, to follow and understand the science, and press our governments to focus on the

major causes of the climate crisis. They had two jobs, and have so far mentioned neither of them. **CT**

**George Monbiot's** new book is *Regenesis: Feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*. Read more at [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).

for Ukraine in its war against Russia. If approved, this will bring US aid to Ukraine, mainly in the form of weapons, ammunition, and the like, to almost \$100-billion in less than a year. People tell me this is because America cares about the Ukrainian people. But the US government doesn't care about Americans living on the streets: do you really think it cares about Ukrainians?

Aid to Ukraine gets approved with alacrity by Congress because most of the money goes to weapons contractors like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. To those and similar corporations, war is profitable, peace isn't. Talk of a new cold war with Russia and China drives war-based profits higher still.

Few in Congress have the temerity to suggest that peace is ultimately better for Americans (and indeed Ukrainians, Russians, and all other life on earth) than incessant wars and preparations for the same.

Imagine what \$100-billion could do for the homeless in America. Imagine the shelters that could be built, the aid that could be provided, the hope that could be instilled. I'm not saying government aid is the solution to homelessness, but it sure would help.

Perhaps we need to declare war on homelessness while creating an army of well-heeled lobbyists to attack Congress with the magic bullet that always gets attention: campaign contributions. Money. At the same time, let's eliminate the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security and replace them with a Department of Peace with an equivalent budgetary authority of roughly a trillion dol-

W. J. ASTORE

## Don't talk about the poor. Or peace

The key to getting elected in America is to raise lots of money. And you can't do that by talking about poor people or the prospects for peace in the world.

Poor people have no powerful lobby or armies of lobbyists. With no access to the political game, they can be easily ignored. Those who advocate for peace also lack armies of lobbyists; they lack money as well compared to Raytheon, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and similar giant weapons contractors. They can also be easily ignored.

When you look at Democrats and Republicans, both parties serve the privileged elites. Neither party is on the side of Aurora, a woman working two part-time jobs cleaning motel rooms while also cleaning houses on the side for affluent clients. She has no health care (she can't afford it, and it doesn't come with her part-time jobs) and she barely makes \$30,000 a year despite working 70+ hours a week while trying to raise two kids.

Which political party is fighting (truly fighting, not just paying lip service) for higher pay for her? Which is fighting for single-payer health care for her that's truly affordable? Child-care benefits? Anything at all? The answer is neither.

To America's political establishment, Aurora doesn't exist. She doesn't count. She doesn't matter.

This point was reinforced as I read an article by Chris Hedges on Father Michael Doyle. In Doyle's words: "There is a meanness that has raised its ugly head in the soul of America. Bobby Kennedy, even Lyndon Johnson, spoke about the poor. Now you can't say the word poor and get elected. Let the poor suffer. They're not important. Let the train roll over them".

This is the crux. America, we're told, is incredibly rich and noble and good. Yet we export wars and weapons and treat the most vulnerable among us like trash.

Speaking of wars and weapons, the Biden administration is asking for nearly \$38-billion more in aid

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lars a year.

Barring that, the poor will continue to suffer and wars and weapons will continue to find a way. **CT**

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colonel (USAF) and professor of history, is a senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN), an organisation of critical veteran military and national security professionals. He blogs at [www.bracingviews.com](http://www.bracingviews.com).

For example, SoftBank, the Japanese owner of the Gannett chain, has pillaged hundreds of local papers. It's now making another round of deep cuts in its newsrooms, including dumping more journalists. The financialisers are also requiring other employees to take unpaid leave and are suspending payments to their pensions.

SoftBank bosses simply said, "we need to ensure our balance sheet remains strong."

Sure, take care of Number One! But what about ensuring that local journalism remains strong, providing the information and connections that communities must have for strong democracies? Don't be silly – that's not part of the hedge fund business model. **CT**

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker. This article was distributed by [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org).

JIM HIGHTOWER

## The depravity of hedge-fund journalism

Throughout the US, newspaper subscribers are asking: Hey, who took my Saturday paper? What happened to those political cartoons and columns that I liked? Why does it take two days to get election results and sports scores? How did my paper get filled with filler?

Oh... and who doubled the price?

The cause of all of the above is a Wall Street concept called "financialisation" – a euphemism for corporate plundering.

Multibillion-dollar hedge funds like SoftBank Group, Alden Global Capital, and Chatham Asset have bought up thousands of our dailies and weeklies. They extract enormous profits, not by making a better journalistic product for customers and the community, but by eliminating reporters, selling off each paper's real estate and assets, shrivelling and standardising content... and jacking up the price.

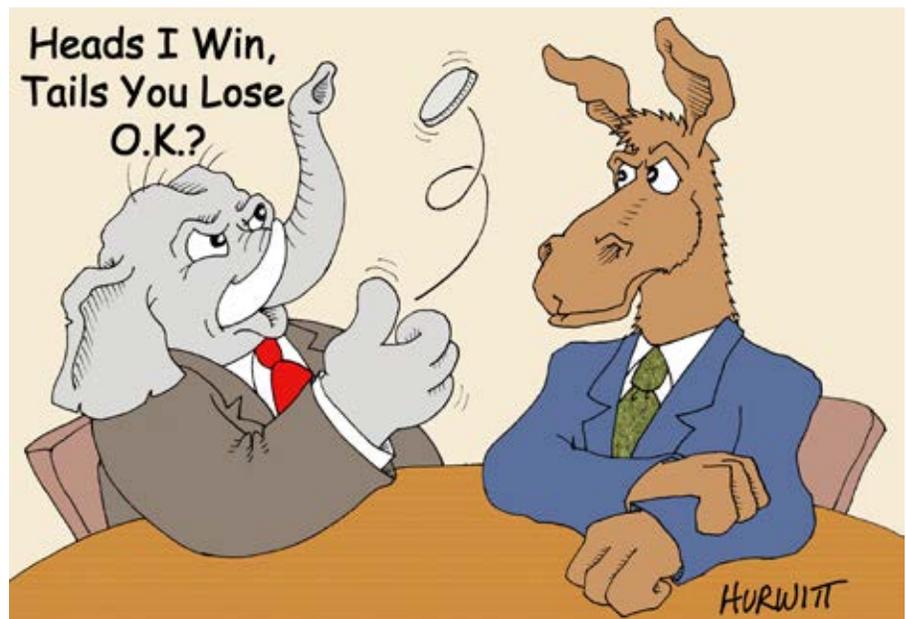
Like avaricious airlines, the profit strategy of these Wall Street

newspapers is to monopolise the market, then charge more for less.

But won't readers stop subscribing? Of course – they're leaving in droves. But hedge fund profiteers don't care. Their plan is to strip-mine the business of every dime it, take the profits, and leave town.

### Hurwitt's Eye

Mark Hurwitt



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FRIDA BERRIGAN

# How to survive us

Yesterday, today and tomorrow  
on a broiling planet

**W**hen I was growing up, there was a parody of an old-fashioned public announcement tacked to the wall of our kitchen that I vividly remember. It had step-by-step instructions for what to do “in case of a nuclear bomb attack.” Step 6 was “bend over and place your head firmly between your legs”; step 7, “kiss your ass goodbye.”

That shouldn’t be surprising, since my parents, Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister, once-upon-a-time priest and nun, were well-known antinuclear activists. I was too young to be a part of the “duck-and-cover generation” who, at school, practiced hiding from a nuclear attack beneath their desks or heading for local bomb shelters in the basements of churches and town halls.

Born in 1974, I think of myself as a member of The Day After generation, who were instructed to watch that remarkably popular made-for-TV movie in 1983 and report on our observations and feelings. Dramatising the life of people in a small town in Kansas after a full-scale nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States, it made a strong (if perhaps unintentional) case that dying in the initial

blast would have been better than surviving and facing the nuclear winter and over-armed chaos that followed.

In this Ukraine War era, maybe we could label today’s kids as the Generation Fed Up With Grown Ups (Gen Fed Up). The members of Gen Z are “digital natives”, born with smartphones in their hands and instantly able to spot all the messy seams in, and agendas behind, poorly produced, un-informative Public Service Announcements like the New York City Emergency Management department’s much pilloried recent PSA about what to do in case of – yep, you guessed it! – a nuclear attack: get inside, stay inside, and stay tuned. (Sounds pretty close to the poster on my wall growing up, doesn’t it?)

**Y**oung people need real information and analysis, survival skills and resources. Generation Z and the younger Generation Alpha (I have some of both in my family) are growing up in a world torn apart by the selfishness and shortsightedness of earlier generations, including the impact of the never-ending production and “modernisation” of nuclear weapons, not to speak of the climate

upheaval gripping this planet and all the horrors that go with it, including sea level rise, megadrought, flooding, mass migration, starvation, and on and on and on...

The nuclear age began during World War II with the July 16, 1945, test of a six-kilogram plutonium weapon code-named Trinity in the Jornada Del Muerto Valley in New Mexico. No one bothered to tell the estimated 38,000 people who lived within 60 miles of that atomic test that it was about to take place or that there might be dangerous nuclear fallout following the blast. No one was evacuated. The area, whose Spanish name in translation means, appropriately enough, Journey of Death, was rich in indigenous culture and life, home to 19 American Indian pueblos, two Apache tribes, and some chapters of the Navajo Nation. Though hardly remembered today, they were the first nuclear casualties of our age.

That initial test was quickly evaluated as successful and, less than a month later, American war planners considered themselves ready for the ultimate “tests” – the atomic bombing of two Japanese cities, Hiroshima on August 6th and Nagasaki three days later. The initial blasts from those back-to-back bombs killed hundreds of



**Save the World, Please!!!:** As part of a coordinated 2021 protest action by tens of thousands of people worldwide, demonstrators took to the streets of London to demand urgent action to tackle the existential threat of catastrophic climate change.

thousands of people on the spot and immediately thereafter, and countless more from radiation sickness and cancer.

Fat Man and Little Boy, as those bombs were bizarrely code-named, should have signalled the end of nuclear war, even of all war. The incineration of so many civilians and the levelling of two major cities should have been motivation enough to put the cork in the deadly power of the atom and consign nuclear weapons to some museum of horrors alongside the guillotine, the rack, and other past devices of obscene torture.

But it would prove to be just the beginning of an arms race and a cheapening of life that goes on to this day. After all, this country con-

tinues to “modernise” its nuclear arsenal to the tune of trillions of dollars, while Vladimir Putin has threatened to use one or more of his vast store of “tactical” nukes, and the Chinese are rushing to catch up. I keep thinking about how 77 years of nuclear brinkmanship and impending doom has taken its global toll, even while making life more precarious and helping render this beautiful and complex planet a garbage can for forever radioactive waste. (Okay, okay, hyperbole alert... it’s not forever, just literally a million years.)

Some among the duck-and-cover generation feared that they wouldn’t

live to see adulthood, that there would be no tomorrow. Not surprisingly, too many of them, when they grew up, came to treat the planet as if there indeed were no tomorrow. And you can see evidence of just that attitude any time you consider the “prosperity” of the second industrial revolution with its toxic sludge of fossil fuels, PCBs, asbestos, lead in paint and gas, and so many plastics. This polluting of our ground, water, and air was all, I suspect, spurred on by a nihilistic nuclearism.

It seems impossible to work so hard to shift from burning carbon to capturing solar or wind power if there’s a chance that it could all go up in a mushroom cloud tomorrow. But there have been some notable efforts from which to draw hope

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and inspiration as we keep living out those very tomorrows. As environmentalist and futurist Bill McKibben writes in his memoir *The Flag, The Cross and The Station Wagon: A Graying American Looks Back on His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What The Hell Happened*, President Jimmy Carter tried to guide this country to a less carbon-dependent future – and it cost him the presidency. The Carter White House sought to mitigate the damage of the 1979 oil crisis with significant investments in solar power and other green technologies and cutting-edge conservation. Had such policies been allowed to take hold, as McKibben points out, “climate changes would have turned from an existential crisis to a manageable problem on a list of other problems”.

Can you imagine? We love Carter now for his folksy accessibility, moral stamina, and promotion of affordable housing through Habitat for Humanity, but as we doom-scroll the latest news about present and future climate catastrophes, we have to reach back through time to even imagine a healthier tomorrow. Sadly enough, with Carter, we might have been near a turning point, we might have had a chance... and then actor (and huckster) Ronald Reagan rode his 10-gallon cowboy hat into the White House, removed the rooftop solar panels the Carters had installed, instituted tax cuts for the very wealthy, and loosened regulations on every type of polluter. President Reagan did that in 1986, only a year or so after the last month of our era that the planet was cooler than average.

**1968** seems like just yesterday! Now what? How about

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## The Carter White House sought to mitigate the damage of the 1979 oil crisis with investments in cutting-edge conservation

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tomorrow?

After all, here we are in 2022 about to hit eight-billion strong on this planet of ours. And there is, of course, a tomorrow. Hotter and drier but dawning all the same. Wetter and windier but coming anyway.

I have three kids, ages 8, 10 and 15, and they anchor me in a troubling and strange, if still ultimately beautiful, reality. This world, however finite with its increasingly overwhelming problems, is still precious to me and worth a good fight. I can't turn away from tomorrow. It's not an abstraction. The headlines now seem to endlessly scream: we are at a potential tipping point in terms of the climate. Did I say a potential tipping point? I meant to make that plural. In fact, an article in the September 8th issue of the Guardian lists 16 of them in all. Sixteen! Imagine that!

Three of the biggest ones that climate scientists agree we're close to tipping over are:

1. The collapse of Greenland's ice cap, which will produce a huge rise in global sea levels.

2. The collapse of a key current in the north Atlantic Ocean, which will further disrupt rainfall and weather patterns throughout the world, severely curtailing global food production.

3. The melting of the Arctic's carbon-rich permafrost, releasing staggering amounts of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and so further broiling this planet.

(Will it freeze again if we do the right thing? Not likely, as it seems as if that tipping point has already tipped.)

In the face of all of this, in the age of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Elon Musk, and the rest of the crew, how do you change political or corporate behaviour to slow, if not reverse, global warming? More than three-quarters of a century of uncertain tomorrows has made the human race – particularly, of course, those in the developed/ industrialised world – awful stewards of the future.

“So when we need collective action at the global level, probably more than ever since the second world war, to keep the planet stable, we have an all-time low in terms of our ability to collectively act together. Time is really running out very, very fast”. So said Johan Potsdam, a scientist with the Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. As he added tellingly, speaking of the global temperature ceiling set at the Paris climate accords in 2015 (and already considered out of date in the latest devastating United Nations report), “I must say, in my professional life as a climate scientist, this is a low point. The window for 1.5C is shutting as I speak, so it's really tough”.

Dire predictions, reams of science, sober calls to act from climatologists and activists, not to speak of island and coastal communities already being displaced by a fast-warming world. Only recently, two young people from the climate movement Last Generation threw mashed potatoes at the glass covering a classic Claude Monet painting in a museum near Berlin in a bid to get attention, while activists from Just Stop Oil used tomato soup on the glass of Vincent Van Gogh's Sunflowers in London in October.

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In neither case were the paintings themselves harmed; in both cases, they have my attention, for what that's worth.

For striking numbers of climate refugees globally, the point has already tipped and, given their situations, they might like to have some tomato soup and mashed potatoes – to eat rather than to be flung as protest props. In the longer term, for their children and grandchildren, they need masses of people in the biggest greenhouse gas polluters – China and the United States top the list – to radically alter their lifestyles to help protect what's left of this distinctly finite planet of ours.

**T**homas Berrigan, my grandfather, was born in 1879. My grandmother Frida was born in 1886. While they missed the pre-industrial era by more than 100 years, their early lives in the United States were almost carbon-free. They hauled water, chopped wood, and largely ate from a meagre garden. As poor people, their carbon footprint remained remarkably small, even as the pace and pollution of life in the United States and the industrialised West picked up.

My father, Philip Berrigan, born in 1923, was the youngest of six brothers. There could have been two more generations of Berrigans between his birth and mine in 1974, but there weren't. I could have been a grandmother when I gave birth to my last child in 2014, but I wasn't. So, in our own way, whether we meant to or not, we slowed down the march of generations and I'm grateful for the long perspective that gives me.

In her later years, my grandmother marvelled at the ways in

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**No more ducking  
and covering,  
no more *Day After*,  
no more staying  
insides**

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which a car could bring her back and forth to the city “all in one day”. More recently, her great-grandchildren have found that they could still go to school (after a fashion) thanks to computers during the Covid pandemic, communicating in real-time with teachers and classmates scattered elsewhere in our world.

It's not likely that I'll live until 2079, my grandfather's 200th birthday, but his great-granddaughter, my daughter Madeline, will just be turning 65 then. If she has my mother's longevity, she'll be 86 when we hit the year 2100, That is the grim milestone (tombstone?) when climate scientists expect that we could reach a disastrous global average temperature of 2.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Unless. Unless something is done, many somethings are done to reverse greenhouse gas emissions. Otherwise, that spells disaster beyond measure for my children's children.

When I look at old photos, I see my own face in my mother's hollowed-out, age-spotted cheeks. And when I look at my daughter's still chubby cheeks and the way her eyebrows arch, I see my own younger face (and that of my mother's, too).

As far as I'm concerned, the year 2100 is my future, even though I won't be here to struggle through it with my children and their children. In the meantime, we keep putting one foot in front of the other (walking is better for the environment

anyway) and struggling somehow to deal with this beautiful, broken world of ours. One generation cedes to the next, doing its best to impart wisdom and offer lessons without really knowing what tools those who follow us will need to carve a better tomorrow out of a worsening today.

To go back to the beginning, while such a thing is still possible, if nuclear weapons, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, fossil fuels, and apocalyptic fear helped get us to this breaking point, we need something truly different now. We need not war, but peace; not new nukes, but next-generation-level diplomacy; not fossil fuels, but the greenest of powers imaginable. We need a world that Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Elon Musk, and their ilk can't even imagine, a world where their kind of power is neither needed, nor celebrated.

We need gratitude, humility, and awe at the deep web of interconnection that undergirds the whole of nature. We need curiosity, joy in discovery, and celebration. And our kids (that Gen Fed Up) can help us access those powers, because they're inherent in all children. So, no more ducking and covering, no more *Day After*, no more staying inside. Let us learn from Generation Z and Generation Alpha and change – and maybe survive. **CT**

**Frida Berrigan** is the author of *It Runs In The Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood*. She is a *TomDispatch* regular and writes the *Little Insurrections* column for [www.wagingnonviolence.org](http://www.wagingnonviolence.org). She has three children and lives in New London, Connecticut, where she is a gardener and community organiser. This article first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

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JONATHAN COOK

# Blocking roads isn't crazy – it's our last hope that sanity will prevail

A lack of public concern in the West at dealing with the impending climate catastrophe isn't accidental. It has been engineered

COP27, the United Nations' annual climate conference attended by world leaders, kicked off in Egypt on November 6 in the midst of a wave of civil disobedience actions in the UK.

The protests have been led by environmental groups such as Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion, and come as oil giants have announced massive profits from surging energy prices caused by the Ukraine war, and new reports show catastrophic climate change is soon to reach a tipping point, becoming irreversible.

Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary general, warned on the eve of the summit that the world would be "doomed" if rich, heavily carbon-dependent economies could not reach an agreement with poorer countries. New figures show temperature rises across Europe have risen twice as fast as the global average, leading to increasingly unstable weather.

In recent direct actions, car showrooms, luxury department stores and oil lobbyists' headquarters have been splattered with or-

ange paint. Waxworks of the royal family in Madame Tussauds have been caked. Famous works of art have been targeted with soup and mashed potatoes. Scientists have occupied a car plant. The lobby of the British parliament has been taken over by demonstrators. And activists have scaled suspension bridges and blocked roads.

There are signs too that the upswell of frustration and anger at the lack of urgency from western leaders and media in addressing the unfolding climate catastrophe is spreading. In the United States, protesters disrupted ABC's daytime television show *The View*, accusing the network of platforming climate deniers and dedicating only six hours to the climate crisis in the whole of 2021.

Most of these actions have been ignored by the media or dismissed as the antisocial posturings of individuals divorced from the concerns of ordinary people.

That was certainly how the most publicised act of civil disobedience was received: two activists threw tomato soup at one of Van Gogh's Sunflower paintings before

glueing their hands to the wall next to the artwork.

The protesters were variously accused of vandalising a work of art (they hadn't, it was protected by glass); of choosing the wrong target (they noted that their protest was to highlight how society values representations of nature over nature itself); and of being white and privileged (their defenders pointed out that they were using their privilege precisely because others who also cared about the environment could not afford to do so).

But the criticism most widely hurled at these various forms of direct action is that they are counterproductive, that they antagonise ordinary people and make them stop listening.

There is an obvious rejoinder. No one appeared to be listening before the activists took to the streets. Endless scientific warnings have made little impact on public discourse. The establishment media have paid only lip service to the dangers, even as the effects on the



24-year-old Just Stop Oil protester Louise, climbed a gantry on the M25 motorway holding up traffic in Surrey, England, said the UK government was 'betraying young people' by allowing the development of new oil and gas projects.

climate have become harder to overlook. And governments have made placatory noises while doing nothing meaningful to reverse the collision course humanity is on with the planet.

That was underscored by the British government's recent decision to issue more than 100 new licences to drill for oil and gas in the North Sea. Officials are also drafting legislation to remove 570 European Union-derived protections on the environment.

Britain's new prime minister, Rishi Sunak, even announced his intention to bow out of COP27, arguing that "domestic challenges" with the economy were more pressing, before international pressure forced him to relent. Predictably, his speech at COP27 was short on specifics or commitments.

These are the UK's responses despite the growing chorus of alarm from expert bodies. Last month the

United Nations warned that, even assuming industrialised nations stick to pledges to cut emissions, the world is heading towards a 2.5C rise in temperatures and catastrophic climate breakdown.

The World Meteorological Organization, meanwhile, noted that the three greenhouse gases have reached record highs, with methane – the biggest offender – showing the largest year-on-year jump.

Civil disobedience is a symptom not of the climate crisis – nature won't listen to the protesters – but of the inaction that continues to be the default position of governing political elites, as well as the billionaire-owned media that is supposed to serve as a watchdog on their power.

For that reason, criticism of the protests has missed the point. The activists aren't trying to win elec-

tions – they are not engaged in a popularity contest.

Their goal is to disrupt narratives and mobilise resistance. That requires building consciousness among those parts of the populace more receptive to their message, swelling the ranks of activists prepared to take part in civil disobedience, and making life ever harder for things to continue as normal.

Such a programme was bound to provoke a backlash, most especially from political and media elites but also from parts of the public. It is that backlash – one that demands respect for effigies of the royal family or works of art above the survival of our species – that challenges current social norms.

The protesters have a huge task ahead. As the climate turns nastier, they need to harness public attention not only towards the causes but towards the true costs of reversing course – in the face of relentless

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misinformation and greenwashing from big business and government.

The establishment media is playing a crucial part in twisting social and political priorities. Every time it focuses on the inconvenience caused by the climate protests – or the potential risk of someone dying in an ambulance caught in a hold-up – it is downplaying what are already the tangible, lethal consequences of the climate emergency.

Large parts of the globe are already suffering. In Nigeria, many hundreds have been killed by recent flood waters, and more than a million forced from their homes. In the summer, a third of Pakistan was inundated by unexpectedly heavy rainfall. After visiting Pakistan, Guterres observed: “We have waged war on nature, and nature is striking back, and striking back in a devastating way.”

**N**onetheless, the claim that there is widespread antipathy in Britain towards acts of civil disobedience on the climate is greatly overstated – and by the very same media outlets determined to play down the climate crisis.

An opinion poll published last month shows that two-thirds of Britons actually back non-violent protests to protect the environment – at a time when the mass media suggests climate activists have become pariahs.

Despite this, the rightwing Conservative government in London has been progressively eradicating the right of protest – precisely to prevent actions to highlight its continuing crimes against the planet.

A spate of recent legislation has been designed to criminalise any expression of dissent. The latest, the Public Order Bill being rushed

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**“We have waged war on nature, and nature is striking back, and striking back in a devastating way”**

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through parliament, makes illegal any protest that causes “serious disruption” to more than one person. The earlier Police Bill defined serious disruption to include noisy demonstrations.

Actions like glueing oneself to railings, sitting in a road, obstructing fracking machinery or tunnelling can result in up to three years’ imprisonment. “Disruption prevent orders” can be issued to anyone who has attended a protest in the last five years, banning them from taking part in future demonstrations for two years. Activists’ freedom of movement can be limited by orders requiring them to wear an electronic tag or denying them entry to specified areas.

London’s Metropolitan police vowed to increase the number of “pre-emptive arrests” after protesters managed to close parts of the M25 motorway around the capital.

One might have hoped that at least Britain’s opposition party would be vowing to reverse such draconian measures once in office. But Labour leader Keir Starmer has suggested he would legislate even stiffer penalties for those taking direct action on the climate. Apparently pandering to what he assumes is public sentiment, Starmer has called such protests “arrogant” and “wrong”.

What all this represents is a shift over the past decade from one kind of political insanity – a denial, either implicitly or explicitly, of a cli-

mate crisis – to a different kind of insanity: official acknowledgment of a looming climate catastrophe but a refusal to do something meaningful to avert it.

**T**his continuing detachment from reality is not accidental. It is engineered by the way political priorities have been ordered.

That is especially true in relation to what westerners think of simplistically as “defensive” or “humanitarian” wars. In truth, they are more usually battles between great powers competing over energy resources to generate the very economic growth destroying the planet.

Wars have horrifying consequences for populations caught in the crossfire, as well as the communities they live in and the wider environment.

But those same wars have highly beneficial outcomes for a tiny wealthy elite. They bolster the profits of big business – from arms manufacturers to media owners and energy firms. At the same time, governments can use wars to justify imposing sacrifices on the wider public, such as austerity measures.

But even more troubling, wars seem to be increasingly useful as a distraction. They create an emergency with a limited and apparently achievable goal – defeating the enemy – that requires the full and immediate attention of western leaders. It presents a reassuring world in which our governments are the Good Guys trying to make the world safer, while theirs are the Bad Guys intending to spread death and destruction.

In this way, wars helpfully deflect attention from the far bigger global crisis of the environment,

one in which Western leaders cannot present themselves as the Good Guys – because they are, in fact, the worst, the greediest and the most destructive of the Bad Guys.

The endless War on Terror has served this purpose all too well over the past two decades, when the climate crisis should have been the world's top priority. Instead, the region where most of the world's oil is located was plunged into a series of interminable resource wars.

As long as there is a war to worry about – even nuclear Armageddon, as President Joe Biden recently warned – the threat of an environmental Armageddon can be deemed less pressing, less horrifying, less worthy of attention.

The current war in Ukraine increasingly fits this bill. As it develops, it looks less and less like a war to defend national sovereignty and more like Ukraine is being turned into another proxy battlefield between the US and Russia – this one for dominance over European

## The constant chatter in western capitals, on TV and in the press, is about how to find new ways to generate gas and oil for public consumption

energy markets and the geostrategic advantages that flow from such dominance.

Profits for arms makers and energy firms are booming. Europeans are facing recession and new rounds of austerity. Television audiences have gorged on the news, encouraged to cheer on one side as if they are watching the latest Marvel movie. Astoundingly, mutually assured nuclear annihilation is no longer off the table.

Instead the constant chatter in western capitals, on TV and in the press, is about how to find new ways to generate gas and oil for public consumption to overcome the energy crisis, not how to wean ourselves off these climate-destroying fuels. Biden, for example, has been on the

warpath over the refusal of OPEC+ to step up production to help him in the mid-term elections.

And, just as happened with the pandemic, and before it with the Trump presidency and the financial crash, there is once again a more pressing matter to worry about – defeating the “madman” Russian president, Vladimir Putin – than the end of a habitable planet.

But in a world of self-inflicted collapse, Putin is no more insane than his western counterparts. In truth, the only sane people are those trying to wake up everyone else, whether by glueing their hands to the road, climbing bridges or hurling soup at paintings. **CT**

**Jonathan Cook** won the *Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism*. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). Cook's web site is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net).

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GORDON PARKS

# Memories of a racist past

New edition of photographic masterwork recalls the darkest days of segregation in America's Deep South

© The Gordon Parks Foundation





In the summer following the 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery, *Life* magazine sent Gordon Parks to Alabama to document the daily realities of African Americans living under the Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation.

For several weeks in the summer of 1956, Parks photographed the life of an extended African-American family, the Causeys, at home and work in the rural South.

Twenty-six of the images from the photo-shoot appeared in the September 24, 1956, issue of *Life* magazine, as part of the photo-essay titled “The Restraints: Open and Hidden”.

These colour photographs are among Parks’ most powerful and groundbreaking images, and have since become iconic representations of the conditions that led to the civil rights movement.

Among the photographs is one of Joanne Thornton Wilson and her niece, Shirley Anne Kirksey, standing in front of a theatre in Mobile, Alabama – a celebrated image (*see page 22*) that became, in Parks’ words, a forceful “weapon of choice” in the struggle against racism and segregation.

The photographs were originally published in Parks’s book, *Segregation Story*. A new edition of which, co-published by



Steidl and the Gordon Parks Foundation, includes several never-before-published photographs, as well as enhanced reproductions created from Parks' original transparencies.

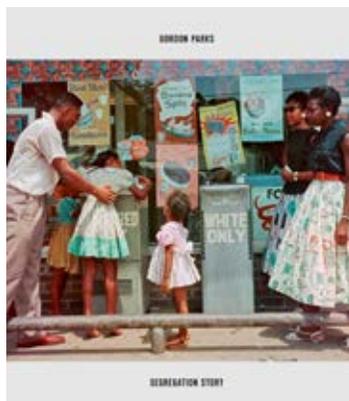
Although some of these photographs were exhibited during his lifetime, the bulk of Parks' assignment was thought

lost. Then, in 2011, five years after Parks's death, the Gordon Parks Foundation discovered more than 70 colour transparencies from the series. Revising the original book, first published in 2014, this expanded edition is the most comprehensive publication of this pivotal body of work to date.



In addition to unseen images from the series, the revised edition of *Segregation Story* includes a new essay by artist Dawoud Bey, alongside texts from the first edition by the late art historian Maurice Berger and journalist and civil rights activist Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

The book also includes facsimile reproductions of the original *Life* magazine photo essay, plus Parks's notes and captions to the images. **CT**



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MATT KENNARD

# ‘The UK executive is wining and dining with people plotting the assassination of my husband’

Stella Assange, the wife of the WikiLeaks founder, talks to *Declassified’s* chief investigator about how her husband is surviving his fourth year inside Belmarsh prison – and how his case threatens the very core of freedom itself

● *“I think they keep him in Belmarsh because they can get away with it. It’s the most effective way of silencing him”*

● *“I’m convinced Julian cannot survive under the conditions the US will put him in. The only reason he’s surviving now is because he’s able to see me and the children”*

● *“If the UK press had reported fairly and critically about this case, would Julian be in Belmarsh prison today? I don’t believe so”*

● *“These concepts of independence and fairness are the only thing that stand between us and a complete darkness of raw power where they can just crush you”*

Julian is fighting for his survival and he’s going through hell, that’s the best way to put it”, Stella Assange says when I ask how he’s doing.

The wife of the world’s most famous political prisoner is speaking to me as part of her relentless battle to save her husband’s life.

“Sometimes it’s been really, really very difficult for him, and sometimes when he’s able to see the children, when he’s with the children, when there’s progress in the case, then he’s energised”, she adds. “And he’s energised by all the support that he sees out there for him. He gets letters of support and expressions of support constantly”.

One thing immediately noticeable when talking with Stella is she has the same unusual intensity and focus as her husband. For anyone who has met Julian, the similarities

are striking.

He has now been in Belmarsh maximum-security prison in London for three-and-a-half years. He was initially put in there ostensibly because of a bail violation after he was given political asylum by the Ecuadorian government.

In 2012, UK courts had ordered Assange’s extradition to Sweden to face questioning over sexual assault allegations. The case was dropped in August 2019, soon after Assange was put in Belmarsh. He is now being held as a remand prisoner at the behest of the US government.

“Belmarsh has about 800 prisoners, and it’s a very harsh regime because it has very serious offenders”, Stella says. “It also has people on remand for non-serious offences. And it has people who are like Julian, where there’s some kind of political aspect to it. Everyone is treated as if



Julian Assange “is energised by all the support that he sees out there for him. He gets letters of support and expressions of support constantly”.

they were a serious offender. This is what distinguishes Belmarsh from other prisons.

“When Julian calls, for example, we only get ten minutes at a time. The explanation for this is that they’re surveilling the phone calls and there’s a technical limitation to how they can surveil the phone calls. So that’s incredibly frustrating: to have just ten minute chunks of phone calls”.

She continues: “Julian’s in his cell for over 20 hours a day, but it varies from day to day. During lockdown, it was for a critical week where there was an outbreak of Covid in his wing, it was 24/7 for several days in a row”.

in September, Assange tested positive for covid and was in solitary confinement in his cell for 10 days. He has a chronic lung condition.

“It’s not like you imagine prison like you see on TV”, Stella says. “The prisoners don’t sit together when they eat. They have to queue up to collect their food and then they have to eat in their own cell. Isolation is the norm. Sometimes they’re allowed out to collect medication, to collect food, to go to the yard, which should be once a day for an hour, but in practice it’s less. Social visits and legal visits, the visits occur a few times a week, if that. Sometimes visits get cancelled, like with the death of the Queen”.

### Inside Belmarsh

The regime in Belmarsh is a purposefully harsh one. “You’re basically not in control of your environment – or anything”, Stella says. “You’re not in control of the routine. You’re not in control of what you eat, how you eat. Other people have control over your physical environment and over your person”.

In 2020, *Declassified* published a

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story showing Assange was one of just two inmates at Belmarsh, which then housed 797 prisoners, being held for violating bail conditions.

The figures showed that more than 20 percent of the prison population was held for murder, while nearly two-thirds – 477 people – were imprisoned for violent offences. A further 16 inmates were held for offences related to terrorism, including four people who planned to carry out terrorist attacks. Assange himself has never been charged with a violent offence.

“I think they keep him in Belmarsh because they can get away with it, because it’s the most effective way of silencing him, precisely because of this extreme regime that Belmarsh is known for”, Stella says.

“It’s a punishment in itself. The very fact that he is in prison for having exercised his right to seek and actually obtain asylum...that’s a right that’s enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That is a long recognised right that every person has. And it violated a technicality, and it’s usually treated as a technicality if there is a sufficient reason for violating the bail. In this case, there undeniably was”.

Stella, whose real name is Sara, continues: “Very rarely is it actually punished with prison time, and he finished serving that prison sentence in October 2019. But effectively it’s an indefinite sentence because while he exercises his right to challenge the US extradition request, the UK keeps him in Belmarsh at the request of the American government”.

### ‘Worse than death’

Assange’s treatment in the US would be much worse. In 2020, UK District Judge Vanessa Baraitser blocked Assange’s extradition to the US because

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## Assange was one of just two inmates at Belmarsh, which then housed 797 prisoners, being held for violating bail conditions

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of the risk of suicide under the onerous conditions he would face. Baraitser’s decision was based on the fact that, if convicted, Assange would likely be moved to the “Supermax” Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) in Florence, Colorado, home to convicted terrorist Abu Hamza and Mexican druglord El Chapo.

A former warden of the prison has said: “There’s no other way to say it – it’s worse than death”.

Pre-trial, Assange could also be held under Special Administrative Measures, or SAMs, where inmates spend 23 or 24 hours a day in their cells with no contact with other prisoners.

The US then appealed Baraitser’s ruling, saying it would promise that Assange would not be subject to SAMs or housed in ADX. Crucially, though, the US reserved the right to reverse these promises in case of further violations by Assange, which can be easily invented.

In December 2021, the UK High Court agreed with the US appeal and reversed the lower court decision not to extradite Assange.

Many believe Assange would commit suicide before being put on a plane to the US.

“I’m convinced that Julian cannot survive under the conditions the US will put him in”, says Stella. “I have no doubt they will put him in a regime of isolation. The only reason he’s surviving now is because he’s able to see me, to see the children. He has a hope of fighting

extradition to the US”.

She adds: “He’s facing trial in the Eastern District of Virginia with a jury that will be composed of people who are either working for or somehow linked to the national security sector, because that is what that area is. That is the jury pool. He faces 175 years under the Espionage Act, under which there is no defence. He cannot explain, he cannot justify, he cannot defend himself from the accusation”.

She pauses. “Under the indictment, Julian is accused of conspiring with a source to publish information: receiving that information from the source, possessing that information, and communicating it to the public. That is journalism. And if you define journalism as a crime, then Julian is guilty and he has no defence”.

### Due process

The original ruling which blocked extradition to the US did so on very narrow grounds. Aside from mental health concerns, Judge Baraitser agreed with every dot and comma of the US indictment.

The current appeal by Assange’s lawyers against that original ruling should be heard next year. It is likely to focus on substantive issues of press freedom and the political nature of this prosecution.

Soon after the 2020 decision, David Davis, a former chair of the Conservative Party who served as Brexit minister in 2016-18, told Declassified the US-UK extradition treaty is “massively asymmetric”.

He also said Judge Baraitser “got the law wrong” by claiming the treaty included political crimes.

“Parliament made clear in terms that it would not cover political crimes”, Davis said.

“The US-UK extradition treaty explicitly prohibits extraditions



Stella Assange: "Julian is accused of conspiring with a source to publish information: receiving that information from the source, possessing that information, and communicating it to the public. That is journalism."

for political offences," says Stella. "So this is one of the very obvious aspects for which the extradition should be blocked. And in fact, when the indictment first came down, there were all these legal commentators I recall at the time, well, one or two, but prominent people, who said, 'well, this can't really be a serious extradition effort, because of course it will be blocked'".

### 'Deference to the intelligence services'

Another bizarre aspect of the Assange case is that the state requesting the extradition of the defendant is on record as spying on his privileged conversations with his defence lawyers – and plotting to assassinate him.

In the Pentagon Papers case in the 1970s, US whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg was charged with leaking a top-secret report on the history of the Vietnam War which eventually helped end that devastating conflict. Ellsberg's case was thrown out after it was revealed the Nixon administration had broken into his psychiatrist's office to find dirt to smear him in the media.

In the Assange case, none of the revelations about the corruption of due process seem to matter. Given the same agency behind the prosecution has plotted to assassinate the defendant, why are we still here?, I ask Stella.

"Well, it's a good question. I try to understand it myself. What's different from the Pentagon Papers case? I think what's different is a deference to the intelligence services that even outright criminality is business as usual".

### The darkness

It should be clear to any independent observer that the UK judiciary

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and penal system has been captured by the state in the Assange case. The evidence is public and extensive.

“There’s an extraordinary conflict of interest that no one can talk about, which is that UK government ministers have been extremely hostile to Julian”, says Stella.

“But not just that. They’re involved in secretive groups like Le Cercle, which *Declassified* has written about. A secret CIA-backed group with UK ministers, including current sitting ministers, where you can’t even find out where they meet or when they meet or what’s on the agenda”.

She pauses, exasperated. “Julian has been the victim of a CIA plot to assassinate him”.

In December last year, *Declassified* published a story revealing eight current Conservative parliamentarians are associated with a secret rightwing group called Le Cercle which a former minister wrote was “funded by the CIA”. This includes recent UK Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng and Sir Alan Duncan, the foreign minister who orchestrated the arrest of Julian Assange in 2019.

*Declassified* also revealed that Duncan was a 40-year “good friend” of the High Court judge who green-lighted Assange’s extradition late last year.

“There’s a disconnect between when we talk about democracy and separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary and the executive”, Stella says.

“The reality of it is that the executive is wining and dining with people who are plotting the assassination of my husband. I don’t even know how to approach explaining this reality. In a way, the more you see the darkness of it, the more a kind of classic liberal I become, in

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## Free expression and press freedom groups across the world have condemned the US prosecution – and the British imprisonment

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the sense that the only thing we have is the insistence of principles of independence and fairness and equity and all these things, because there’s nothing else”.

She continues: “These are concepts, they’re the only thing that stand between us and a complete darkness of raw power where they can just crush you. So I have to stay optimistic that the courts can redeem this situation, because the alternative is that there is just darkness”.

### Media failure

Noticeable during the whole Assange saga is the lack of support from mainstream British journalists. No UK newspaper has launched a campaign for his release, and there has not been a single investigation of the legal process in any paper either. This stands in contrast to the media in Italy, Spain, Germany and the US.

“It’s a very interesting thought experiment”, says Stella. “If the newspapers, especially the ones that collaborated with WikiLeaks, which isn’t just the *Guardian* – it’s also the *Telegraph*, it’s Channel Four, it’s the BBC, the *Independent*; all of these had agreements with WikiLeaks about publishing those materials. It was a joint venture, a joint publishing venture. If they had reported fairly and diligently and critically about this case, would Julian be in Belmarsh prison today? I don’t believe so. I don’t think he would have spent

a single day in prison because in many ways, for many years, they enabled the hounding of Julian out of negligence...because WikiLeaks challenged the old order media, the legacy media”.

She adds: “Julian’s profile was also much higher than the editor of the most well-established newspaper in the UK, for example. Most people don’t know who that is. So Julian was an inconvenience and was changing the landscape. I think there was a lot of jealousy there. But these petty personal issues among journalists, it’s kind of endemic to journalism or to some of the journalists class I’d say, has had such a pernicious effect because Julian is a test case”.

The case has been described as the biggest threat to the first amendment in the US and press freedom globally in generations. Free expression and press freedom groups across the world have condemned the US prosecution – and the British imprisonment.

National security whistleblowers have always been criminalised, but this is the first time a journalist and publisher faces life in prison.

“What is not properly understood, I think, because of their failure to report accurately, critically, or diligently, is that Julian is being prosecuted as a journalist”, Stella says. “They are going after him as a journalist, not as a whistleblower, not as anything else. The activities that they have criminalised are journalistic activities”.

### ‘War of attrition’

In 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Assange had been arbitrarily detained by Britain since 2010. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, later accused the British of “torturing” Assange. Both stories were

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barely covered in the British media.

“For the first nine years, until he was dragged out of the embassy, he was never charged and there was just a complete catastrophic failure to accurately report that. I think right now the press is in a bit of an awkward position because the narratives that they have been furthering for so long just don’t fit the reality. And the public perceives that...There’s a guy in prison for three-and-a-half years who isn’t convicted of anything, and it has to do with publishing war crimes”.

Stella believes it is corrupting the whole body politic. “I think it is a war of attrition”, she says. “I think there are some people within the US and UK governments who understand how cancerous this whole affair is, how harmful it is, because it’s corrupting, right?”

She continues: “In order to keep this going, it is corrupting the system at every level. But then there are the short-term interests, for example in the US, where they’re thinking, ‘well, as long as he’s in prison in a different jurisdiction, we don’t have to worry about it’.”

“For the UK”, she adds, “it’s, ‘well, we can blame this on the US and we keep him silenced with this excuse that he’s a flight risk if he’s released’.”

Stella says the persecution of her husband hampers the ability of the UK and the US to project themselves internationally within institutions. “For example, if the US and the UK start really undermining the UN system and the international legal system in such a flagrant manner. Then the whole thing falls apart. And of course, these are empires”.

The corruption started years before, Stella contends. “The undermining of these systems became institutionalised and systematic during the so-called War on Ter-

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**“He’s been kind of silenced and made invisible. But at the same time, the longer this goes on, the more obvious it is to everyone”**

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ror. Initially it was outward looking – black sites in other countries and torture regimes through carve-outs – but now they’ve basically internalised that into the UK system, into the US system”.

She adds: “If Julian gets extradited to the US, they are basically doing away with the First Amendment, and the First Amendment is the one thing that distinguishes the US from every other superpower. It actually has a strong free speech principle that has worked. The UK less so. But as a principle, it is a counterbalance to the kind of raw, dark aspects of the state. If you start weakening that and undermining that, which is what is happening both in the US and the UK, by keeping Julian imprisoned, then you are fundamentally corrupting the entire system.”

### **‘Enough is enough’**

In May, a new progressive administration was elected in Australia under Anthony Albanese. It held out hope that Assange’s home country could finally exert some diplomatic pressure to force his release.

Albanese, as leader of the Labor Party, said in February 2021: “Enough is enough. I can’t see what is served by keeping Julian Assange incarcerated”. The previous prime minister Scott Morrison was close to the Trump administration, allegedly having former CIA director Mike Pompeo on speed dial for two years.

“It is a shift from the previous government in the sense they were in complete lockstep with the US”, Stella says. “There was no questioning of what was going on, there was no effort to find a solution. With the new Australian government, there is a position that they want to find a solution and their position, as they’ve expressed it, is enough is enough, and so on. How that translates into reality? Julian isn’t free yet, and that’s the only measure”.

She continues: “I don’t have insight into what is happening or if it’s happening, but there has been no result, and it’s been already many months that they’ve been in government. The other aspect is how can it be that an Australian citizen in the UK is wanted for extradition by the US? I think it has to do with citizenship in practice becoming weaker and almost irrelevant. I think it was Australia that expressed that they had something like joint sovereignty with the United States at the security state level of these Five Eyes”.

The Five Eyes intelligence alliance comprises Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain and the US.

“There is something else going on that is shaping changing states as we traditionally understand them. If you have these five countries operating as a single brain that dilutes citizenship in each of those countries in ways that we don’t even understand, and I think that’s part of the equation”.

### **Hope**

The odds seem stacked against Stella and her husband. The forces ranged against them do not come more powerful. But she cautions against hopelessness.

“I think that there’s a real risk

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in this sense of powerlessness”, she says. “I don’t agree with it at all that people are powerless. In a way, when you have such a stark injustice as in Julian’s case, it has to be a motivator, not a de-motivator, to take action”.

She continues: “Our democracy, our society, these principles that we believe in, in order to live in the fairest, best society we can live in, they’re incredibly fragile. They have to be fought for, and every generation has to fight for them again, because there are constant forces in the opposite direction that are trying to eat up our rights. Julian’s case represents a real turning point. And we are agents in the society we live in. It is not just a moral imperative, but a practical imperative to stand up and take action”.

The level of attacks on Assange by different elements within the Anglo-American establishment has been ferocious since 2010.

“The purpose has been to silence support for him because he’s fighting a political case”, says Stella. “In a political case, you need political support. That’s why there was such an relentless attack on him in the lead up to his imprisonment. And since then there has been a deliberate silencing of Julian. He’s not even allowed to go to the hearings in person. For the last year-and-a-half, he hasn’t been given permission to go. So he’s been kind of silenced and made invisible. But at the same

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**Stella and Julian  
have two sons, Gabriel  
and Max. “They’re  
happy three and five  
year olds. They just  
want to play”**

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time, the longer this goes on, the more obvious it is to everyone”.

She adds: “This is a defining case of our times, just like other cases have been defining cases of their times. This is it for us”.

### **The future**

Do you sometimes allow yourself to daydream about your husband being free and what your life would look like?, I ask.

“I always picture us being in a park or on a mountain or something like that, because that’s what Julian hasn’t had for over a decade”, she says. “He just needs to be treated like a human being and be allowed to be a human being and not denied his dignity and his humanity, which is what has been done to him for years and years”.

Stella’s life now revolves around answering questions about her husband. But with two little boys to look after, and the power of the world’s most powerful state bearing down on her, she is herself living in very difficult conditions. How is she doing?

“It’s been difficult, but Julian is the one in the more difficult situation, obviously, and I just want him to be free. The clarity of that goal doesn’t just make it bearable, it makes me have a burning fire to get him out and to continue fighting. There’s a lot of support for him and the awareness and the goodwill and solidarity is there and it’s growing and it’s undeniable. So I’m just going to keep going until Julian’s free”.

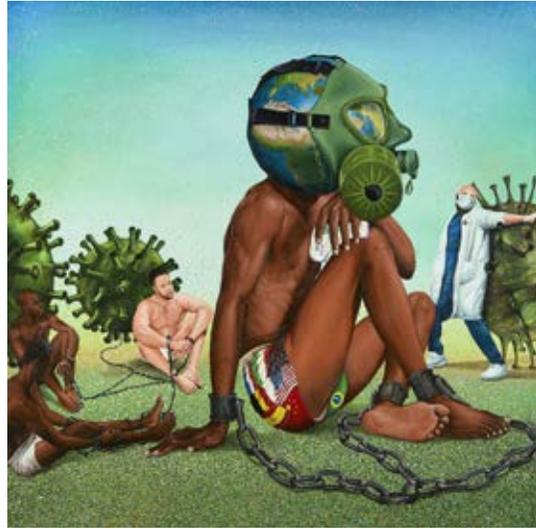
Stella and Julian have two sons, Gabriel and Max, born while he was confined in the Ecuadorian embassy. What do you tell them about their dad’s situation?, I ask.

“They speak to him over the phone and they see him about once a week and they understand that bad people are keeping their father away from them and that their father wants to come home and that this strange place that we go to is keeping him from coming home,” she says.

“But I don’t tell them about the extradition. There’s no way they can conceptualise that. So there’s no point. There’s also no point in casting this dark prospect in their horizon. But they enjoy seeing him. They’re happy three- and five-year-olds. They just want to play”. **CT**

***Matt Kennard** is chief investigator at [www.declassifieduk.org](http://www.declassifieduk.org). He was a fellow and then director at the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London. Follow him on Twitter @kennardmatt*

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Amani Bodo (DRC),  
Masque à gaz ('Gas Mask'),  
2020.

VIJAY PRASHAD

# Africa says 'No!'

Continent doesn't want to be breeding ground  
for the new Cold War

On 17 October, the head of US Africa Command (Africom), US Marine Corps General Michael Langley visited Morocco. Langley met with senior Moroccan military leaders, including Inspector General of the Moroccan Armed Forces Belkhir El Farouk. Since 2004, Africom has held its “largest and premier annual exercise”, African Lion, partly on Moroccan soil. This past June, ten countries participated in the African Lion 2022, with observers from Israel (for the first time) and (Nato).

Langley's visit is part of a broader US push onto the African continent, which we documented in our dossier no. 42 (July 2021), *Defending Our Sovereignty: US Military Bases in Africa and the Future of African Unity*, a joint publication with The Socialist Movement

of Ghana's Research Group – <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-42-militarisation-africa>

In that text, we wrote that the two important principles of Pan-Africanism are political unity and territorial sovereignty and argued that “[t]he enduring presence of foreign military bases not only symbolises the lack of unity and sovereignty; it also equally enforces the fragmentation and subordination of the continent's peoples and governments”.

In August, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield travelled to Ghana, Uganda, and Cape Verde. “We're not asking Africans to make any choices between the United States and Russia”, she said ahead of her visit, adding, “for me, that choice would be simple”. That choice is nonetheless being impelled by the US Congress

as it deliberates the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, a bill that would sanction African states if they do business with Russia (and could possibly extend to China in the future).

To understand this unfolding situation, our friends at No Cold War have prepared their briefing no. 5, *Nato Claims Africa as Its Southern Neighbourhood*, which looks at how Nato has begun to develop a proprietary view of Africa and how the US government considers Africa to be a frontline in its Global Monroe Doctrine.

That briefing can be read in full and downloaded at <https://nocoldwar.org/news/briefing-nato-claims-africa-as-its-southern-neighbourhood>.

In August 2022, the United States published a new foreign policy strategy aimed at Africa.

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The 17-page document featured 10 mentions of China and Russia combined, including a pledge to “counter harmful activities by the [People’s Republic of China], Russia, and other foreign actors” on the continent, but did not once mention the term “sovereignty”.

Although US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has stated that Washington “will not dictate Africa’s choices”, African governments have reported facing “patronising bullying” from Nato member states to take their side in the war in Ukraine. As global tensions rise, the US and its allies have signalled that they view the continent as a battleground to wage their New Cold War against China and Russia.

**A**t its annual summit in June, Nato named Africa along with the Middle East “Nato’s southern neighbourhood”. On top of this, Nato’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ominously referred to “Russia and China’s increasing influence in our southern neighbourhood” as a “challenge”.

The following month, the outgoing commander of Africom, General Stephen J Townsend, referred to Africa as “Nato’s southern flank”. These comments are disturbingly reminiscent of the neocolonial attitude espoused by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in which the US claimed Latin America as its “backyard”.

This paternalistic view of Africa appears to be widely held in Washington. In April, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Countering Malign Russian Influence Activities in Africa Act by a vote of 415-9. The bill, which aims to punish African governments for not aligning with US

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## Will the US and Nato invoke the ‘malign influence’ of China and Russia as a justification for regime change in Africa?

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foreign policy on Russia, has been widely condemned across the continent for disrespecting the sovereignty of African nations, with South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor calling it “absolutely disgraceful”.

The efforts by the US and Western countries to draw Africa into their geopolitical conflicts raise serious concerns: namely, will the US and Nato weaponise their vast military presence on the continent to achieve their aims?

In 2007, the United States established its Africa Command (Africom) “in response to our expanding partnerships and interests in Africa”. In just 15 years, Africom has established at least 29 military bases on the continent as part of an extensive network which includes more than 60 outposts and access points in at least 34 countries – over 60 percent of the nations on the continent.

Despite Washington’s rhetoric of promoting democracy and human rights in Africa, in reality Africom aims to secure US hegemony over the continent. Africom’s stated objectives include “protecting US interests” and “maintaining superiority over competitors” in Africa. In fact, the creation of Africom was motivated by the concerns of “those alarmed by China’s expanding presence and influence in the region”.

From the outset, Nato was involved in the endeavour, with the original proposal put forward by

then Supreme Allied Commander of Nato James L Jones, Jr. On an annual basis, Africom conducts training exercises focused on enhancing the “interoperability” between African militaries and “US and Nato special operations forces”.

The destructive nature of the US and Nato’s military presence in Africa was exemplified in 2011 when the US and Nato – ignoring the African Union’s opposition – launched their catastrophic military intervention in Libya to remove the government of Muammar Gaddafi. This regime change war destroyed the country, which had previously scored the highest among African nations on the UN Human Development Index. Over a decade later, the principal achievements of the intervention in Libya have been the return of slave markets to the country, the entry of thousands of foreign fighters, and unending violence.

In the future, will the US and Nato invoke the “malign influence” of China and Russia as a justification for military interventions and regime change in Africa?

At this year’s UN General Assembly, the African Union firmly rejected the coercive efforts of the US and Western countries to use the continent as a pawn in their geopolitical agenda. “Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history”, stated Chairman of the African Union and President of Senegal Macky Sall. “It does not want to be the breeding ground of a new Cold War, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis”. Indeed, the drive for war offers nothing to the peoples of Africa in their pursuit of peace, climate change adaptation, and development.

At the inauguration of the Eu-

ropean Diplomatic Academy on 13 October, the European Union's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, said, "Europe is a garden... The rest of the world... is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden". As if the metaphor were not clear enough, he added, "Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us".

Borrell's racist comments were pilloried on social media and eviscerated in the European Parliament by Marc Botenga of the Belgian Workers' Party, and a petition by the Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25) calling for Borrell's resignation has received over 10,000 signatures. Borrell's lack of

## The African Union firmly rejected the coercive efforts of the US and Western countries to use the continent as a pawn in their geopolitical agenda

historical knowledge is significant: it is Europe and North America that continue to invade the African continent, and it is those military and economic invasions that cause African people migrate. As President Sall said, Africa does not want to be a "breeding ground of a new Cold War", but a sovereign place of dignity. **CT**

**Vijay Prashad** is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at *Globetrotter*. He is an editor of *LeftWord Books* and the director of *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*. He is a senior non-resident fellow at *Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies*, *Renmin University of China*. He has written more than 20 books, including *The Darker Nations* and *The Poorer Nations*. His latest books are *Struggle Makes Us Human: Learning from Movements for Socialism* and (with *Noam Chomsky*) *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of US Power*. Distributed by *Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research*



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CHRIS HEDGES

# Writing on war, and living in a world from hell

“There were days when I could not write. I would sit in despair, overcome by emotion, unable to cope with a sense of loss, of hurt, and the hundreds of violent images I carry within me”

**A**s this century began, I was writing *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, my reflections on two decades as a war correspondent, 15 of them with the *New York Times*, in Central America, the Middle East, Africa, Bosnia, and Kosovo. I worked in a small, sparsely furnished studio apartment on First Avenue in New York City. The room had a desk, chair, futon, and a couple of bookshelves – not enough to accommodate my extensive library, leaving piles of books stacked against the wall. The single window overlooked a back alley.

The super, who lived in the first-floor apartment, smoked prodigious amounts of weed, leaving the grimy lobby stinking of pot. When he found out I was writing a book, he suggested I chronicle his moment of glory during the six days of clashes known as the Stonewall Riots, triggered by a 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay club in Greenwich Village. He claimed he had thrown a trash can through the front window of a police cruiser.

It was a solitary life, broken by periodic visits to a small antique bookstore in the neighbourhood that had a copy of the 1910-1911

*Encyclopedia Britannica*, the last edition published for scholars. I couldn't afford it, but the owner generously let me read entries from those 29 volumes written by the likes of Algernon Charles Swinburne, John Muir, T.H. Huxley, and Bertrand Russell. The entry for Catullus, several of whose poems I could recite from memory in Latin, read: “The greatest lyric poet of Rome”. I loved the certainty of that judgment – one that scholars today would not, I suspect, make, much less print.

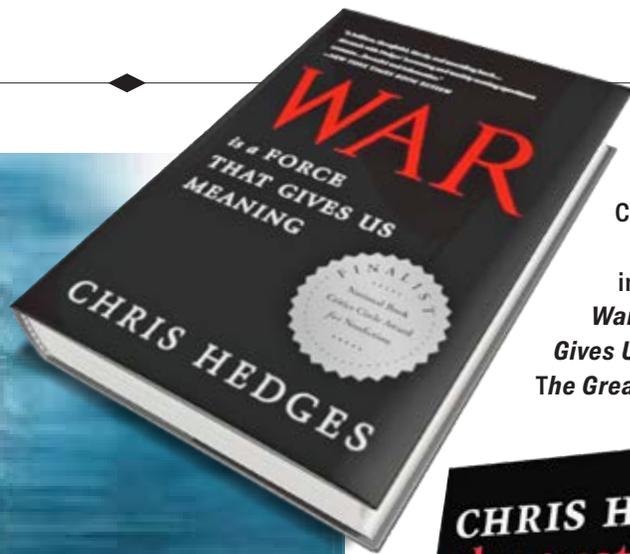
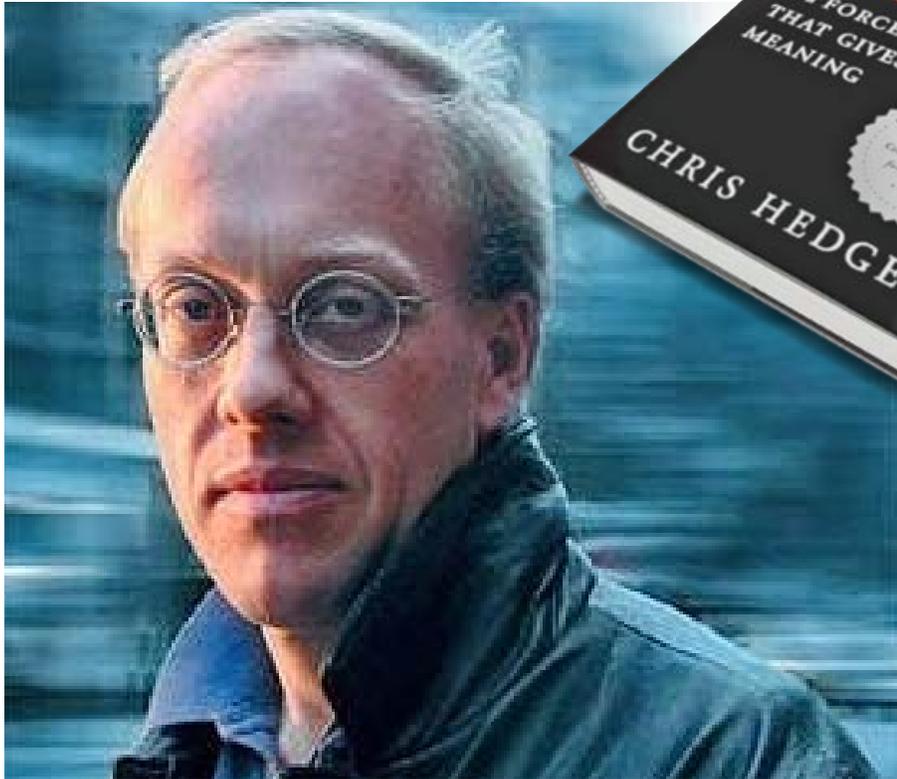
There were days when I could not write. I would sit in despair, overcome by emotion, unable to cope with a sense of loss, of hurt, and the hundreds of violent images I carry within me. Writing about war was not cathartic. It was painful. I was forced to unwrap memories carefully swaddled in the cotton wool of forgetfulness. The advance on the book was modest: \$25,000. Neither the publisher nor I expected many people to read it, especially with such an ungainly title. I wrote out of a sense of obligation, a belief that, given my deep familiarity with the culture of war, I should set it down. But I vowed, once done, never to willfully dredge up those memories again.

To the publisher's surprise, the

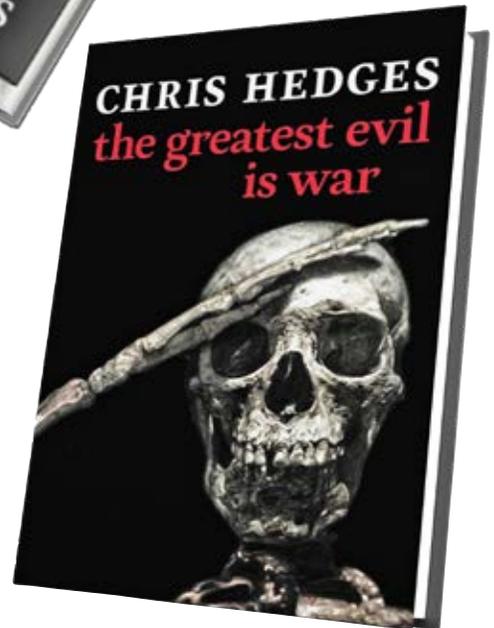
book exploded. Hundreds of thousands of copies were eventually sold. Big publishers, dollar signs in their eyes, dangled significant offers for another book on war. But I refused. I didn't want to dilute what I had written or go through that experience again. I did not want to be ghettoised into writing about war for the rest of my life. I was done. To this day, I'm still unable to reread it.

**Y**et it's not true that I fled war. I fled my wars but would continue to write about other people's wars. I know the wounds and scars. I know what's often hidden. I know the anguish and guilt. It's strangely comforting to be with others maimed by war. We don't need words to communicate. Silence is enough.

I wanted to reach teenagers, the fodder of wars and the target of recruiters. I doubted many would read *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. I embarked on a text that would pose, and then answer, the most basic questions about war – all from military, medical, tactical, and psychological studies of combat. I operated on the assumption that the simplest and most obvious questions rarely get answered like: What hap-



Chris Hedges and his two most important books: *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, and *The Greatest Evil Is War*.



pens to my body if I'm killed?

I hired a team of researchers, mostly graduate students at Columbia University's School of Journalism, and, in 2003, we produced an inexpensive paperback – I fought the price down to \$11 by giving away any future royalties – called *What Every Person Should Know About War*.

I worked closely on the book with Jack Wheeler, who had graduated from West Point in 1966 and then served in Vietnam, where 30 members of his class were killed. (Rick Atkinson's *The Long Gray Line: The American Journey of West Point's Class of 1966* is the story of Jack's class.) Jack went on to Yale Law School after he left the military and became a presidential aide to Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush, while chairing the drive to build the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington.

He struggled with what he called "the open wound of Vietnam" and severe depression. He was last seen on December 30, 2010, disoriented

and wandering the streets of Wilmington, Delaware. The next day, his body was discovered as it was dumped from a garbage truck into the Cherry Island Landfill. The Delaware state medical examiner's office said the cause of death was assault and "blunt force trauma". Police ruled his death a homicide, a murder that would never be solved. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honours.

The idea for the book came from the work of Harold Roland Shapiro, a New York lawyer who, while representing a veteran disabled in World War I, investigated that conflict, discovering a huge disparity between its reality and the public perception of it. His book was, however, difficult to find. I had to get a copy from the Library of Congress. The medical descriptions of wounds, Shapiro wrote, rendered "all that I had read and heard previously as being either fiction, isolated reminiscence, vague gener-

alisation or deliberate propaganda". He published his book, *What Every Young Man Should Know About War*, in 1937. Fearing it might inhibit recruitment, he agreed to remove it from circulation at the start of World War II. It never went back into print.

The military is remarkably good at studying itself (although such studies aren't easy to obtain). It knows how to use operant conditioning – the same techniques used to train a dog – to turn young men and women into efficient killers. It skillfully employs the tools of science, technology, and psychology to increase the lethal force of combat units. It also knows how to sell war as adventure, as well as the true route to manhood, comradeship, and

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maturity. The callous indifference to life, including the lives of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, leapt off the pages of the official documents. For example, the response to the question “What will happen if I am exposed to nuclear radiation but do not die immediately?” was answered in a passage from the Office of the Surgeon General’s *Textbook of Military Medicine* that read, in part:

“Fatally irradiated soldiers should receive every possible palliative treatment, including narcotics, to prolong their utility and alleviate their physical and psychological distress. Depending on the amount of fatal radiation, such soldiers may have several weeks to live and to devote to the cause. Commanders and medical personnel should be familiar with estimating survival time based on onset of vomiting. Physicians should be prepared to give medications to alleviate diarrhoea, and to prevent infection and other sequelae of radiation sickness in order to allow the soldier to serve as long as possible. The soldier must be allowed to make the full contribution to the war effort. He will already have made the ultimate sacrifice. He deserves a chance to strike back, and to do so while experiencing as little discomfort as possible”.

Our book, as I hoped, turned up on Quaker anti-recruitment tables in high schools.

I was disgusted by the simplistic, often mendacious coverage of our post-9/11 war in Iraq, a country I had covered as the Middle East bureau chief for the *New York Times*. In 2007, I went to work with reporter Laila Al-Arian on a long investigative article in the *Nation*, *The Other*

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## Russian President Vladimir Putin, like Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein, instantly became the new Hitler

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*War: Iraq Veterans Bear Witness*, that ended up in an expanded version as another book on war, *Collateral Damage: America’s War Against Iraqi Civilians*.

We spent hundreds of hours interviewing 50 American combat veterans of Iraq about atrocities they had witnessed or participated in. It was a damning indictment of the US occupation with accounts of terrorising and abusive house raids, withering suppressing fire routinely laid down in civilian areas to protect American convoys, indiscriminate shooting from patrols, the large kill radius of detonations and air strikes in populated areas, and the slaughter of whole families who approached military checkpoints too closely or too quickly. The reporting made headlines in newspapers across Europe but was largely ignored in the US, where the press was generally unwilling to confront the feel-good narrative about “liberating” the people of Iraq.

For the book’s epigraph, we used a June 4, 2005, suicide note left by Colonel Theodore “Ted” Westhusing for his commanders in Iraq. Westhusing (whom I was later told had read and recommended *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*) was the honor captain of his 1983 West Point class. He shot himself in the head with his 9mm Beretta service revolver. His suicide note – think of it as an epitaph for the global war on terror – read in part:

“Thanks for telling me it was a good day until I briefed you. [Redacted name] – You are only interested in your career and provide no support to your staff – no msn [mission] support and you don’t care. I cannot support a msn that leads to corruption, human right abuses and liars. I am sullied – no more. I didn’t volunteer to support corrupt, money-grubbing contractors, nor work for commanders only interested in themselves. I came to serve honourably and feel dishonoured”.

The war in Ukraine raised the familiar bile, the revulsion at those who don’t go to war and yet revel in the mad destructive power of violence. Once again, by embracing a childish binary universe of good and evil from a distance, war was turned into a morality play, gripping the popular imagination.

Following our humiliating defeat in Afghanistan and the debacles of Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, here was a conflict that could be sold to the public as restoring American virtue. Russian President Vladimir Putin, like Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein, instantly became the new Hitler. Ukraine, which most Americans undoubtedly couldn’t have found on a map, was suddenly the front line in the eternal fight for democracy and liberty.

The orgiastic celebration of violence took off.

It’s impossible, under international law, to defend Russia’s war in Ukraine, as it is impossible to defend our invasion of Iraq. Preemptive war is a war crime, a criminal war of aggression. Still, putting the invasion of Ukraine in context was out of the question. Explaining – as Soviet specialists (including famed

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Cold War diplomat George F. Kennan) had – that expanding Nato into Central and Eastern Europe was a provocation to Russia was forbidden. Kennan had called it “the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era” that would “send Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking”.

In 1989, I had covered the revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania that signalled the coming collapse of the Soviet Union. I was acutely aware of the “cascade of assurances” given to Moscow that Nato, founded in 1949 to prevent Soviet expansion in Eastern and Central Europe, would not spread beyond the borders of a unified Germany. In fact, with the end of the Cold War, Nato should have been rendered obsolete.

I naively thought we would see the promised “peace dividend”, especially with the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reaching out to form security and economic alliances with the West.

In the early years of Vladimir Putin’s rule, even he lent the US military a hand in its war on terror, seeing in it Russia’s own struggle to contain Islamic extremists spawned by its wars in Chechnya. He provided logistical support and resupply routes for American forces fighting in Afghanistan. But the pimps of war were having none of it. Washington would turn Russia into the enemy, with or without Moscow’s cooperation.

The newest holy crusade between angels and demons was launched.

War unleashes the poison of nationalism, with its twin evils of self-exaltation and bigotry. It creates an illusory sense of unity and purpose. The shameless cheerleaders who sold us the war in Iraq are

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## The shameless cheerleaders who sold us the war in Iraq are once again on the airwaves beating the drums of war for Ukraine

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once again on the airwaves beating the drums of war for Ukraine. As Edward Said once wrote about these courtiers to power:

“Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn’t trust the evidence of one’s own eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest *mission civilisatrice*”.

I was pulled back into the morass. I found myself writing for Scheerpost and my Substack site, columns condemning the bloodlusts Ukraine unleashed. The provision of more than \$50-billion in weapons and aid to Ukraine not only means the Ukrainian government has no incentive to negotiate, but that it condemns hundreds of thousands of innocents to suffering and death. For perhaps the first time in my life, I found myself agreeing with Henry Kissinger, who at least understands realpolitik, including the danger of pushing Russia and China into an alliance against the US, while provoking a major nuclear power.

Greg Ruggiero, who runs City

Lights Publishers, urged me to write a book on this new conflict. At first, I refused, not wanting to resurrect the ghosts of war. But looking back at my columns, articles, and talks since the publication of *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* in 2002, I was surprised at how often I had circled back to war.

I rarely wrote about myself or my experiences. I sought out those discarded as the human detritus of war, the physically and psychologically maimed like Tomas Young, a quadriplegic wounded in Iraq, whom I visited recently in Kansas City after he declared that he was ready to disconnect his feeding tube and die.

It made sense to put those pieces together to denounce the newest intoxication with industrial slaughter. I stripped the chapters down to war’s essence with titles like “The Act of Killing,” “Corpses” or “When the Bodies Come Home”.

*The Greatest Evil Is War* has just been published by Seven Stories Press. This, I pray, will be my final foray into the subject. **CT**

**Chris Hedges** was a war correspondent for two decades in Central America, the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans, 15 of them with the *New York Times*, where he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The author of 14 books, he writes a column for Scheerpost and has a show, the *Chris Hedges Report*, on the Real News Network. He has taught at Columbia University, New York University, Princeton University, and the University of Toronto. as well as students earning their college degrees from Rutgers University in the New Jersey prison system. You can find him at [chrishedges.substack.com](http://chrishedges.substack.com). This article first appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).

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BELLA DEVAAN

# Taylor Swift fans join anti-monopoly crusade

Monopolists, steel yourselves and remember:  
When you provoke a superfan, they'll come for you

**T**aylor Swift fans had their time wasted and pockets emptied by Ticketmaster. Now they're calling to break up the company's live events monopoly – and joining the movement to crack down on monopolies, period.

The anti-monopoly movement is having a moment. Gone are the days of associating evil market dominance with Standard Oil or Carnegie Steel, Bill Gates' petulance during deposition, or how it feels to desperately mortgage Marvin Gardens because you landed at the hotel on Park Place.

As now-Federal Trade Commission (FTC) chair Lina Khan asserted five years ago in her seminal work, *Amazon's Antitrust Paradox*, our government's outdated enforcement standards "fail[ed] to register" monopolistic harm. Since then, millions more Americans have been awakened to the sinister power of monopolies in our economy – and the exciting political opportunities to rein them in.

Last month, legions of new anti-monopolists were born. They have enormous potential to change the game: shrewd social media skills, undying loyalty, and encyclopedic knowledge. They're Taylor Swift's superfans – and they just might

be the reason that the government breaks up Ticketmaster.

The Swifties – as Swift's fans are affectionately nicknamed – experienced the destructive power of the live event and ticketing monopoly firsthand. Hoping to procure presale tickets to their favourite pop star's upcoming tour, millions of fans waited in endless e-queues, only to be hit with sky-high ticket prices and exorbitant fees – if they were able to snag a ticket at all.

"Ticket prices may fluctuate, upon demand, at any time", read an ominous warning on the Ticketmaster website. And they did: Due to their "dynamic pricing" system, which vaults ticket costs to a maximum market rate, fans reported buying tickets for thousands upon thousands of dollars, not including hefty fees, and prices spiked even higher on the secondary resale market. On StubHub, for example, ticket listings reached upwards of \$95,000.

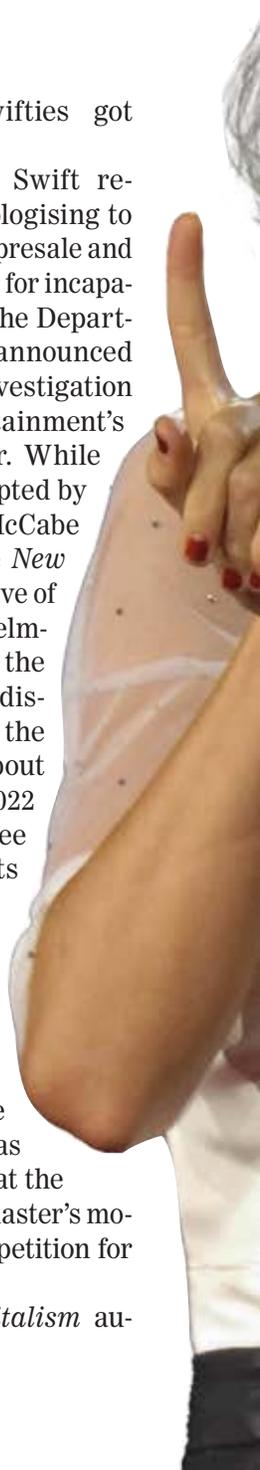
Finally, Ticketmaster threw in the towel and cancelled subsequent presale windows. Their site crashed thousands of times. It was absolute mayhem – and fans had no other option but to endure it, the kind of undignified customer experience caused only by an unchecked monopoly.

Ultimately, the Swifties got results.

Hours after Taylor Swift released a statement, apologising to the fans for the bungled presale and chastising Ticketmaster for incapably handling demand, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced it has launched an investigation of Live Nation Entertainment's abuse of market power. While their work wasn't prompted by Swift, reported David McCabe and Ben Sisario in the *New York Times*, Swifties' wave of discontent was overwhelming enough to warrant the Department's public disclosure. Immediately, the company bragging about a record-smashing 2022 ("benefitting" from "fee bearing tickets") saw its stock plummet.

**H**ow did we get here? When it comes to antitrust issues, the American government has essentially been asleep at the wheel, allowing Ticketmaster's monopoly to crush its competition for over a decade.

As *Chokepoint Capitalism* au-



thor Cory Doctorow explained to More Perfect Union, Ticketmaster's dominant control of the live show ticketing market had a natural customer in Live Nation's concert promoting business, which managed an impressive portfolio of major

artists and live music venues.

In 2010, the two entities merged into Live Nation Entertainment to suppress their rivalry – a process waved through by the Obama administration's consolidation-friendly Department of Justice. The company was subject to a relatively weak consent decree, which asked the merged companies to not use their live venue dominance to expand their ticketing capacity. But it's been easy to intimidate their naysayers and flout guidelines ever since.

Put simply, the merger created a monster, subordinating all parties in the live event life cycle from ticket acquisition to performance.

"Ticketmaster bullies venues into not working with their competitors", concluded Doctorow. "They bully smaller artists by denying them management. They bully big artists by controlling their ticket prices and letting their fans down.

And they bully their customers into paying exorbitant prices for tickets, not only by enabling resellers but by collecting massive fees on every ticket those resellers sell".

Even Swift, an aspiring billionaire and private jet power-user, has no choice but to bend the knee to the ticketing monopoly, often an exclusive partner at her massive preferred venues.

Greg Maffei, chairman of the monopoly's parent group – and head of Liberty Media, a media conglomerate with Republican ties – blamed the service's lag time on Taylor's popularity. "Ticketmaster will twist any situation to protect its market power over live events", noted the American Economic Liberties Project. (It's time to mention

that Maffei took home \$47-million from Liberty Media in 2021, and is personally worth hundreds of millions, like Swift herself.)

Soaring ticket prices are not entirely the artist's fault for their popularity. Even as Taylor Swift's music is of the money-printing, monocultural variety – incentivising "dynamic pricing" to the highest degree – she's still a worker, exploited by and beholden to an overarching system. As Live Nation and Ticketmaster can force artists to work with them and make a killing on their sale and resale fees, less popular or well-resourced artists are uniquely harmed by the business model without other streams of income.

"Corporations are extracting the maximum capital from artists' labour, and they're not sharing it anymore", said Doctorow.

**T**icketmaster's unsustainable market dominance has long been understood. Well before the Taylor Swift fiasco, a coalition of research organisations and artists collectives launched the Break Up Ticketmaster campaign – asking the DOJ to "investigate and unwind" the live events monopoly. The campaign quickly gained ground, generating tens of thousands of signatures on an advocacy letter.

Pro-breakup legislators also harnessed the news cycle, calling on the Department of Justice to investigate the abusive ticketing monopoly.

"Consumers deserve better than this anti-hero behaviour," tweeted Senator Richard Blumenthal, punning off a song from Swift's latest album, *Midnights*.

And on MSNBC, Senate Antitrust Committee chair Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) promised a Senate hearing



Ronald Woan/Flickr

on Ticketmaster's market power and insufficient consent decree in the coming year. She expressed political interest in "put[ting] the Taylor Swift fans right on antitrust", as their ticketing experience was "a story of a monopoly gone wild". Her bills with Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Mike Lee (R-UT) aim to facilitate antitrust enforcement with new filing, funding, and state empowerment rules.

State lawmakers, too, seized the opportunity to criticise consolidation. After all, Swifties are spread across the country and party lines. The Attorney General of Tennessee – home to the "angriest Swifties" – opened an investigation into Ticketmaster's misconduct. And in New York, state Senator Mike Gianaris called attention to his 21st Century Anti-Trust Act, which would "hold [Ticketmaster] accountable for manipulating the ticket market to bleed concert-goers".

For his part, President Biden re-

## President Biden recently directed his administration to "reduce or eliminate" junk fees like Ticketmasters' infamous extra charges

cently directed his administration to "reduce or eliminate" junk fees like Ticketmasters' infamous extra charges, which sometimes total up to 78 percent of the cost of a ticket. And he's appointed a passel of pioneering antitrust enforcers – like New Brandeisian icon and FTC chair Lina Khan, DOJ Antitrust lead Jonathan Kanter, and former economic advisor Tim Wu – who are dedicated to bucking Robert Bork's inert "consumer welfare standard", overhauling the state's merger guidelines, and appropriately disciplining monopolistic harm in the contemporary economy. Biden also signed a robust competition-oriented executive order in his first months in the Oval Office.

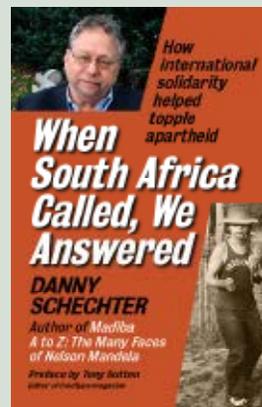
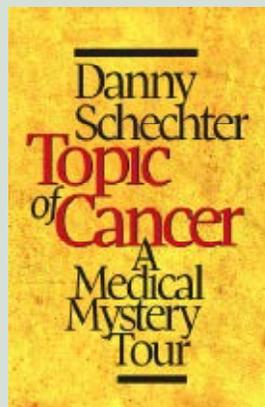
The President's paradigm shift comes not a moment too soon. Monopolies aren't just disfiguring our economy or our political processes. They are capable of stripping everything for parts – even our arts and culture, cornerstones of democratic society that should be unequivocally protected from the incursions of greedy corporations.

Swifties understand this. And they experience the villainy of monopolies across the board – through the high price of a tight seat on a plane home from college, in the improbability of a solid career in journalism, in their skyrocketing monthly rent, or in the marginalisation of their small e-commerce business.

So, present day monopolists, steel yourselves and remember: When you provoke a superfan, they'll come for you. **CT**

*Bella DeVaan is a Program Associate at the Institute for Policy Studies and a co-editor of Inequality.org – www.inequality.org. You can follow her on Twitter @bdevaan.*

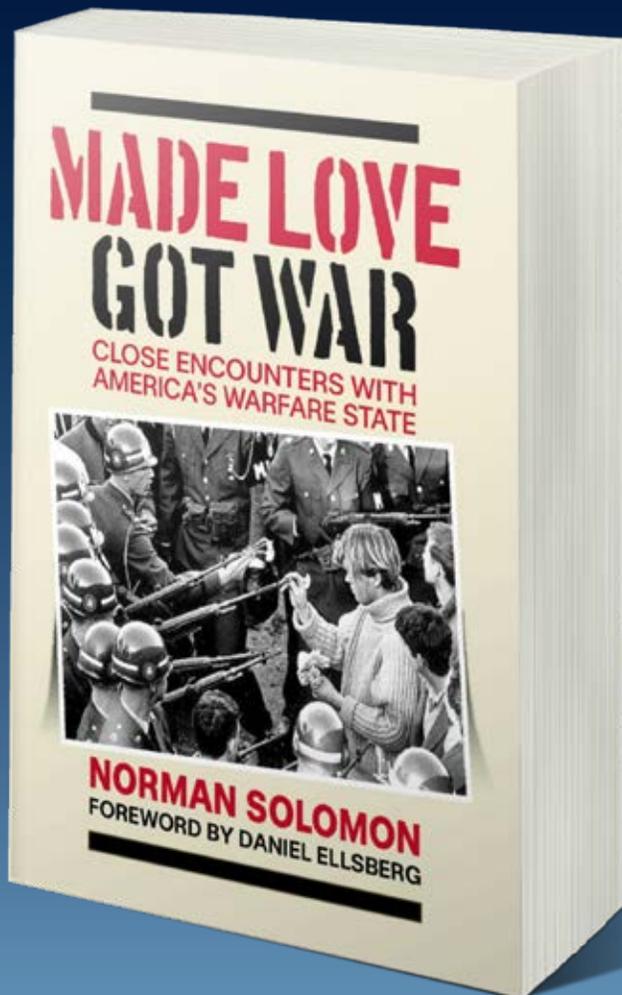
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– Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK: Women for Peace



## MADE LOVE GOT WAR

Close Encounters With  
America's Warfare State

Norman Solomon

"*Made Love, Got War* lays out a half century of socialized insanity that has brought a succession of aggressive wars under cover of – but at recurrent risk of detonating – a genocidal nuclear arsenal. We need to help each other to awaken from this madness."

– From the introduction by Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg

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C.J. HOPKINS

# The Road to Totalitarianism (Again)

The scenery out the window has changed. The destination has not.  
I haven't seen any exits. Let me know if you do, will you?

It feels like it's finally over, doesn't it, the whole "apocalyptic pandemic" thing? I mean, really, really over this time. Not like all those other times when you thought it was over, but it wasn't over, and was like the end of those *Alien* movies, where it seems like Ridley has finally escaped, but the alien is hiding out in the shuttle, or the escape pod, or Ridley's intestinal tract.

But this time doesn't feel like that. This time it feels like it's really, really over. Go out and take a look around. Hardly anyone is wearing masks anymore (except where masks are mandatory) or being coerced into submitting to "vaccinations" (except where "vaccination" is mandatory), and the hordes of hate-drunk New Normal fanatics who demanded that "the Unvaccinated" be segregated, censored, fired from their jobs, and otherwise demonised and persecuted, have all fallen silent (except for those who haven't).

Everything is back to normal, right?

Wrong. Everything is not back to normal. Everything is absolutely New Normal. What is over is the "shock-and-awe" phase, which was never meant to go on forever. It was always only meant to get us here.

Where, you're probably asking, is "here"? "Here" is a place where the new official ideology has been firmly established as our new "reality", woven into the fabric of normal everyday life. No, not everywhere, just everywhere that matters. (Do you really think the global-capitalist ruling classes care what people in Lakeland, Florida, Elk River, Idaho, or some village in Sicily believe about "reality"?) Yes, most government restrictions have been lifted, mainly because they are no longer necessary, but in centres of power throughout the West, in political, corporate, and cultural spheres, in academia, the mainstream media, and so on, the New Normal has become "reality", or, in other words, "just the way it is", which is the ultimate goal of every ideology.

For example, I just happened

#### IMPORTANT COVID-19 INFORMATION

##### ✓ Mask

Unless eating or drinking, all guests are required to wear a mask at all times while inside this venue.

##### ✓ Covid safety

This venue has additional Covid-19 safety measures in place to ensure the health and well-being of the staff, performers, and guests.

##### ✓ Proof of vaccine

All guests must be fully vaccinated prior to their performance date in order to attend.

upon this "Important Covid-19 information," (*See foot of previous column*) which you need to be aware of (and strictly adhere to) if you want to attend a performance at this Off-Broadway theatre in New York City, where "everything is back to normal."

I could pull up countless further examples, but I don't want to waste your time. At this point, it isn't the mask and "vaccination" mandates themselves that are important. They are simply the symbols and rituals of the new official ideology, an ideology that has divided societies into two irreconcilable categories of people:

1. those who are prepared to conform their beliefs to the official narrative of the day, no matter how blatantly ridiculous it is, and otherwise click heels and follow the orders of the global-capitalist ruling establishment, no matter how destructive and fascist they may be; and

2. those who are not prepared to do that.

Let's go ahead and call them "Normals" and "Deviants". I think you know which one you are.

This division of society into two opposing and irreconcilable classes of people cuts across and supersedes old political lines. There



are Normals and Deviants on both the Left and the Right. The global-capitalist ruling establishment couldn't care less whether you are a "progressive"; or a "conservative", or a "libertarian", or an "anarchist", or whatever you call yourself. What they care about is whether you're a Normal or a Deviant.

What they care about is whether you will follow orders. What they care about is whether you are conforming your perceptions and behaviour and thinking to their new "reality" ... the hegemonic global-capitalist "reality" that has been gradually evolving for the last 30 years and is now entering its totalitarian stage.

I've been writing about the evolution of global capitalism in my essays since 2016 – and since the early 1990s in my stage plays – so I'm not going to reiterate the whole story here. Readers who have just tuned into my political satire and commentary during the last two years

can go back and read the essays in my books *Trumpocalypse* (2016-2017) and *The War on Populism* (2018-2019).

The short version is, back in 2016, GloboCap was rolling along, destabilising, restructuring, and privatising the planet that it came into sole unchallenged possession of when the Soviet Union finally collapsed, and everything was hunky-dory, and then along came Brexit, Donald Trump, and the whole "populist" and neo-nationalist rebellion against globalism throughout the West.

So, GloboCap needed to deal with that, which is what it has been doing for last six years ... yes, the last six – not just two-and-a-half – years.

The War on Dissent didn't start with Covid and it isn't going to end with Covid. GloboCap (or "the Corporatocracy" if you prefer) has

been delegitimising, demonising, and disappearing dissent and increasingly imposing ideological uniformity on Western society since 2016.

The New Normal is just the latest stage of it. Once it gets done quashing this "populist" rebellion and imposing ideological uniformity on urban society throughout the West, it will go back to destabilising, restructuring, and privatising the rest of the world, which is what it was doing with the "War on Terror" (and other "democracy"-promoting projects) from 2001 to 2016.

The goal of this global Gleichschaltung campaign is the goal of every totalitarian system – to render any and all deviance from its official ideology pathological. The nature of the deviance does not matter. The official ideology does not matter. (GloboCap has no fixed ideology. It can abruptly change its official "reality" from day to day, as we have experienced recently). What matters is one's willingness or unwillingness to conform to whatever the official "reality" is, regardless of how ridiculous it is, and how many times it has been disproved, and sometimes even acknowledged as fiction by the very authorities who nonetheless continue to assert its "reality".

I'll give you one more concrete example.

After I happened upon the "Covid restrictions" (ie, the social-segregation system) still being enforced by that Off-Broadway theatre, I stumbled upon this article – <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2022/07/the-dangerous-populist-science-of-yuval-noah-harari> – in *Current Affairs* about the oracle Yuval Noah Harari, the writer of which article mentions in passing that somewhere between six-million and 12-million people have "died of Covid",

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as if this were a fact, a fact that no one in their right mind would question. Which it is, officially, in our new “reality”, despite the fact (i.e., the actual fact) that – as even the “health authorities” have admitted – anyone who died of anything in a hospital after testing positive was recorded as a “Covid-19 death.”

This is how “reality” (ie, official “reality”, consensus “reality”) is manufactured and policed. It is manufactured and policed, not only by the media, corporations, governments, and non-governmental governing entities, but also (and, ultimately, more effectively) by the constant repetition of official narratives as unquestionable axiomatic facts.

In our brave new totalitarian global-capitalist “reality”, anyone who questions or challenges such “facts” immediately renders oneself a “Deviant” and is excommunicated from “Normal” society. Seriously, just for fun, try to get a job at a corporation, or a university, or a part in a movie or a Broadway play, or a book deal, or a research grant while being honest about your beliefs about Covid. Or, if you’re a “respectable” journalist, you know, with literary and public-speaking agents, and book deals, and personal managers, and so on, go ahead, report the facts (ie, the actual facts, which you know are there, but which you have been avoiding like the plague for the last two years), and watch your career get violently sucked down the drain like a turd in an airplane toilet.

That last bit was meant for “urban professionals”, who still have careers, or are aspiring to careers, or are otherwise still invested in remaining members in good standing of “Normal” society, ie, not you folks in Florida and Idaho, or my fellow literary and artistic “Deviants”.

We have pretty much burned our

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## Unless you’re prepared to mindfuck yourself, and gaslight yourself, and confess, and convert, there’s no going back to “normal” society

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bridges at this point. Unless you’re prepared to mindfuck yourself, and gaslight yourself, and confess, and convert, there’s no going back to “normal” society (which we couldn’t go back to anyway, on account of how it doesn’t exist anymore).

I realise that a lot of folks have probably been looking forward to that ... to the day when the Normals finally “wake up” and face the facts, and truth prevails, and we return to something resembling normality. It’s not going to happen. We’re not going back. The Normals are never going to “wake up.” Because they’re not asleep. They’re not hypnotised. They’re not going to “come to their senses” one day and take responsibility for the damage they have done. Sure, they will apologise for their “mistakes”, and admit that possibly they “overreacted”, but the official narrative of the Covid pandemic and the new “reality” it has ushered into being will remain in force, and they will defend both with their lives.

Or, rather, they will defend both with our lives.

If you think I’m being hyperbolic, well, consider the epithets GloboCap has conditioned the Normals to use to demonise us ... “conspiracy theorist”, “science denier”, “insurrectionist”, “extremist”, “violent domestic terrorist”. None of which signify a political ideology or any political or critical

position whatsoever. They signify deviation from the norm. Any type of deviation from the norm. They are tactical terms, devoid of meaning, designed to erase the political character of the diverse opposition to global-capitalism (or “globalism”, if you are touchy about the word “capitalism”), to lump us all into one big bucket of “deviance”.

It is usually not a very good omen when nations – or totally unaccountable, supranational global-power systems – suddenly break out the “deviance bucket”. It is usually a sign that things are going to get ugly, ugly in a totalitarian fashion, which is precisely what has been happening for the past six years.

Back in July of 2021, at the height of the fascistic New Normal hate frenzy, with the military enforcing “Covid restrictions”, a global segregation system being implemented, and people threatening to decapitate me for refusing to get “vaccinated”, I published a piece titled *The Road to Totalitarianism* – <https://consentfactory.org/2021/07/31/the-road-to-totalitarianism/>. We are still on that road. Both the Normals and we Deviants. We’ve been on that road for quite some time, longer than most of us probably realise. The weather has improved, slightly. The scenery out the window has changed. The destination has not. I haven’t seen any exits. Let me know if you do, will you?

**C.J. Hopkins** is an American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His dystopian novel, *Zone 23*, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volumes I-III of his *Consent Factory Essays* are published by Consent Factory Publishing. He can be reached at [cjhopkins.com](http://cjhopkins.com) or [consentfactory.org](http://consentfactory.org).



Gases from gas flares in Iraq emit a mix of carcinogenic chemicals such as carbon dioxide, methane and black soot.

DAVID EDWARDS

# The media, BP and cancer in Iraq

Wicked Leaks, Part 2

In the first part of *Wicked Leaks*, (See *ColdType* Issue 239), I described how state-corporate media non-reporting of evidence relating to the sabotage of the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines on September 26 was an example of how the truth on key issues is increasingly being quarantined from public awareness by “mainstream” media.

At first sight, this second example might appear to contradict this claim.

To its credit, in several news re-

ports, and in an hour-long film, “Under Poisoned Skies”, the BBC provided news from Iraq that will have shocked many readers and viewers (in truth, it is a shock to read any UK media news on life in Iraq): “Communities living close to oil fields, where gas is openly burned, are at elevated risk of leukaemia, a BBC News Arabic investigation has revealed”.

By BBC standards, the report was absolutely damning: “The UN told the BBC it considers these areas, in Iraq, to be ‘modern sacri-

fice zones’ – where profit has been prioritised over human rights.

“Gas flaring is the ‘wasteful’ burning of gas released in oil drilling, which produces cancer-linked pollutants.”

Some of the worst “modern sacrifice zones” are found on the outskirts of Basra, in the south-east of Iraq, “some of the country’s biggest oil exploration areas”. Flared gases from these sites are dangerous because they emit a mix of carbon dioxide, methane and black soot which is carcinogenic.

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If this sounds bad, it gets worse when we consider just who has been subordinating Iraqi human welfare to profit in this way: “BP and Eni are major oil companies we identified as working on these sites”.

Eni is an Italian multinational energy company. BP, of course, is one of the world’s oil and gas “supermajors”, and is British.

In other words, these BBC reports highlighted the rarely discussed fact that a British oil giant is deeply involved in a country that was illegally invaded in 2003, at the cost of one-million Iraqi lives, on a pack of bogus claims relating to “national security” and “human rights”. The 2003 war was, of course, waged by a coalition led by the United States and Britain. Italy was part of the coalition.

Not only did this US-UK war crime secure substantial quantities of Iraq’s oil for US and UK corporations, but BP has now been accused of creating environmental mayhem in Iraq. The BBC reported: “A leaked Iraq Health Ministry report, seen by BBC Arabic, blames air pollution for a 20 percent rise in cancer in Basra between 2015 and 2018.

“As part of this investigation, the BBC undertook the first pollution monitoring testing amongst the exposed communities. The results indicated high levels of exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.

“Using satellite data we found that the largest of Basra’s oil fields, Rumaila, flares more gas than any other site in the world. The Iraqi government owns this field, and BP is the lead contractor.

“On the field is a town called North Rumaila – which locals call ‘the cemetery’. Teenagers coined the phrase after they observed high levels of leukaemia amongst their friends, which they suspect is from the flaring.

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## This important story involving harm caused by powerful British interests was deemed unworthy even of mention

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“Prof Shukri Al Hassan, a local environmental scientist, told us that cancer here is so rife it is ‘like the flu’.”

This was a truly shocking comment; no wonder the BBC initially used it as the headline for its report: “BP in oil field where ‘cancer is like the flu’.”

The News Sniffer website, which tracks edits made to media articles, found that this headline only lasted a few hours before being toned down to: “BP in oil field where ‘cancer is rife’.”

Remarkably, the less dramatic headline and citation was actually fake. The relevant part of the text reads: “Prof Shukri Al Hassan, a local environmental scientist, told us that cancer here is so rife it is ‘like the flu’.”

Professor Al Hassan was not quoted as using the word “rife”, nor was anyone else quoted in the article. The edited headline was simply made up.

The BBC quoted Dr Manuela Orjuela-Grimm, professor of childhood cancer at Columbia University: “The children have strikingly high levels [of cancer-causing chemicals]... this is concerning for [their] health and suggests they should be monitored closely”.

The BBC report also gave us an idea of the nature of the “democracy” installed in Iraq by the 2003 US-UK invasion and occupation. The leaked Iraqi health ministry report shows the government is aware

of the region’s health issues: “But Iraq’s own prime minister issued a confidential order – which was also seen by BBC Arabic – banning its employees from speaking about health damage caused by pollution”.

**D**avid Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, told the BBC that people living near oil fields are “the victims of state-business collusion, and lack the political power in most cases to achieve change”.

Ali Hussein, a 19-year-old childhood leukaemia survivor, from North Rumaila, said: “Here in Rumaila nobody speaks out, they say they’re scared to speak in case they get removed”.

Indeed, the BBC reported: “Until now health researchers have been prevented from entering the oil fields to carry out air quality tests”.

As the BBC noted, their reports also revealed “millions of tonnes of undeclared emissions from gas flaring at oil fields where BP, Eni, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell work”. Major oil companies are not declaring this significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

These were important exposés by the BBC, but what is simultaneously so shocking, and yet so normal for the media strategy of quarantine over inoculation, is that our search of the ProQuest media database for terms like “Iraq” and “cancer” found no articles mentioning or following-up the BBC reports in any UK national newspaper. This important story involving harm caused by powerful British interests was deemed unworthy even of mention.

In a free media environment, the report would have triggered serious reflection on whether the Iraq

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war really was, in fact, about oil, as honest commentators have long claimed, albeit at the margins of “respectable” discourse. What does it say about Western “civilisation” and its “rules-based order” that UK and US oil companies like BP and Exxon have been able to profit from the vast crimes of their governments in Iraq? And what does it say that they’re able to do so without any state-corporate journalists noticing any controversy, or feeling any need to comment at all?

In a recent Media Lens alert, we described how the Al Jazeera documentary series, “The Labour Files”, has been effectively quarantined by “mainstream” media. The ban on discussion is so extreme that a caller to journalist Matt Frei’s talk show on LBC was simply cut off when he mentioned the series. More than 1,200 people supported our polite request for an explanation from Frei on Twitter, but he simply ignored them and us.

In previous alerts, Media Lens described how whistle-blowers from within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) challenging claims of chemical weapons attacks allegedly committed by Assad’s forces in Syria have been quarantined by “mainstream” media. The silence has been overwhelming. News on the grim fate of Wikileaks’ Julian Assange, imprisoned in Belmarsh maximum security prison, has been similarly quarantined. Other examples abound.

Agony is piled on agony for anyone who knows and cares about the torment inflicted by the West on Iraq over the last 30 years, when we recognise the strong echoes in the latest devastation of earlier horrors

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## The extent of genetic damage suffered by residents in Fallujah suggested the use of uranium in some form

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inflicted in the process of conquering Iraq.

In 2010, the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, a leading medical journal, published a study, “Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005–2009”. Noam Chomsky described the study’s findings as “vastly more significant” than the Wikileaks Afghan “War Diary” leaks.

The survey of 4,800 individuals in Fallujah showed a four-fold increase in all cancers and a 12-fold increase in childhood cancer in under-14s. It found a 10-fold increase in female breast cancer and significant increases in lymphoma and brain tumours in adults. Researchers found a 38-fold increase in leukaemia. By contrast, Hiroshima survivors showed a 17-fold increase in leukaemia. According to the study, the types of cancer are “similar to that in the Hiroshima survivors who were exposed to ionising radiation from the bomb and uranium in the fallout”.

The extent of genetic damage suffered by residents in Fallujah suggested the use of uranium in some form. Dr Chris Busby, a visiting professor at the University of Ulster and one of the authors of the survey, said: “My guess is that they used a new weapon against buildings to break through walls and kill those inside”.

The truth on Nord Stream and on cancer in Iraq has been effec-

tively quarantined – journalists are deeply reluctant to point the finger of blame at the state-corporate Establishment of which they are a part and by which they are richly rewarded.

We are not supposed to notice that the same British media endlessly packing their pages with realpolitik-friendly “concern” for the plight of Ukrainian people suffering invasion and bombardment by Russia have no interest whatever in massive environmental damage and mass human suffering caused by US and British corporations profiting from the crimes of their governments. Latest media reports predict that “2022 profits at Britain’s BP could break the \$20-billion mark” in the next week. ExxonMobil is “expected to report year-to-date earnings approaching \$70-billion”.

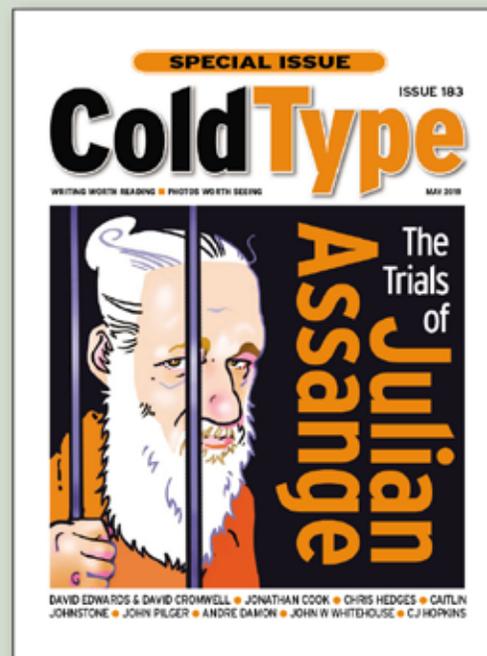
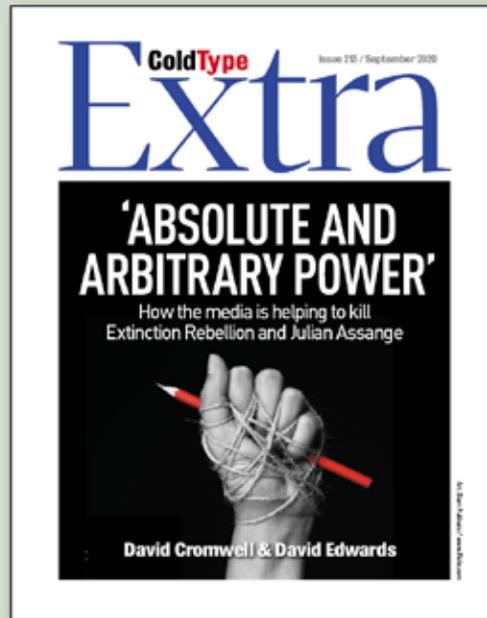
By contrast, all “mainstream” media gave high-profile coverage over several days to allegations that a policeman in oil-rich Iran had been caught on camera committing “sexual abuse”. The BBC analysed video footage of the incident: “officer approaches her from behind and puts his left hand on her bottom”.

Former *Guardian* journalist Jonathan Cook asked: why does the West not “give a damn about these women’s lives, or those of their brothers, when it comes to enforcing decades of western sanctions?”

The answer: for the same reason the West doesn’t give a damn about its victims in Libya, Palestine, Iraq, or anywhere else. Western state-corporate “concern” for human rights is a function of power, not of compassion. **CT**

**David Edwards** is co-editor of *Media Lens*, the UK media watchdog. Its website, where this article first appeared, is [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org).

# THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE

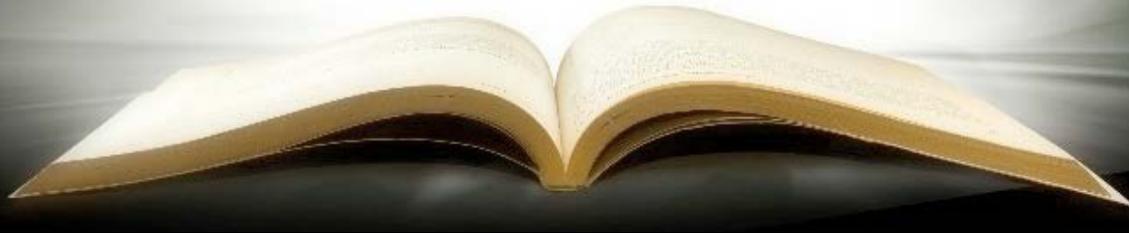


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TREVOR HOYLE

# The Quantum Writer

As physicists were delving into the sub-atomic world to reveal underlying reality, writers were seeking the same holy grail



I don't suppose Virginia Woolf had ever heard of Quantum Mechanics. Safe to assume that James Joyce and T.S.Eliot were also none the wiser. And I'd give good odds that to these writers the names Max Planck, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrödinger were obscure if not totally unknown. (Yes, Woolf & Co would have heard of Einstein, of course, and his world-famous equation  $E=MC^2$ . But Albert and Relativity were a different kettle of fish to the quantum world.)

Which makes what took place in the early years of the 20th-century so extraordinary as to be beyond rational explanation. A coincidence bordering on the supernatural perhaps. For during those decades, when the theory of Quantum Mechanics was undergoing its birth pangs, a parallel or mirror development was taking place in the arts and in literature. Not only physicists and scientific researchers but experimental writers too were enthralled and inspired by an incen-

diary flux of ideas that swept away the old order and re-imagined the world anew. Moreover a world that defied common sense and outraged the most basic, instinctive beliefs.

But first we need to define our terms. In 1900 the German physicist Max Planck was attempting to discover whether energy – a beam of sunlight, say – flowed in a smooth unbroken stream or as a series of particles. He came up with the term “quanta” – meaning tiny discrete packets of energy which constitute the flow. Hence “quantum”, which eventually became the key description of this new branch of physics. Planck had no experimental evidence to back up his conclusion; he came to it by pure mathematics, in

what he admitted was “an act of desperation”.

Later experiments proved his theory to be correct – and that's when the real trouble started. Aim a single particle of light (a photon) at a screen with two parallel slits, you would expect it to pass through one or the other. That's common sense. But not both together; that's uncommon sense. By causing an *interference pattern* behind the screen (think of it as overlapping ripples from two pebbles dropped in a pond) the photon was doing just that, passing through both slits simultaneously: behaving both as particle *and* wave. Which can't be right, can it? In our “normal” world, a solitary object is a separate entity and cannot be in two places at the same time.

(As physicist Niels Bohr said, “Anyone not shocked by Quantum Mechanics has not understood it.”)

The puzzling, paradoxical and let's face it, nonsensical outcome of this simple experiment is the crux of the matter. If, at a fundamental

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---

level, nature behaves in such a bizarre fashion (and innumerable trials verify the results), this throws into question the entire basis of our belief in what we think of as “reality”.

So how do writers come into the picture? Because while particle physicists were delving deeper and deeper into the sub-atomic world, novelists and poets such as Woolf, Joyce and Eliot were also seeking the same holy grail by probing beneath surface reality to reveal some elemental truth.

Virginia Woolf intuitively distrusted the mere outward appearance of things. In her 1924 essay *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* she rejected the old guard and their plodding “realism” – writers such as H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. Woolf was after something more transitory and elusive – a *luminous halo* as she called it in her essay – in order to capture the essential mystery of life.

Similarly, the “stream-of-consciousness” technique (also used by Woolf) that James Joyce employed in *Ulysses* was an attempt to transcend the tedious mechanical depiction of everyday events, to discard the hackneyed emotional responses used by writers of popular fiction. Later on, in the thirties, T.S.Eliot was wrestling with the baffling conundrum of Einsteinian space-time in the “Burnt Norton” section of his long narrative poem *Four Quartets*:

*Time present and time past*

*Are both perhaps present in time future,*

*And time future contained in time past ....*

It wasn’t necessary for these writers to decipher the abstruse mathematics and dense thicket

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**The fate of  
Schrödinger’s  
cat is unknown,  
so it exists in limbo,  
both alive and dead,  
simultaneously**

---

of blackboard equations that underpin quantum theory; as I said earlier, they, along with the rest of humanity, had never even heard of it. They didn’t need to, and it isn’t important. What really matters are the questions these theories pose for us as human beings; those eternal mysteries we’ve grappled with for centuries, such as what is mankind’s destiny and place in the universe; whether we as humans possess freedom of choice or if our every thought and action is pre-determined; and the quest to disentangle subjective truth from objective reality – to discover if, indeed, there is any difference at all.

Remarkable too, when you think about it, that both groups – scientists and writers – independently chanced upon the same metaphorical image in trying to define their shared vision: physicists imagining the atom not as a solid particle, more akin to an indeterminate “fuzzy halo”, and Virginia Woolf describing her perception of the essence of life as a “luminous halo”. Quite a coincidence – if that’s what it was.

We’re not done yet with mind-boggling concepts unveiled by Quantum Mechanics. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle tells us that the more precisely you measure a particle’s exact position, the more uncertain you will be about its mo-

mentum. And vice versa. You can establish its position or its momentum – but not both together. This has nothing to do with the accuracy of the measuring instrument by the way: it’s a fundamental law of nature which cannot be broken.

A brain-teaser which has entered the popular imagination is Schrödinger’s Cat. Attempting to show the absurdity of quantum theory, in 1935 the Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger came up with a “thought experiment”. As the term indicates, this is an intellectual exercise, not a procedure carried out in an actual lab. Schrödinger postulated a scenario in which a cat in a sealed box is subject to the release of a cyanide gas capsule, which would kill it. But the capsule will be triggered by the decay of a radioactive atom – an arbitrary event which no one can predict. While the box remains sealed, the fate of the cat is unknown, so it exists in limbo, both alive and dead, simultaneously. We can only discover which one by opening the box.

Although his purpose was to disprove or at least question quantum theory, Schrödinger actually revealed a core truth. Which is that elementary particles, and hence all matter, exist as a *wave-function* in a state of *probability* – confirming the elusive fuzziness, the arbitrary nature of underlying reality.

(Incidentally, this is why Einstein could never accept the quantum view of the universe, for as he famously remarked to Niels Bohr: “God does not play dice”. But maybe the great man was wrong for once.)

Taking these theories to their logical (some might say *illogical*) limit pushes us into the realm of science fiction. Consider this: matter at the sub-atomic level refuses to be categorised (as particle or wave) until it is observed and measured:

only then does it make up its mind. Like Schrödinger's Cat, it inhabits a state of probability until it is observed, and only then pops into reality. You could say the object itself doesn't exist until someone decides to measure it.

For some writers, this has a satisfying symmetry to it, seeming to chime with their intuitive feeling that we are not mere mechanical automatons in a clockwork universe, that beneath the many layers of everyday life and human experience lies a profound and insoluble enigma.

The writers I've mentioned are by no means the exception. A host of creative and experimental artists were caught up in the zeitgeist: Picasso, Kandinsky, Duchamp, the Futurists, Wyndham Lewis, Kafka, Rex Warner, William Faulkner, Dorothy Richardson, Samuel Beckett, and many more.

## This is the stick of mind-dynamite that blasts the imaginations of writers and artists wide open

In our own era, several leading novelists and playwrights have been just as bewitched (and just as baffled) by quantum theory: Martin Amis (*Time's Arrow*), Tom Stoppard (*Arcadia*), Harold Pinter (*Betrayal*), Michael Frayn (*Copenhagen*). The list includes Ian McEwan, John Fowles, Paul Auster, Colin Wilson, Jorge Luis Borges, Philip K Dick, and countless SF writers. (My novel *Mirrorman* and BBC Radio 4 drama "GIGO" were the product of the same fascination.)

Man's place in the vast, fathomless universe is so insignificant as to be hardly worth thinking about. And yet the fact that human beings

can think about it is perhaps the most significant thing of all. Even, perhaps, that our thinking about it allows the universe to exist in the first place; this is the stick of mind-dynamite that blasts the imaginations of writers and artists wide open.

*"In the beginning there were only probabilities. The universe could only come into existence if someone observed it. It does not matter that the observers turned up several billion years later. The universe exists because we are aware of it."*

– Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal

CT

Trevor Hoyle is a novelist based in Lancashire, England. His most recently published work is the environmental thriller *The Last Gasp* (Quercus). He is currently working on a 'fictional memoir' *The Rock 'n' Roll Diaries*, set in the golden Fifties. His website is [www.trevorhoyle.com](http://www.trevorhoyle.com)

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