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- BEHIND THE SCENES IN ARIZONA ● **WE'RE ON THE ROAD TO ZIMBABWE!** ● INSIDE OCCUPIED WASHINGTON DC ● **AMERICA: THE GRIM TRUTH**
- THE DREAM THAT BECAME A NIGHTMARE

The ColdType **READER**

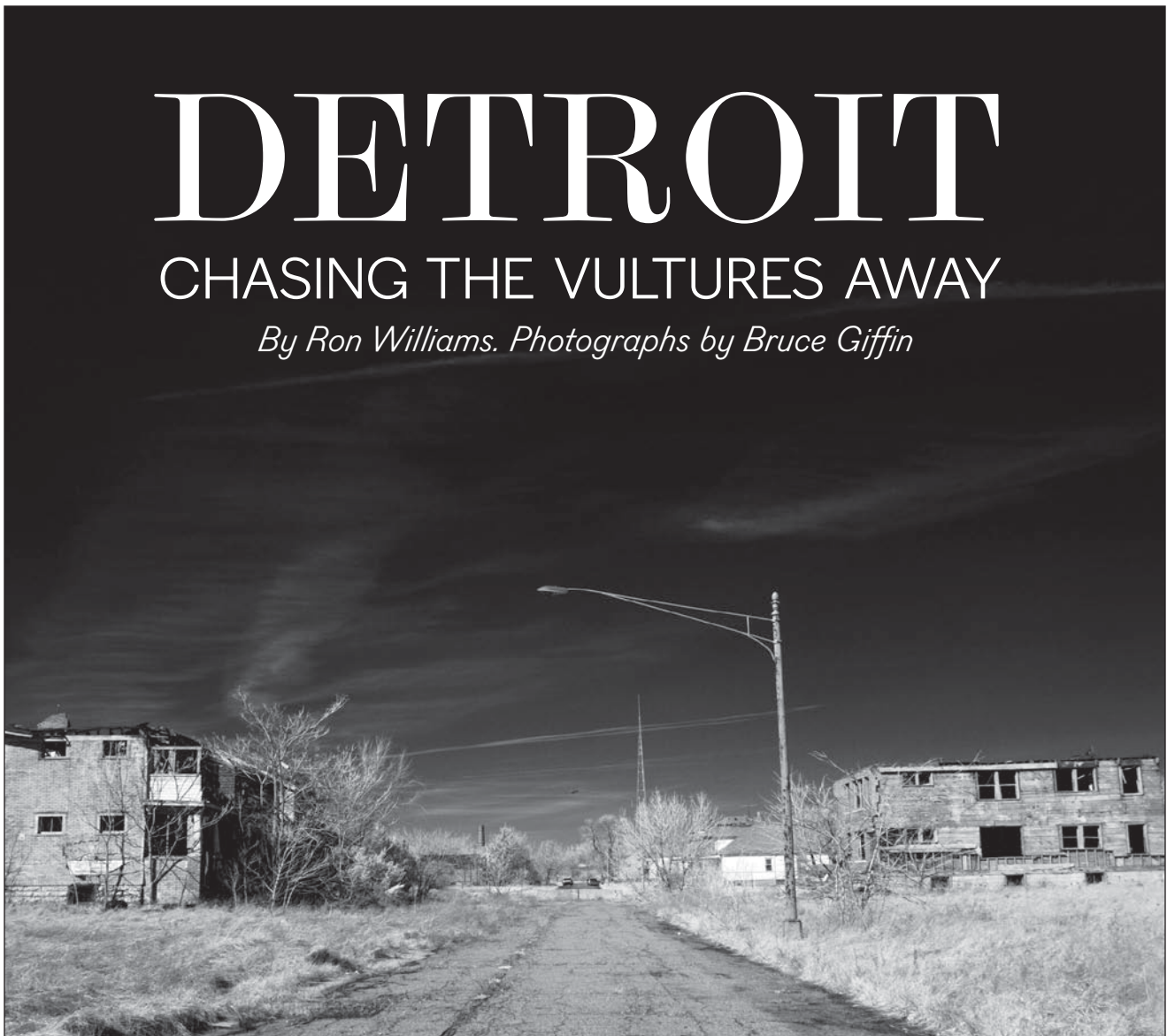
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DETROIT

CHASING THE VULTURES AWAY

By Ron Williams. Photographs by Bruce Giffin

BRUCE GIFFIN



PLUS ● THE LIES OF LIBERATION ● THE UNSHAKABLE TRUTH OF HAITI

The ^{ColdType} READER



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Cover Photo by Bruce
Giffin: Houses slated
for demolition in Detroit

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Chasing the vultures away from Detroit

Don't write off Motor City, writes **Ron Williams**,
like it or not, Detroit is the future of the United States
Photographs by **Bruce Giffin**

The vultures are picking at the bones again: “Two French photographers immortalize the remains of the motor city on film”. That’s how *Time* magazine describes a recent photo series by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre titled “Detroit’s Beautiful, Horrible Decline”.

I’d like to know who appointed these editors coroner, anyway? Where I come from, which happens to be Detroit, anytime you are immortalizing somebody’s remains, they are dead. In this case I find it odd to send in two French photographers to conduct the forensics and perform the cultural autopsy. Who are these guys? How long did they spend in the city? What do they even know about Detroit?

Their photograph of a grand old theatre with its roof collapsing is certainly striking. Only problem is that it could have been taken 25 years ago. In fact, it was. When I was the editor and publisher of the *Metro Times* in the 80’s, we paid photographers to break into abandoned theatres across downtown to rally the community to save these civic treasures. Yes, we lost some like the United Artist and Michigan. But we also saved the Fox, the State, the Gem and the Grand Circus, all in the same neighborhood.

If *Time* wanted to show the world some images of Detroit, maybe they could have contacted a local photographer. There are many great ones. Bruce Giffin, for example,

with whom I worked for many years. Bruce’s powerful, respectful photographs from the streets of the city are deeply moving. They are authentic – I doubt if he jumps on the first plane to Paris after a photo session.

After all the political rhetoric, all the corporate funded white papers and messed up mainstream media coverage, Detroit is the truth. Detroit is the end result of a global economic system unfettered by labor or environmental standards. The city is the deadly consequence of capital freely moving across the planet, forever in search of a lower common denominator of working conditions, pollution and corruption. Add an utter lack of vision (and too often integrity) on the part of the local business and political leadership and the result has been an urban implosion unmatched in scale and depth anywhere in the United States. The amount of suffering and heartbreak is so acute and so real that it can take your breath away.

So does Detroit still matter? Or should we just bulldoze what is still standing and scatter the remaining residents across the country as the Bush administration did with the victims of Hurricane Katrina? Blame it on the post-industrial hurricane called global free market capitalism.

Part of the answer lies in the city’s history. Detroit was the Silicon Valley of the industrial age with people starting automobile companies in their garages instead of tech com-

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Brush Park: Once it housed the mansions of Detroit

Detroit was the place, more than any other, that gave real power to working men and women through collective bargaining

panies. The world may not have defeated fascism and genocide without the “Arsenal of Democracy” running full tilt with countless women doing the heavy lifting. It was the place, more than any other, that gave real power to working men and women through collective bargaining. It was a crucible of Black pride and Black political power. And Detroit is birthplace to some of the best R&B, blues, jazz, rock & roll and hip hop the world has ever heard.

DO NOT underestimate the capacity of this city to achieve great things.

Detroit not only still matters, but it is at this moment the single most important city in North America. Detroit is coming to a neighborhood near you – it is an early warning of what urban communities across the US and far beyond are facing as those post-industrial, peak oil hurricane winds gather strength.

There is a flip side to Detroit’s devastation. With the disinvestment and abandonment of the city at such an extreme and criminal



Mathias, resident of Detroit’s Highland Park.



Playground monkey bars covered in blankets as alternative housing in the shadow of a Detroit casino



Clothesline from homeless living in the abandoned Detroit Public Schools warehouse in the shadows of Michigan Central Depot

BRUCE GIFFIN

Detroit not only still matters, but it is at this moment the single most important city in North America. Detroit is coming to a neighborhood near you

Family walking on Hamilton Street
in the Highland Park area (5 degrees)



BRUCE GIFFIN

There are now 800 community gardens on abandoned lots, peace zones for public safety, green retrofitting of empty houses, new open source media projects and an exploding hip hop and poetry scene



Brush Park area
of Detroit

BRUCE GIFFIN



BRUCE GIFFIN

Walking by the abandoned Detroit Central Depot



BRUCE GIFFIN

Home sweet home

level, the usual entrenched interests are far weaker and less capable of controlling the landscape. Call it the VOID. Nowhere else are the opportunities to re-invent, re-think, rebuild and re-imagine a major American city greater than Detroit today.

With the city's current leadership hypnotized by what they see as a civic death spiral, new leadership is coming from the bottom up. This new cycle is a grassroots affair with an astonishing number of people fashioning solutions and affirming life. There are now 800 community gardens on abandoned lots, peace zones for public safety, green retrofitting of empty houses, new open source media projects and an exploding hip hop and poetry scene.

This June, 10,000 people from around the world will be convening in Detroit for the US Social Forum, organizing around the statement: "Another Detroit is Happening," and have chosen the city because it is ground zero in today's global financial meltdown.

Detroit is ground zero for the sustainability movement as well. Green celebrities, high-end eco fashion and \$125,000 electric

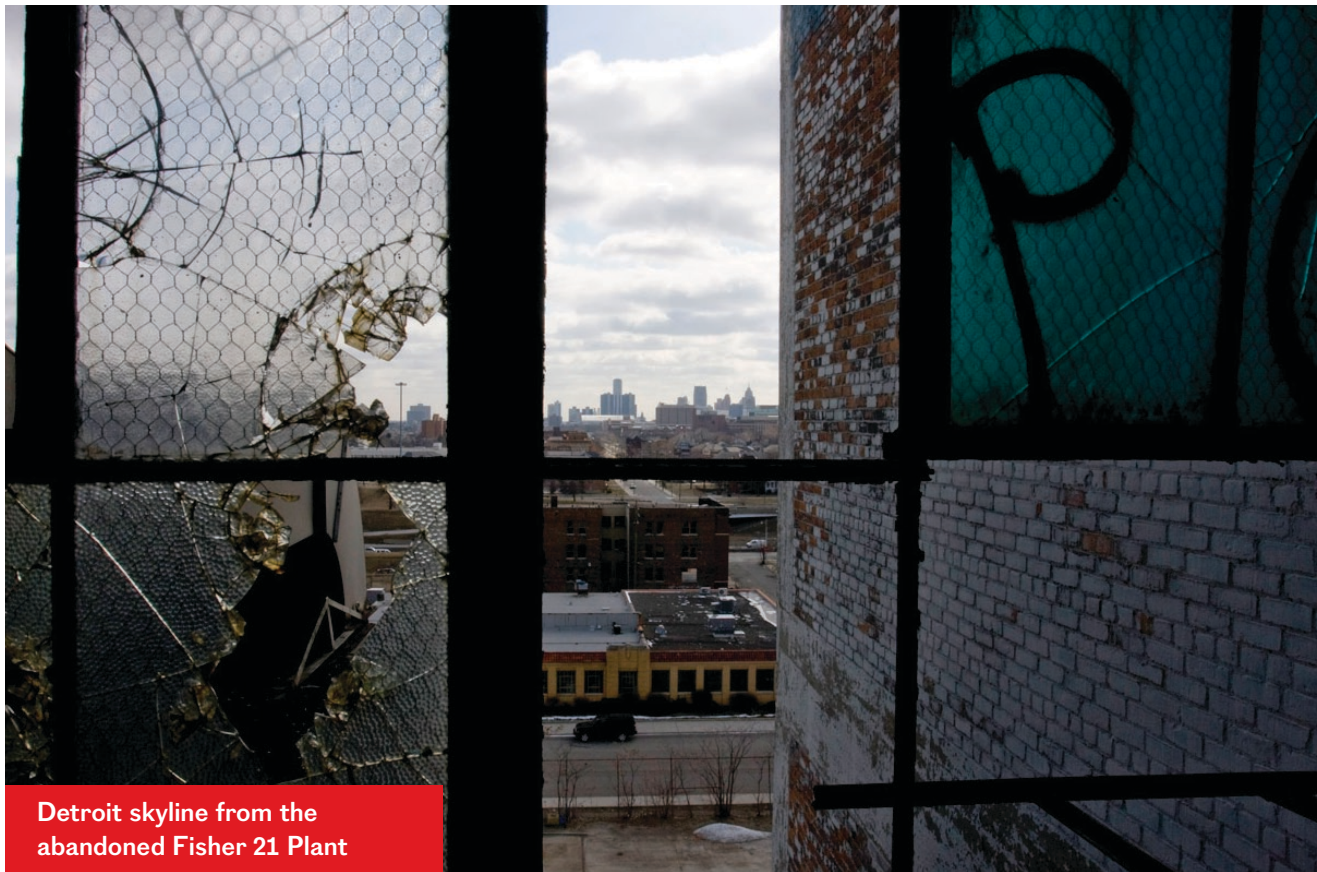
sports cars – they are all good. But today's hip "green lifestyle" is overwhelmingly a white, academic, upper middle class phenomenon. I don't understand how so much passion and energy can yield so few results and be so disconnected from most people's lives.

The Green movement can never succeed without placing social justice at its very heart. Sustainability will never gain real traction in North America without coming to terms with how it can engage with communities of color, those with lower incomes and people who are struggling. How do we make sustainability relevant to those losing their jobs, losing their homes?

What we need now is a collaborative effort that could echo around the world. An Urban Green Lab. What possible better stage than the 11th largest city in the United States which is experiencing Depression-level economic conditions? Let's take sustainability home. Detroit's solutions are likely to be the very same solutions every community will need in the years ahead.

Can you imagine if the socially responsible business community via Social Ven-

What better place for the United States to take all that talk about building a green economy and put it into practice than the city that put the internal combustion engine on every street?



Ron Williams is president of 3rdWhale Mobile and Chair of the Free Speech TV board of directors. He is the co-founder and former editor and publisher of *Metro Times (Detroit)* and founder of happyfrog.ca.

Bruce Giffin has spent more than 25 years shooting pictures on the streets of Detroit where he wanders with his wonderfully huge black dog Henry.

ture Network, BALLE and SOCAP, powerful membership organizations such as the Sierra Club, NRDC, Greenpeace and the Nature Conservancy, sustainable urban planning departments, student environmental organizations, activists in food security, renewable energy, green building, new media and alternative currencies, were to join in a shared commitment to the people of the city?

The result would be a wonder to behold – justice and compassion and a powerful validation of the elusive promise the environmental movement has always held. A gift from our brains, our hands and our hearts.

Let's be clear: The people of Detroit don't need anyone to "save" them. But they sure could use a little help.

Grassroots organizations such as Detroit Summer, Friends of Detroit, Michigan Welfare Rights, Community Food Security Network, Boggs Center, 1515 Broadway, Earthworks Urban Farm, Hush House, Heidelberg Project and East Michigan Environmental Action

are doing unbelievable things with few resources. National organizations such as The Apollo Alliance, Green for All, Bioneers and the Green Party are all active in southeastern Michigan but none appear to fully grasp the opportunity in Detroit.

Barack should come too. The world is going to wake up sooner than it realizes and find that it desperately needs an electric grid and transportation system that runs on renewable energy.

What better place for the United States to take all that talk about building a green economy and put it into practice than the city that put the internal combustion engine on every street?

Ignore the mainstream media. Detroit is not about architectural ruins. The future of Detroit is happening in plain sight. The people of the D are re-imagining their lives and their city in fresh and courageous ways. They are on the front lines and there is a lot to learn from them. **CT**

Behind the scenes in Arizona

My investigation in Arizona discovered the real intent of the show-me-your-papers law, writes **Greg Palast**

Don't be fooled. The way the media plays the story, it was a wave of racist, anti-immigrant hysteria that moved Arizona Republicans to pass a sick little law, signed last week, requiring every person in the state to carry papers proving they are US citizens.

I don't buy it. Anti-Hispanic hysteria has always been as much a part of Arizona as the Saguaro cactus and excessive air-conditioning. What's new here is not the politicians' fear of a xenophobic "Teabag" uprising.

What moved GOP Governor Jan Brewer to sign the Soviet-style show-me-your-papers law is the exploding number of legal Hispanics, US citizens all, who are daring to vote – and daring to vote Democratic by more than two-to-one. Unless this demographic locomotive is halted, Arizona Republicans know their party will soon be electoral toast. Or, if you like, tortillas.

In 2008, working for *Rolling Stone* with civil rights attorney Bobby Kennedy, our team flew to Arizona to investigate what smelled like an electoral pogrom against Chicano voters ... directed by one Jan Brewer.

Brewer, then Secretary of State, had organized a racially loaded purge of the voter rolls that would have made Katherine Harris blush. Beginning after the 2004 election, under Brewer's command, no less than 100,000 voters, overwhelming Hispanics, were blocked from registering to vote. In 2005,

the first year of the Great Brown-Out, one in three Phoenix residents found their registration applications rejected.

That statistic caught my attention. Voting or registering to vote if you're not a citizen is a felony, a big-time jail-time crime. And arresting such criminal voters is easy: after all, they give their names and addresses.

So I asked Brewer's office, had she busted a single one of these thousands of allegedly illegal voters? Did she turn over even one name to the feds for prosecution?

No, not one.

Which raises the question: were these disenfranchised voters the criminal, non-citizens Brewer tagged them, or just not-quite-white voters given the José Crow treatment, entrapped in document-chase trickery?

The answer was provided by a federal prosecutor who was sent on a crazy hunt all over the Western mesas looking for these illegal voters. "We took over 100 complaints, we investigated for almost 2 years, I didn't find one prosecutable voter fraud case."

This prosecutor, David Iglesias, is a prosecutor no more. When he refused to fabricate charges of illegal voting among immigrants, his firing was personally ordered by the President of the United States, George W. Bush, under orders from his boss, Karl Rove.

Iglesias' jurisdiction was next door, in New Mexico, but he told me that Rove and the Republican chieftains were working na-

When he refused to fabricate charges of illegal voting among immigrants, his firing was personally ordered by the President of the United States, George W. Bush, under orders from his boss, Karl Rove

It is important to see the Republicans' latest legislative horror show, sanctioning cops to stop residents and prove citizenship, as one more step in the party's desperate plan to impede Mexican-Americans from marching to the ballot box

Greg Palast
*has investigated the illegal disenfranchisement of voters for BBC Television, Rolling Stone (with Robert Kennedy Jr.), Harper's, The Nation and Truthout.org. Palast is the author of the New York Times bestseller, **The Best Democracy Money Can Buy.***

tionwide to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria with public busts of illegal voters, even though there were none. "They wanted some splashy pre-election indictments," Iglesias told me. The former prosecutor, himself a Republican, paid the price when he stood up to this vicious attack on citizenship.

But Secretary of State Brewer followed the Rove plan to a T. The weapon she used to slice the Arizona voter rolls was a 2004 law, known as "Prop 200," which required proof of citizenship to register. It is important to see the Republicans' latest legislative horror show, sanctioning cops to stop residents and prove citizenship, as one more step in the party's desperate plan to impede Mexican-Americans from marching to the ballot box.

[By the way, no one elected Brewer. Weirdly, Barack Obama placed her in office last year when, for reasons known only to the Devil and Rahm Emanuel, the President appointed Arizona's Democratic Governor Janet Napolitano to his cabinet, which automatically moved Republican Brewer into the Governor's office.]

State Senator Russell Pearce, the Republican sponsor of the latest ID law, gave away his real intent, blocking the vote, when he said, "There is a massive effort under way to register illegal aliens in this country."

How many? Pearce's PR flak told me, five million. All Democrats, too. Again, I asked Pearce's office to give me their the names and addresses from their phony registration forms. I'd happily make a citizens arrest of each one, on camerwa. Pearce didn't have five million names. He didn't have five. He didn't have one.

The horde of five million voters who swam the Rio Grande just to vote for Obama was calculated on a Republican website extrapolating from the number of Mexicans in a border town who refused jury service because they were not citizens. Not one, in fact, had registered to vote: they had registered to drive. They had obtained licenses as required by the law.

The illegal voters, "wetback" welfare moms, and alien job thieves are just GOP

website wet-dreams, but their mythic PR power helps the party's electoral hacks chop away at voter rolls and civil rights with little more than a whimper from the Democrats.

Indeed, one reason, I discovered, that some Democrats are silent is that they are in on the game themselves. In New Mexico, Democratic Party bosses tossed away ballots of Pueblo Indians to cut native influence in party primaries. But what's wrong with requiring folks to prove they're American if they want to vote and live in America? The answer: because the vast majority of perfectly legal voters and residents who lack ID sufficient for Ms. Brewer and Mr. Pearce are citizens of color, citizens of poverty.

According to a study by professor Matt Barreto of Washington State University, minority citizens are half as likely as whites to have government ID. The numbers are dreadfully worse when income is factored in. Just outside Phoenix, without Brewer's or Pearce's help, I did locate one of these evil un-American voters, that is, someone who could not prove her citizenship: 100-year-old Shirley Preiss. Her US birth certificate was nowhere to be found as it never existed.

In Phoenix, I stopped in at the Maricopa County prison where Sheriff Joe Arpaio houses the captives of his campaign to stop illegal immigration. Arpaio, who under the new Arizona law will be empowered to choose his targets for citizenship testing, is already facing federal indictment for his racially-charged and legally suspect methods.

I admit, I was a little nervous, passing through the iron doors with a big sign, "NOTICE: ILLEGAL ALIENS ARE PROHIBITED FROM VISITING ANYONE IN THIS JAIL." I mean, Grandma Palast snuck into the USA via Windsor, Canada. We Palasts are illegal as they come, but Arpaio's sophisticated deportee-sniffer didn't stop this white boy from entering his sanctum.

But that's the point, isn't it? Not to stop non-citizens from entering Arizona – after all, who else would care for the country club lawn? – but to harass folks of the wrong color: Democratic blue. **CT**

My American nightmare

Once a publisher, now a farmhand, **Stacey Warde** contemplates a new career – in the funeral business

Worried that I might sink into a hole, squeaking out an inadequate living as a part-time Californian farmhand, mom suggests that I look into an opening at Fairhaven Memorial Park and Mortuary, not far from where she lives.

“They’re looking for a funeral director,” she says excitedly.

“Mom, I’m not qualified for a position like that.”

“You might,” she responds. “You’re good with people and you’re low-key.”

I try to imagine myself – sober demeanor, faint smile, slight signs of hope and compassion carefully constructed across my face, voice subdued – doing the business of a funeral director: “So sorry for your loss. How may we assist you?”

A warm, professional grasp of the hand and on to the next order of business. “So sorry for your loss....”

“Mom, thanks. I’d really like to stay in the field I grew up with. I like stories.”

I’ve spent most of my adult life pursuing stories for newspapers and magazines. I grew up believing that there’s a place for stories that present life not as another promotional campaign but as it is actually lived by real people. Unfortunately, the market for these kinds of stories seems to be dwindling.

“You could get a whole bunch of stories

working at a mortuary.”

“I’m sure I could mom.”

She tells me it’s worth looking into; the job has been advertised for more than three weeks, she adds; they might just consider me. “It doesn’t look like they’ve found anyone.”

“Mom, that’s what businesses do; they run an ad for a few weeks, build up a candidate pool, and make their selections.”

“Well, you could look into it, get some stories, write a book and get rich.”

“I’ll look into it, mom.”

It’s not a bad idea, really. There’s likely to be more job security in this business, of course, because there’s never a shortage of dead people. It’s unlikely to be a dead-end job (no pun intended), and the story possibilities ... well, you’d have to be six feet under not to see them.

I go online, find the mortuary website and locate “career opportunities.” The site lists openings for Assistant Sales Manager, Family Services Counselor, Sales, and Operations Manager.

I click on *operations manager*, curious what duties such a position at a mortuary might entail. Assign holes to be dug? Bodies to be dressed or cremated? Gravestones to be lifted, set into place? Coffins to be bought and sold?

The ad reads: “Premiere...mortuary seeking an individual looking for a challenging

I click on operations manager, curious what duties such a position at a mortuary might entail. Assign holes to be dug? Bodies to be dressed or cremated? Gravestones to be lifted, set into place? Coffins to be bought and sold?

Welcome to the economy of dashed hopes, where nearly an entire generation is forced out of retirement to survive the sudden loss of personal financial resources built up over a lifetime, where careers have been severely downsized or eliminated entirely

opportunity that offers the ability to grow and develop a strong employee staff.”

The “challenging opportunity” sounds interesting but the ad offers no details. I can only imagine the possibilities: “Hey Hector! How come you haven’t filled that goddamned hole yet? It was supposed to have been done yesterday. We have another graveside service scheduled in the next plot at noon. What’s taking you so long? ... The furnace broke down again? Damn it! We’ve got five stiffs whose ashes we’re supposed to deliver by morning...”

As for growing and developing a “strong employee staff,” I like people but have never felt comfortable managing them: “Here’s the deal guys, I’m used to working a deadline, just not at a mortuary.”

Unfortunately, they want an “experienced manager with a minimum of 5 years of funeral home management experience.” That eliminates me right away. The call volume of “over 700 cases” a year I could handle. Hell, I used to handle almost that many calls in a week as a newspaper editor.

Additionally, the job prefers an individual who’s a California licensed funeral director. That’s probably a good idea. Someone with a license can be expected to get the job done right. No Maxwell House Coffee cans as urns in this business.

Next, the Family Services Counselor’s duties include “promotion of the funeral home through public relations.” Well, here’s another opportunity to create stories. “At Fairhaven, everyone’s dying to get in....”

I hate public relations. I agree with the late comedian Bill Hicks, who said that people who earn their living convincing others they should accept things that aren’t true, or buy things they don’t need, should just go ahead and kill themselves. “You’ll be doing a public service,” he said.

I also hate sales and skip over the remaining ads, so much for career opportunities in the funeral business. The year 2010 seems to be the year of deflated career options.

The latest reports suggest that many boomers like myself are working at “sur-

vival” jobs such as checkout clerks at chain hardware stores earning \$10 an hour; or the lucky ones have found positions for which they are severely over-qualified at slightly more than \$10 an hour and far less than the six-figure salaries they had before the economy crashed.

“I never thought it would be like this,” they collectively groan. “I was supposed to retire and spend my golden years taking it easy.”

In a recent Frontline episode on PBS, “Close to Home,” which features a local hair salon in the upscale Upper East Side of New York City, a woman in her mid-forties laments: “I’ve had to borrow money from my mother just make ends meet.” She’s embarrassed, and surprised that she’s admitting her sudden unexpected dependency as an adult.

A former middle-aged executive who’s been out of work for more than two years admits he never anticipated long-term unemployment. The hardest hit age group in the U.S. for periods of unemployment lasting two years or longer are people 50 and above.

And so it goes, as regular salon customers complain of their reduced circumstances: “I never thought it would be like this.”

Welcome to the economy of dashed hopes, where nearly an entire generation is forced out of retirement to survive the sudden loss of personal financial resources built up over a lifetime, where careers have been severely downsized or eliminated entirely, and where a banking industry on the verge of collapse, recently bailed out by the federal government, refuses to renegotiate home loans for people unable to make ends meet.

So far, we seem to be taking it in the shorts without much complaint, but here’s what one struggling homeowner recently said he’d do if the bank refuses to renegotiate: “If the fuckin’ bank comes after my home, I’m gonna call my buddy, who’s gotta ‘dozer, and I’m gonna have him bring it over here, and I’m gonna get on that thing, drive

it off the trailer and plow it right through the middle of that fuckin' house. And you know what? I'm gonna tell the bank, 'You can have your piece-a-shit house.'"

Another friend recently called me a "malcontent" because I've never been happy with the status quo, with the little bit of truth or good that squeaks out of Washington, D.C. or Sacramento; I've never quite trusted Wall Street. I do, however, see something positive in the crumbling condition of our global banking and business enterprises, which seem to have forgotten the smaller economies of Main Street.

We've been challenged to reduce consumption, to find more sustainable models for doing business, to turn to our neighbors and friends for help and support, and to think independently from the "experts" who run our government and industry.

In my own neighborhood, we've talked about how to grow more of our own food, and ways to earn a little more money by selling the surplus, and saving money by doing more of our own repairs. Maybe it's a pipe dream but already one of our own

opened up his yard as a nursery because he can't find enough work as a landscaper.

Selling plants won't make him rich, he says, but it's a better alternative to having nothing.

I've never lived so close to the ground, planting, tending crops, working as a farmhand, as I have in these reduced circumstances, thinking how much better it is to be above ground eking out a living than to be below ground pushing up daisies.

Still, there's enough uncertainty and desperation in this economy for people like my mother to suggest that maybe, just maybe, her malcontent of a son might qualify for another ground-breaking endeavor such as working as a funeral director at a premier mortuary.

I won't waste my time pretending that I might qualify for such an opportunity, but at least it's an opportunity. **CT**

Stacey Warde was until recently editor of the Californian Literary monthly, Rogue Voice. He can be reached at roguewarde@gmail.com



"I don't call myself an artist; if you think it's art, that's all right; if you don't think it's art, that's all right too, because I'm still going to do it!"

REAL DETROIT PICTURES

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We're on the road to Zimbabwe!

David Michael Green is worried about the direction the USA's leaders are taking their people – is Mugabe the new role model?

We have been siccing the Yankee Mugabes on America for just about exactly as long as the real deal has been similarly afflicting Zimbabwe

Pardon me for noticing, but my country is going down the toilet. Speaking of which, I just couldn't help but be struck by the two articles on either side of the same *New York Times* op-ed page recently.

In one, Nicholas Kristof reports the incredibly dismal fact that the kleptocrats of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe have so thoroughly disemboweled the country they rule that people there actually pine for the “old, racist, white regime of what was then called Rhodesia”. Oh boy. Said one farmer, “It would have been better if whites had continued to rule because the money would have continued to come. It was better under Rhodesia. Then we could get jobs. Things were cheaper in stores. Now we have no money, no food.”

Meanwhile, over on the other side of the page, Gail Collins details the latest deployment of insane right-wing politics in America, as scary Virginia governor Bob McDonnell has been singing the virtues of the Confederacy (again), conveniently omitting that minor historical footnote of slavery so that yet another white, Southern politician can court the racist vote (again).

Do I really live in a country this stupid? Is it really possible that parasites like McDonnell and virtually every other Republican politician can continue the Zimbabwefication of America with the actual assistance

of the very clowns who are the victims of this grand rip-off, simply by feeding them a little race-bait to make them feel better about themselves?

These two articles feel a lot like “Before” and “After” snapshots of America and its struggle with a fast-growing national cancer.

Except for one thing. We are no longer terribly “Before” anymore. Indeed, we have been siccing the Yankee Mugabes on America for just about exactly as long as the real deal has been similarly afflicting Zimbabwe. The same year that brought him to power there introduced the Reagan era in the US. (Worse, with our battered but still extant democracy, we have far less excuse than the poor Zimbabweans.) Presidents come and go in America, but – with the complete co-optation of the Democratic Party under Clinton and Obama – the predatory ideology of Reaganism remains.

Shifting wealth

Few have laid out the case in a more compelling fashion than Tony Judt, in the recent edition of the *New York Review of Books*. Noting the massive shifts of wealth in America these last decades, he writes:

“Inequality, then, is not just unattractive in itself; it clearly corresponds to pathological social problems that we cannot hope to address unless we attend to their underlying

cause. There is a reason why infant mortality, life expectancy, criminality, the prison population, mental illness, unemployment, obesity, malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, illegal drug use, economic insecurity, personal indebtedness, and anxiety are so much more marked in the US and the UK than they are in continental Europe.

“The wider the spread between the wealthy few and the impoverished many, the worse the social problems: a statement that appears to be true for rich and poor countries alike. What matters is not how affluent a country is but how unequal it is. Thus Sweden and Finland, two of the world’s wealthiest countries by per capita income or GDP, have a very narrow gap separating their richest from their poorest citizens – and they consistently lead the world in indices of measurable well-being. Conversely, the United States, despite its huge aggregate wealth, always comes low on such measures. We spend vast sums on health care, but life expectancy in the US remains below Bosnia and just above Albania.”

Hey, at least no one can say the richest country in the world is worse off than Albania, eh?! The twin-axis graphs Judt presents illustrating his article make the same points visually. In every case, the US of A is sitting off by its lonesome in the unhappiest corner of the plot. Juxtapose income inequality with either social mobility, health or homicides, and there’s the US over there by itself, in the stinker corner. Most inequality, least mobility. Most inequality, worst health. Most inequality, most murders. Woo-hoo!

Look, there will always be Mugabes out there. And there will always be the victims of such predators. And there will always be unimaginable horrors awaiting those with the political courage to call out such crimes for what they are. But what is most astonishing is when folks voluntarily contribute to their own demise, and when they do so in an environment relatively free from coercion and relatively open to change if only it were demanded.

Worse still, such change actually is be-

ing demanded right now. It’s called the Tea Party movement, and what it demands is a full-on exacerbation of the crises its politics have already made so acute, under a different guise (then we just called it Republicanism). Somehow, this is the only political movement in America with any juice these days, despite the almost sheer inanity of its content.

This means that the choices du jour facing voters are: the Republican Party, the other Republican Party, and – should the tea-boneheads come to power – an Even More Republican Republican Party. Turns out that Ralph Nader was actually wrong. It’s not just Tweedledee and Tweedledum that we get to choose from in American politics. It’s Tweedledee, Tweedledum and Tweedledumber. Who says we have no real political choice here in the good ol’ USA?

Where’s the Left?

The real \$64,000 question of American politics right now is what happened to the left? Or, where is the New New Left we might expect to see today? Could conditions be more ripe for a progressive flowering, short of a world war over nothing or a Great Depression caused by the right (as opposed to the mere Great Recession they’ve (so far) caused this time)? Isn’t economic melt-down for 98 percent of the country while the other two percent grows rich of the rest of us sufficient? ‘Cause, if not, I can throw in two really stupid and endless wars! No? Do Americans still need more? How about ongoing planetary destruction in the name of profits for the few? Not enough yet? How about strangling levels of national debt which will inevitably result in shredding further the already tattered social safety net? Do we need to drown an entire American city to get peoples’ attention? Oops, never mind. Been there and done that.

I could go on and on here, but if that isn’t enough to wake people out of their regressive slumbers, just what will? And how in the world would we ever survive it, whatever that might be?

Turns out that Ralph Nader was actually wrong. It’s not just Tweedledee and Tweedledum that we get to choose from in American politics. It’s Tweedledee, Tweedledum and Tweedledumber

Liberalism didn't fail (unless you like low wages, child labor, illiteracy, racism, sexism, homophobia and war), so much as it was abandoned by those who were entrusted with its care, those who decided that, at the end of the day, money and fame were much cooler things than taking responsible care of millions of lives

There are, to be sure, some signs of hope, rare and bare as they might be. Young people today are not quite as politically stupid (i.e., conservative) as their parents (you know, the folks who left them holding the bag in every way imaginable). But that's kinda like being the best pole vaulter in your sixth grade home room class. Sure, it's an achievement, but ...

Making matters uglier

I don't really know how to explain our collective narcolepsy at a moment that fairly well screams out for a progressive r-thing (you know, what they used to call revolutions). Maybe it's just that the right has been so brilliant at their task that they've not only ripped people off blind, but have left them without any consciousness of their own looting. Worse, now, they are unable to envision a way out that doesn't involve making matters even uglier.

Even worse yet, they seem to lack the very consciousness of their mental state. Isn't the greatest crime one in which the victim doesn't even know he's been victimized? Here's where articles like Judt's are so valuable for their comparative analysis, but so lonely out there in the media wilderness.

How many Americans have the slightest clue that their country isn't the greatest in the world on all meaningful measures? I mean that question seriously. American nationalism makes it almost treason to wonder whether other folks – especially those effete French! – are living better, healthier, happier and longer lives than we are. Which, of course, also makes it not so much impossible as irrelevant to spend any time thinking about alternative policy solutions.

But it is precisely upon the question of such policy solutions where I depart from Tony Judt, who infers that progressives are today every bit as ideologically spent as are regressives. Not only is this not the case, but the greatest shame of our time (and that's saying a lot) is that these solutions are right there before us, in our own past and in Europe's (for instance) present. We don't need to reinvent these ideas. We just need to re-implement them.

Liberalism didn't fail (unless you like low wages, child labor, illiteracy, racism, sexism, homophobia and war), so much as it was abandoned by those who were entrusted with its care, those who decided that, at the end of the day, money and fame were much cooler things than taking responsible care of millions of lives. Not every particular program of the New Deal – Great Society era was wonderful in every particular respect. But the gist of the approach, and the vast bulk of the actual programs, were massively successful and massively beneficial. As they still are – along with ones we never got around to – for the people who are lucky enough to live under them in places like Europe or Canada.

We should be headed back in that direction.

Instead, we're trying to out-Zimbabwe Zimbabwe.

When we get there, no doubt we'll wonder why.

Assuming, that is, that by then we still have the capacity to wonder at all. **CT**

David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. More of his work can be found at his website, www.regressiveantidote.net.

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America: The grim truth

Lance Freeman has left the country – and he wonders when you're going to join him

Americans, I have some bad news for you: You have the worst quality of life in the developed world – by a wide margin.

If you had any idea of how people really lived in Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and many parts of Asia, you'd be rioting in the streets calling for a better life. In fact, the average Australian or Singaporean taxi driver has a much better standard of living than the typical American white-collar worker.

I know this because I am an American, and I escaped from the prison you call home.

I have lived all around the world, in wealthy countries and poor ones, and there is only one country I would never consider living in again: The United States of America. The mere thought of it fills me with dread.

Consider this: you are the only people in the developed world without a single-payer health system. Everyone in Western Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand has a single-payer system. If they get sick, they can devote all their energies to getting well. If you get sick, you have to battle two things at once: your illness and the fear of financial ruin. Millions of Americans go bankrupt every year due to medical bills, and tens of thousands die each year because they have no insurance

or insufficient insurance. And don't believe for a second that rot about America having the world's best medical care or the shortest waiting lists: I've been to hospitals in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Singapore, and Thailand, and every one was better than the "good" hospital I used to go to back home. The waits were shorter, the facilities more comfortable, and the doctors just as good.

This is ironic, because you need a good health system more than anyone else in the world. Why? Because your lifestyle is almost designed to make you sick.

Genetically modified diet

Let's start with your diet: Much of the beef you eat has been exposed to fecal matter in processing. Your chicken is contaminated with salmonella. Your stock animals and poultry are pumped full of growth hormones and antibiotics. In most other countries, the government would act to protect consumers from this sort of thing; in the United States, the government is bought off by industry to prevent any effective regulations or inspections.

In a few years, the majority of all the produce for sale in the United States will be from genetically modified crops, thanks to the cozy relationship between Monsanto Corporation and the United States government. Worse still, due to the vast quantities of high-fructose corn syrup Americans con-

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The fact is, they work you like dogs in the United States. This should come as no surprise: the United States never got away from the plantation/sweat shop labor model and any real labor movement was brutally suppressed

sume, fully one-third of children born in the United States today will be diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives.

Of course, it's not just the food that's killing you, it's the drugs. If you show any sign of life when you're young, they'll put you on Ritalin. Then, when you get old enough to take a good look around, you'll get depressed, so they'll give you Prozac. If you're a man, this will render you chemically impotent, so you'll need Viagra to get it up. Meanwhile, your steady diet of trans-fat-laden food is guaranteed to give you high cholesterol, so you'll get a prescription for Lipitor. Finally, at the end of the day, you'll lay awake at night worrying about losing your health plan, so you'll need Lunesta to go to sleep.

With a diet guaranteed to make you sick and a health system designed to make sure you stay that way, what you really need is a long vacation somewhere. Unfortunately, you probably can't take one. I'll let you in on little secret: if you go to the beaches of Thailand, the mountains of Nepal, or the coral reefs of Australia, you'll probably be the only American in sight. And you'll be surrounded by crowds of happy Germans, French, Italians, Israelis, Scandinavians and wealthy Asians. Why? Because they're paid well enough to afford to visit these places AND they can take vacations long enough to do so. Even if you could scrape together enough money to go to one of these incredible places, by the time you recovered from your jetlag, it would time to get on a plane and rush back to your job.

If you think I'm making this up, check the stats on average annual vacation days by country:

Finland: 44 Italy: 42 France: 39 Germany: 35 UK: 25 Japan: 18 USA: 12

The fact is, they work you like dogs in the United States. This should come as no surprise: the United States never got away from the plantation/sweat shop labor model and any real labor movement was brutally suppressed. Unless you happen to be a member of the ownership class, your options

are pretty much limited to barely surviving on service-sector wages or playing musical chairs for a spot in a cubicle (a spot that will be outsourced to India next week anyway). The very best you can hope for is to get a professional degree and then milk the system for a slice of the middle-class pie. And even those who claw their way into the middle class are but one illness or job loss away from poverty. Your jobs aren't secure. Your company has no loyalty to you. They'll play you off against your coworkers for as long as it suits them, then they'll get rid of you.

Of course, you don't have any choice in the matter: the system is designed this way. In most countries in the developed world, higher education is either free or heavily subsidized; in the United States, a university degree can set you back over US\$100,000. Thus, you enter the working world with a crushing debt. Forget about taking a year off to travel the world and find yourself – you've got to start working or watch your credit rating plummet.

Paying back the interest

If you're "lucky," you might even land a job good enough to qualify you for a home loan. And then you'll spend half your working life just paying the interest on the loan – welcome to the world of American debt slavery. America has the illusion of great wealth because there's a lot of "stuff" around, but who really owns it? In real terms, the average American is poorer than the poorest ghetto dweller in Manila, because at least they have no debts. If they want to pack up and leave, they can; if you want to leave, you can't, because you've got debts to pay.

All this begs the question: Why would anyone put up with this? Ask any American and you'll get the same answer: because America is the freest country on earth. If you believe this, I've got some more bad news for you: America is actually among the least free countries on earth. Your piss is tested, your emails and phone calls are monitored, your medical records are gathered, and you are never more than one stray comment

away from writhing on the ground with two Taser prongs in your ass.

And that's just physical freedom. Mentally, you are truly imprisoned. You don't even know the degree to which you are tormented by fears of medical bankruptcy, job loss, homelessness and violent crime because you've never lived in a country where there is no need to worry about such things.

But it goes much deeper than mere surveillance and anxiety. The fact is, you are not free because your country has been taken over and occupied by another government. Fully 70% of your tax dollars go to the Pentagon, and the Pentagon is the real government of the United States. You are required under pain of death to pay taxes to this occupying government. If you're from the less fortunate classes, you are also required to serve and die in their endless wars, or send your sons and daughters to do so. You have no choice in the matter: there is a socio-economic draft system in the United States that provides a steady stream of cannon fodder for the military.

If you call a life of surveillance, anxiety and ceaseless toil in the service of a government you didn't elect "freedom," then you and I have a very different idea of what that word means.

If there was some chance that the country could be changed, there might be reason for hope. But can you honestly look around and conclude that anything is going to change? Where would the change come from? The people? Take a good look at your compatriots: the working class in the United States has been brutally propagandized by jackals like Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity. Members of the working class have been taught to lick the boots of their masters and then bend over for another kick in the ass. They've got these people so well trained that they'll take up arms against the other half of the working class as soon as their masters give the word.

If the people cannot make a change, how about the media? Not a chance. From Fox News to the *New York Times*, the mass me-

dia in the United States is nothing but the public relations wing of the corporatocracy, primarily the military industrial complex. At least the citizens of the former Soviet Union knew that their news was bullshit. In America, you grow up thinking you've got a free media, which makes the propaganda doubly effective. If you don't think American media is mere corporate propaganda, ask yourself the following question: have you ever heard a major American news outlet suggest that the country could fund a single-payer health system by cutting military spending?

Corrupt politicians

If change can't come from the people or the media, the only other potential source of change would be the politicians. Unfortunately, the American political process is among the most corrupt in the world. In every country on earth, one expects politicians to take bribes from the rich. But this generally happens in secret, behind the closed doors of their elite clubs. In the United States, this sort of political corruption is done in broad daylight, as part of legal, accepted, standard operating procedure. In the United States, they merely call these bribes campaign donations, political action committees and lobbyists. One can no more expect the politicians to change this system than one can expect a man to take an axe and chop his own legs out from underneath him.

No, the United States of America is not going to change for the better. The only change will be for the worse. And when I say worse, I mean much worse. As we speak, the economic system that sustained the country during the post-war years is collapsing. The United States maxed out its "credit card" sometime in 2008 and now its lenders, starting with China, are in the process of laying the foundations for a new monetary system to replace the Anglo-American "petro-dollar" system. As soon as there is a viable alternative to the US dollar, the greenback will sink like a stone.

If you don't think American media is mere corporate propaganda, ask yourself the following question: have you ever heard a major American news outlet suggest that the country could fund a single-payer health system by cutting military spending?

Once the shit really hits the fan, do you really think you'll just be able to jump into the old station wagon, drive across the Canadian border and spend the rest of your days fishing and drinking Molson?

While the United States was running up crushing levels of debt, it was also busy shipping its manufacturing jobs and white-collar jobs overseas, and letting its infrastructure fall to pieces. Meanwhile, Asian and European countries were investing in education, infrastructure and raw materials. Even if the United States tried to rebuild a real economy (as opposed to a service/financial economy) do think American workers would ever be able to compete with the workers of China or Europe? Have you ever seen a Japanese or German factory? Have you ever met a Singaporean or Chinese worker?

There are only two possible futures facing the United States, and neither one is pretty. The best case is a slow but orderly decline – essentially a continuation of what's been happening for the last two decades. Wages will drop, unemployment will rise, Medicare and Social Security benefits will be slashed, the currency will decline in value, and the disparity of wealth will spiral out of control until the United States starts to resemble Mexico or the Philippines – tiny islands of wealth surrounded by great poverty (the country is already halfway there).

Equally likely is a sudden collapse, perhaps brought about by a rapid flight from the US dollar by creditor nations like China, Japan, Korea and the OPEC nations. A related possibility would be a default by the United States government on its vast debt. One look at the financial balance sheet of the US government should convince you how likely this is: governmental spending is skyrocketing and tax receipts are plummeting – something has to give. If either of these scenarios plays out, the resulting depression will make the present recession look like a walk in the park.

Whether the collapse is gradual or gut-wrenchingly sudden, the results will be chaos, civil strife and fascism. Let's face it: the United States is like the former Yugoslavia – a collection of mutually antagonistic cultures united in name only. You've got your own version of the Taliban: right-wing

Christian fundamentalists who actively loathe the idea of secular Constitutional government. You've got a vast intellectual underclass that has spent the last few decades soaking up Fox News and talk radio propaganda, eager to blame the collapse on Democrats, gays and immigrants. You've got a ruthless ownership class that will use all the means at its disposal to protect its wealth from the starving masses.

On top of all that you've got vast factory farms, sprawling suburbs and a truck-based shipping system, all of it entirely dependent on oil that is about to become completely unaffordable. And you've got guns. Lots of guns. In short: the United States is about to become a very unwholesome place to be.

Keeping them out – and you in

Right now, the government is building fences and walls along its northern and southern borders. Right now, the government is working on a national ID system (soon to be fitted with biometric features). Right now, the government is building a surveillance state so extensive that they will be able to follow your every move, online, in the street and across borders. If you think this is just to protect you from “terrorists,” then you're sadly mistaken. Once the shit really hits the fan, do you really think you'll just be able to jump into the old station wagon, drive across the Canadian border and spend the rest of your days fishing and drinking Molson? No, the government is going to lock the place down. They don't want their tax base escaping. They don't want their “recruits” escaping. They don't want YOU escaping.

I am not writing this to scare you. I write this to you as a friend. If you are able to read and understand what I've written here, then you are a member of a small minority in the United States. You are a minority in a country that has no place for you.

So what should you do?

You should leave the United States of America.

If you're young, you've got plenty of choices: you can teach English in the Mid-

dle East, Asia or Europe. Or you can go to university or graduate school abroad and start building skills that will qualify you for a work visa. If you've already got some real work skills, you can apply to emigrate to any number of countries as a skilled immigrant. If you are older and you've got some savings, you can retire to a place like Costa Rica or the Philippines. If you can't qualify for a work, student or retirement visa, don't let that stop you – travel on a tourist visa to a country that appeals to you and talk to the expats you meet there. Whatever you do, go speak to an immigration lawyer as soon as you can. Find out exactly how to get on a path that will lead to permanent residence and eventually citizenship in the country of your choice.

You will not be alone. There are millions of Americans just like me living outside the United States. Living lives much more fulfilling, peaceful, free and abundant than we ever could have attained back home. Some of us happened upon these lives by accident – we tried a year abroad and found that we

liked it – others made a conscious decision to pack up and leave for good. You'll find us in Canada, all over Europe, in many parts of Asia, in Australia and New Zealand, and in most other countries of the globe. Do we miss our friends and family? Yes. Do we occasionally miss aspects of our former country? Yes. Do we plan on ever living again in the United States? Never. And those of us with permanent residence or citizenship can sponsor family members from back home for long-term visas in our adopted countries.

In closing, I want to remind you of something: unless you are an American Indian or a descendant of slaves, at some point your ancestors chose to leave their homeland in search of a better life. They weren't traitors and they weren't bad people, they just wanted a better life for themselves and their families. Isn't it time that you continue their journey?

CT

This essay originally appeared at www.americathegrimtruth.wordpress.com

If you can't qualify for a work, student or retirement visa, don't let that stop you – travel on a tourist visa to a country that appeals to you and talk to the expats you meet there

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Inside occupied Washington DC

Stephanie Westbrook rides the subway and doesn't like what she sees on the walls

Where you would normally expect to find ads for cell phones or museum exhibitions, Washington's subway, the second busiest in the country, instead displays full color backlit billboards for some of the most deadly – and expensive – weapons systems ever produced

As a visitor to our nation's capital, I cannot tell you how disconcerting it is to step off the metro and find yourself face to face with a F-35 fighter jet. Where you would normally expect to find ads for cell phones or museum exhibitions, Washington's subway, the second busiest in the country, instead displays full color backlit billboards for some of the most deadly – and expensive – weapons systems ever produced.

The ads for such companies as Lockheed Martin, the world's largest weapons producer, Goodrich, KBR, AGI, BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman can be found in many of the metro stations in the Washington metropolitan area.

Not surprisingly, the heaviest concentration is at Pentagon City and near government offices at the Federal Center and Capitol South stations. Undoubtedly, the ads aim to influence key decision-makers, but they also serve the purpose of selling to the general public the concept that only our superior military prowess can protect us from a hostile world.

The billboards range from explicit ads for attack helicopters and combat vehicles to more subtle billboards for companies such as little-known DRS, owned by Italian weapons maker Finmeccanica and 26th among the top 100 Pentagon contractors, or for "rugged" Dell computers designed to

meet Defense Department specifications for military use.

Far from subtle is Northrop Grumman's marketing approach in the Capitol South metro station, the closest to Congress. In an all out assault on the visual senses, the station has been literally festooned by the country's third largest military contractor. Apparently considering the usual ad space along the tracks to be insufficient, Northrop Grumman ads can also be found on all four sides of columns installed near the turnstiles, on banners strung up along the railings upstairs and even on the floor just before the escalators. CBS Outdoor, responsible for the ad space in DC metro stations, claims that "Capitol Hill Station Domination is an impactful way to get your message in front of the Congress and decision-makers in DC."

An estimated 17,000 Capitol South metro passengers are confronted daily with Northrop Grumman Global Hawks and X-47 Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles, which boast a 4500-pound weapons bay, E-2D Advanced Hawkeyes, Viper Strike-armed Fire Scout unmanned helicopters and E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar Systems (STARS), all designed "for an unsafe world." According to the centrist Brookings Institute, 90% of drone casualties in "targeted" strikes in Pakistan have been innocent civilians. Yet ads for these systems, which carry

price tags ranging hundreds of millions of dollars when factoring in development costs, are on full display.

Perhaps most startling of all the Capitol South billboards is the ominous scene of a bombed out apartment building above the slogan “By the time you find the threat, we’ve already taken it out of the picture.” Northrop Grumman fails to fill us in on what happened to the people living in those apartments.

Following the trend of major defense companies wishing to cozy up to power-brokers in Congress and at the Pentagon, Northrop Grumman announced plans to relocate its California headquarters to the DC area. Officials from Washington, Virginia and Maryland have been falling over themselves trying to influence the decision of the \$34 billion company. The District of Columbia has gone as far as offering a \$25 billion incentive package for what Northrop Grumman estimates to be a measly 300 jobs, which will be filled primarily by company executives moving from Los Angeles!

The defense contractor presence on the DC metro is but one example of the ubiquitous signs of militarism in Washington. Standing out like sore thumbs, military personnel dressed in camouflage can be seen everywhere from the food court at the shopping mall to the line at the bank. Combat fatigues were ordered everyday wear for all service members, including those with desk jobs, following the September 11, 2001 attacks. I asked several camouflaged service members the reason behind the combat uniforms and all sheepishly replied that it was in support of the “troops in the field.” One woman told me, “That’s a good question. You feel kind of funny wearing this.” Looking down at her desert boots, she said, “It’s not exactly office wear.” But it is a clear and constant reminder that the nation continues to be on a war footing.

Signs calling for support of the troops can be found on everything from restaurant walls to dump trucks. Cheering on the “troops in the field” is also the Liberty gas

station on Columbia Pike in Arlington. Directly above the gas pumps is a red, white and blue sign that reads “Support Our Troops.” This is either the result of disturbingly twisted logic or an astonishingly candid call for protecting U.S. access to Middle East oil reserves.

Walking the halls of Congress, you will find memorials at the offices of many representative and senators for the fallen troops from their district or state. What you will not find are any memorials for the 2,200 veterans who died in 2008 as a result of a lack of health insurance.

At Union Station, Amtrak passengers should not be surprised if a soldier or two cut in line. Signs in the station invite uniformed military personnel to skip to the head of the ticket line. According to Amtrak, which is the only Department of Defense approved rail passenger carrier in the US, it is a way for the company to “extend their thanks.” That’s all and good but why wouldn’t Amtrak want to do the same for teachers, healthcare professionals, firefighters, librarians or non-profit volunteers?

Much of this is not necessarily new; the militarization of our society has been progressing for decades, permeating our schools, research and development programs, law enforcement and culture. And despite the heavy concentration in Washington DC, the phenomenon is certainly not limited to the nation’s capital. The signs of militarism in our country are ever-present to the point of becoming virtually invisible, while subconsciously persuading us to accept violence and war as not only a suitable solution to conflict, but the only one.

The fighter jets and missile-firing drones are anything but invisible to the people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Let’s rebel against their apparent “normalcy” here in the US. As a start, contact Dan Langdon, CBS Outdoor’s Vice President and Regional Manager letting him know that ads for deadly weapons systems have no place on the DC metro, or anywhere else for that matter! Dan.Langdon@cbsoutdoor.com. **CT**

Standing out like sore thumbs, military personnel dressed in camouflage can be seen everywhere from the food court at the shopping mall to the line at the bank

Stephanie Westbrook is a U.S. citizen who has been living in Rome, Italy since 1991. She is active in the peace and social justice movements in Italy and spent the month of March in Washington DC participating in anti-war activities.

The unshakable truth in Haiti

Three months after the earthquake, **Jesse Hagopian** takes a critical look at relief efforts in Haiti

The boy was laid out on a cream-colored polyester blanket with part of his brain exposed where a brick had crushed his skull

Jesse Hagopian, a teacher in Seattle, was in Haiti with his wife, who works on HIV education in the country, and one-year-old son when the earthquake hit. They spent the next week trying to help with makeshift rescue and relief efforts.

Three months later, he looks at how the forces of poverty and genocide shaped not only his own personal background, but the lives of millions of Haitians who suffered through the quake.

Since my family and I survived the tremble – Creole for the 7.0 earthquake that devastated Haiti – I have returned home with unshakable thoughts of life and death.

Only two days before the quake, my son Miles and I had accompanied my wife, Sarah – who works as an HIV educator for health care workers – to Haiti. When the Enriquillo faultline shifted at 4:53 p.m. on January 12, 2010, our bed was sent across the hotel room, the other side of the building collapsed, and, as we would soon find out, Haiti was devastated.

We had one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) at our hotel, and when the word got out that there was a trained medical professional, people began flocking to what became a makeshift medical clinic for hundreds of badly injured Haitians. The EMT quickly deputized my wife and I as order-

lies in his driveway “emergency room,” and without any prior medical training, we assisted in whatever way we could – ripping sheets to use as bandages, setting splints, tying tourniquets.

It was during the second day after the quake that I witnessed, for the first time, someone die. This beautiful boy was about 8 years old, and I remember he was wearing a bright yellow shirt with a graphic of the sun rising over mountains. His father had worked all night, a translator relayed to us, digging him out of the concrete debris that had been their home. His son’s screams, which had served to guide rescuers to his location, had turned to irregular intervals of low moans by the time he reached us.

The boy was laid out on a cream-colored polyester blanket with part of his brain exposed where a brick had crushed his skull. His father knelt at his side blowing frantically into his mouth. The father was not administering CPR – I doubt he had any training for it. Rather, it was a devoted attempt to animate his son’s listless body with his own life force. Yet even as we began dressing his abrasions, the boy took his final breath.

The father, with a look of anguish that made me avert my eyes, quickly fled the area to grieve in seclusion, and the child’s motionless body lay on the blanket for some time before anyone could bring themselves to remove him.

I have since learned that some 270,000 other Haitians were also crushed to death by falling cement walls and ceilings – which were themselves a product of the crushing poverty in Haiti that leaves people with the barest of building materials.

Shaped by History

While this is the first time I have personally witnessed death, it is not the first time I have reflected on how mass death has played a role in shaping who I am. My family story – on both sides – is one of survival from some of history’s most merciless chapters.

My mother’s side of the family, on her father’s side, came from Armenia. Her grandfather, Ardash Hagopian, was already out of the country in 1915 when Turkey commenced its killing of 1.5 million Armenians. However, my great-grandfather’s first wife and kids were in Armenia at the time and did not survive what Armenians call “The Great Calamity” – a genocide widely recognized by scholars and nations alike, with the notable exceptions of the Turkish and U.S. governments.

My father is African American, and we trace our roots back to slaves on plantations in New Orleans, La., and Natchez, Miss. My ancestors, then, at some unrecorded point in history, survived the middle passage between Africa and America – a journey that inflicted the deaths of millions Africans.

The natural disaster I lived through in Haiti was, of course, different than these willful acts of mass extermination my ancestors endured so many years ago. The wreckage we saw was not the result of mortar shells. The hundreds of thousands who perished were not beaten to death, thrown overboard, marched to their death, or rounded up for the firing squad.

And yet, I cannot help but appreciate the analogy between the slaughter that my forebears survived and the bloodshed of the Haitian people.

On the third day after the earthquake, we drove around central Port-au-Prince and

soon realized that the Haitian people had been abandoned to catastrophe. The first thing we noticed was that everyone had their shirt pulled over their nose or was wearing a facemask to shield themselves from the stench of rotting bodies. Some who had managed to find the dead body of a relative ran through the streets with wooden coffins.

As I took in the sight of Haitians scrambling over toppled building – desperately trying to uncover loved ones with only their bare hands – I soon realized there were likely tens of thousands of living people still trapped in the wreckage.

In all of our hours of driving that day we didn’t see a single uniformed official – U.S., UN or otherwise – digging anyone out of the rubble or providing water for people on the verge of fatal dehydration. Of the many disturbing images that continue to invade my thoughts about that day, perhaps most distressing was the legion of armed UN troops who were guarding their collapsed headquarters, rather than attending to the relief effort.

The only help we saw from any government came in the form of cadaver removal, as bulldozers scooped scores of decaying bodies and hoisted them into the back of Mack trucks. It is hard to bring myself to estimate how many could have been saved if those who were marooned under slabs of fractured concrete, yet still alive, had received water on that critical third day after the quake.

We have heard multiple excuses for why the UN and the U.S., a mere 90 minutes away by plane, could not get the aid to the Haitian people in a timely manner. We were told the collapse of UN headquarters and the death of the top two officials made it difficult to launch an immediate relief effort.

While there can be no doubt that the UN personnel were dealing with losses of their own, this alone cannot explain the failure to act quickly to save Haitian lives. After all, the UN mission (dubbed MINUSTAH) had built up infrastructure since its occupation

Of the many disturbing images that continue to invade my thoughts about that day, perhaps most distressing was the legion of armed UN troops who were guarding their collapsed headquarters, rather than attending to the relief effort

Regrettably, the most prevalent explanation in the media for the sluggish delivery of aid was that authorities anticipated rioting by the violence-prone Haitian people

began in 2004 that included up to 6,700 military personnel, 622 police, 548 international civilian personnel, 154 United Nations volunteers and 995 local civilian staff.

Think about it from my perspective: When the quake hit, instead of shutting ourselves behind the hotel gate, we began that very evening helping in any way we could. Could not the UN, supplied with more than just bedsheets, have done this, too?

The media reported the U.S. government could not help any faster than it did because the Haitian airport was damaged, slowing the arrival of goods. Granted, but this does not account for why aid could not immediately be flown to the other two airports on the island, located in the Dominican Republic.

Some accounts said impassable roads prevented aid dispersal in a timely manner. But we drove around the neighborhoods near the epicenter and found the roads surprisingly passable.

Racist narrative

Regrettably, the most prevalent explanation in the media for the sluggish delivery of aid was that authorities anticipated rioting by the violence-prone Haitian people. This well-worn racist narrative attempted to transform Haitians from victims of an earthquake into perpetrators of a security threat.

However, my wife and I didn't see a single instance of rioting or violence in the week we were there. As Latin American commentator Nelson Valdes reported, "The United Nations and the U.S. authorities on the ground are telling those who directly want to deliver help not to do so because they might be attacked by 'hungry mobs.'"

When asked why the U.S. had not used its C-130 transport planes to drop supplies in Port-au-Prince, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, "An air drops will simply lead to riots."

With the ready-made talking point of the necessity to maintain order, the U.S. government failed to rush aid to the neediest and

proceeded to flood the country with troops – totaling some 20,000 at the peak – working to secure strategic sites.

Alain Joyandet, the French minister responsible for humanitarian relief in Haiti, charged the U.S. with treating this as a military operation rather than an aid mission. Joyandet told the *Daily Telegraph* that he had been involved in an argument with a U.S. commander in the airport's control tower over the flight plan for a French evacuation flight, saying, "This is about helping Haiti, not about occupying Haiti."

Guido Bertolaso, head of Italy's civil protection department, said that the U.S.-led efforts were a "pathetic" failure – which comes as no surprise to people aware that President Obama named George W. Bush, who left countless Black people on rooftops in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, as one of the overseers for the U.S. aid mission.

I should disclose that I am not a scholar of genocide studies, I do not hold an international law degree, and I do not have the qualifications to make a precise determination whether the mass death in Haiti qualifies under the technical definition of genocide.

My speculation on the topic is informed only by my eyewitness of neglect, my understanding of my ancestors' history, and my reading of the UN's definition ratified at the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. The genocide convention document reads in part:

Article II: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

To my untrained eye, what I saw in the streets of Port-au-Prince – prioritization of nonexistent security considerations resulting in the deliberate withholding of life-saving water and food – seems to qualify under Article II, Section C.

This was punctuated upon my evacuation from Haiti on Sunday, January 17, when I saw a virtual cornucopia of food, water and medical equipment piled up on the tarmac and not being transported out of the airport to the people in need. More than two months after the quake, Canada Haiti Action Network coordinator, Roger Annis reports that the anemic relief effort continues:

“The Partners In Health agency estimates some 1.3 million people were left without shelter by the earthquake. The majority of those people still do not have adequate emergency shelter nor access to potable water, food and medical attention...”

“Two leading directors of Doctors Without Borders have called the relief effort to date ‘broadly insufficient.’ In a March 5 interview, they say that, ‘The lack of shelter and the hygiene conditions represent a danger not only in terms of public health, but they are also an intolerable breach of the human dignity of all these people.’ They call conditions in the makeshift refugee camps where many survivors still struggle to survive ‘shocking’ and ‘shameful.’”

Yet despite the colossal failure to help the Haitian people in their greatest hour of need, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Ken Merten boasted, “In terms of humanitarian aid delivery ... frankly, it’s working really well, and I believe that this will be something that people will be able to look back on in the future as a model for how we’ve been able to sort ourselves out as donors on the ground and responding to an earthquake.”

Deceitful words

Arundhati Roy delivered a speech on genocide, in Istanbul, Turkey, on January 18, 2008

– commemorating the first anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink, editor of the Turkish-Armenian paper – that foretold Ambassador Marten’s deceitful words. She said:

“Genocides are often denied for the same set of reasons genocides are prosecuted. Economic determinism marinated in racial/ethnic/religious/national discrimination. Crudely, the lowering or raising of the price of a barrel of oil (or a ton of uranium), permission granted for a military base, or the opening up of a country’s economy could be the decisive factor when governments adjudicate on whether a genocide did or did not occur...”

“Since the United States is the richest and most powerful country in the world, it has assumed the privilege of being the World’s Number One Genocide Denier. It continues to celebrate Columbus Day, the day Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, which marks the beginning of a holocaust that wiped out millions of Native Indians.

“In fact, Columbus Day, a federal holiday, commemorates the man who perpetrated genocide against the original inhabitants of Haiti. As Randall Robinson recounts:

“ ‘Within 50 years of Columbus’s arrival, the Tainos and their ancient egalitarian culture had all but disappeared. Most died of diseases brought to the Americas from Europe by Columbus and his crewmen. The rest were slaughtered by the Great Discoverer, his brothers, Diego and Bartolome, Spanish colonists and soldiers armed with crossbows, pikes, lances, arguebuses and killer dogs.

“Columbus’ slaughtering of the Tainos people is an early genocide the U.S. denies, but it certainly is not the last. His Nobel Peace Prize notwithstanding, President Obama is lobbying Congress against allowing a vote to come to the floor to recognize the Armenian Genocide for fear of alienating Turkish allies that play a critical role in the U.S.’s strategy for controlling the Middle East.

The CEOs of five major American aero-

I saw a virtual cornucopia of food, water and medical equipment piled up on the tarmac and not being transported out of the airport to the people in need

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

I wonder if my West African grandmother, having survived the Middle Passage, would have viewed the deaths of so many West African descendents as “natural” if she had been by my side to see the streets lined with bodies in Port-au-Prince?

space and defense companies – Lockheed Martin Corp., Boeing Co., Raytheon Co., United Technologies Corp., and Northrop Grumman Corp – sent a joint letter [9] to the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee urging Obama to reject an Armenian Genocide resolution, in order not to jeopardize their sales to Turkey.

Given this well-coordinated campaign to conceal Turkey’s genocide of the Armenian people 95 years ago this month, I suppose I should not be surprised at the U.S.’s capacity to cover up its own recent role in the willful neglect of Haitians.

The earthquake in Haiti is regarded as the worst natural disaster in modern history and in one sense it is: nearly 24,000 people per million of Haiti’s population died with the closest comparable earthquake taking 4,000 per million in the 1972 earthquake that struck Nicaragua.

Yet I wonder how my grandfather Ardash would judge this profound loss of life? Having lost his own family to genocide, I wonder what Ardash might he have said to the father of the boy who I was trying to save? I wonder if my West African grandmother, having survived the Middle Passage, would have viewed the deaths of so many West African descendents as “natural” if she had been by my side to see the streets lined with bodies in Port-au-Prince?

While the U.S. attempts to throw the hundreds of thousands dead Haitians down the memory hole it is worth considering an old Haitian proverb: Bay kou bliye, pote mak sonje: “Those who give the blows forget; those who bear the scars remember.” **CT**

Jesse Hagopian is a teacher in Seattle.

This essay originally appeared at www.socialistworker.com



One of the first to grasp the potential of the internet for photography, **Report Digital** continues the tradition of critical realism, documenting the contradictions of global capitalism and the responses to it, both in the UK and internationally

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Liberation's lies

Felicity Arbuthnot contrasts high-minded military ethics with the mowing down of innocent civilians from an Apache helicopter

"All murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets." – Voltaire.

"God Bless America" does not mean: "God Damn Everyone Else." – Bumper sticker.

The litany of war crimes in the name of "liberation", "ridding the country of tyrants", spreading "democracy", has become the language of blackest satire. Even death has been "rebranded". The shredded, dismembered, decapitated, incinerated, old and young, are not "lost", "mourned", "passed on", "in a better place", "with their God". They are "a mistake", "collateral damage", or a "regrettable incident."

The litany of industrial scale "incidents", are often compounded by further "regrettable" wholesale annihilation of the funeral gathering. The "mistakes" seldom have names. They are not little Aisha, Ali, Ziad, Naira, or indeed Umm Naira or Umm Ali (Mother of) or Abu Ziad or Abu Aisha (father of.) Uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents too are simply the unaccounted. Those obliterated at baby naming ceremonies or weddings remain just that. Humanity deferred, by democracy delivered – with guns, grenades, hellfire missiles, and village and town erasing bunker busting obscenities.

Sometimes, as with bombed sheep, goats,

donkeys, bereaved relatives (if any left) are offered compensation. A McDonald's diner, scalded by black coffee, was awarded a million dollars. An Afghan or Iraqi life ranks along with the price of goats.

American life, however, is a "godly, righteous and sober" one, a precious thing, of shining worth, "wearing the white flower of a blameless" existence. Compare two incidents:

"It is the U.S. Army's most urgent alert and it is now ringing across the Arghandab Valley (Afghanistan) from the 82nd Airborne's Battalion Command to the smallest combat outpost: 'Soldier missing in action.'"

The alert was after a patrol was allegedly ambushed by the Taliban. Lt Jordan Ritenour tried to "persuade" Afghan Army recruits to join him on the search mission.

"We wanted you to come because an American died today," he tells them, his voice choking with frustration and emotion ... "A death for us is sacred," (adds) Sgt. Mason. "No effort will be spared to return that body to its family." (*Washington Times*, 5th April 2010.)

It has to be wondered what the Afghans thought, after nine years of seeing their country men, women and children, casually splattered towards infinity, by these invading adherents to the sanctity of life and death.

American life, however, is a "godly, righteous and sober" one, a precious thing, of shining worth, "wearing the white flower of a blameless" existence

DYING FOR FREEDOM

The transcript, for the bloodlust expressed, video game grasp of the enormity of sentencing a group of people to death – for walking casually down a quiet street, on a shimmering summer’s day – is an insight into inhumanity

The Afghans troops exhorted to accompany their American colleagues were living with them in the base, in line with instructions given by General Stanley McChrystal, in yet another hearts and minds initiative. They would thus have no doubt seen his television address shortly before, when he said, “We have shot an amazing number of people, but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat.” Further, “... to my knowledge, in the nine-plus months I’ve been here, not a single case where we have engaged in an escalation of force incident and hurt someone, has it turned out that the vehicle had a suicide bomb or weapons in it and, in many cases, had families in it.” But indeed, “stuff happens” and he continued: “That doesn’t mean I’m criticizing the people who are executing (sic) ...” it was a matter of taking it all “in perspective.” So much for “sacred.”

McChrystal’s chilling admission as to how inconsequential Afghan lives are to the occupying forces was compounded by the Nobel winning President’s confirmation of “... innocent victims we have killed so tragically in such amazing numbers.” He added, in mitigation of America’s litany of mass graves in the name of “humanitarian intervention,” “America’s sincere and shamed apology.”

On the day Sgt. Mason was explaining high minded US military ethics to the Afghan troops, Wikileaks released the video of another mass execution in central Baghdad, in July 2007. The transcript, for the bloodlust expressed, video game grasp of the enormity of sentencing a group of people to death – for walking casually down a quiet street, on a shimmering summer’s day – is an insight into inhumanity. The conversation between Apache helicopter pilots, in little over half an hour of planning and carrying out cold blooded assassinations, is an insight to a mindset arguably psychologically challenged.

As people wander below them, one pilot says, “I just estimate there’s probably about twenty of them.”

A few words, then, ““That’s a weapon.”
“Fucking prick.”

“Have individuals with weapons.”

“Yup, he’s got a weapon too.” The unaware jay walkers then become obscured by a building:

“Just fuckin’ once you get ‘em, just open ‘em up.”

“Let me know when you’ve got them.”

“Let’s shoot.”

“Light ‘em all up.”

“Come on, fire!”

“Keep shoot, keep shoot ...”

“Keep shoot.”

“Keep shoot.”

“Alright we engaged all eight individuals.”

“All right, hahaha, I hit (shot) ‘em ...”

“Got a bunch of bodies layin’ there.”

“All right, we got about, uh, eight individuals.”

“Yeah, we got one guy crawling around down there, but, uh, you know, we got, definitely got something.”

“We’re shooting some more.”

“Right.”

“You shoot, I’ll talk.”

“... Currently engaging approximately eight individuals, uh, KIA (killed in action) uh, RPGs, and AK 47s.”

“Oh, yeah, look at those dead bastards.”

“Nice.”

“Nice.”

“Good shoot.”

“Thank you.”

“There’s one guy moving down there but he’s uh, he’s wounded.”

“... we also have one individual, uh, appears to be wounded trying to crawl away.”

“He’s getting up.”

“I see you guys got that guy crawling right now on that curb.”

“Yeah, I got him. I put two rounds (30 mm cannon shells near him) and you guys were shooting over there too, so uh, we’ll see.”

“... we have a van that’s approaching and picking up the bodies.”

“Where ...?”

“Right there by the bodies.”
 “... request permission to engage.”
 “Picking up the wounded?”
 “Come on, let us shoot.”
 “... go ahead.”
 “I think the van’s disabled.”
 “Go ahead and shoot it.”
 “A vehicle appears to be disabled.”
 “There were approximately four to five individuals in the vehicle, moving bodies.”

Bradley fighting vehicles approach the scene.
 Comment from air:

“You should have a van in the middle of the road with about twelve to fifteen bodies.”

“Oh yeah, look at that, right through the windshield.”

“Ha, ha.”

“There were uh approximately four to five individuals in that truck, so I’m counting twelve to fifteen.”

“I think we whacked (killed) them all.”

That’s right, good.”

Then:

“... looks like we’ve got some slight movement from ah, the ah, van that was engaged.”

“Looks like a kid. Over.”

To more personnel on the ground:

“Got that big pile of bodies to the right, on the corner?”

“Got ‘em.”

“... It worked out pretty good.”

“I didn’t want those fuckers to run away and scatter.”

From ground:

“... One small child wounded.”

“... We need (to evacuate) this child ... she’s got a wound to the belly.”

“... Ah, damn, oh well.”

“Well it’s their fault for bringing their kids in to battle.”

Of colleagues:

“I think they just drove over a body.”

“Hey, hey!”

“Yeah!”

“Well, they’re dead, so.”

Before leaving a building is destroyed with Hellfire missiles. One Apache is short on fuel:

“We’re not even going to watch this fucking shit.”

Then:

“Firing.”

“There it goes! Look at that bitch go!”

“Patoosh!”

“Ah, sweet.”

“Nice missile.”

“Does it look good?”

“Sweet.”

“... building destroyed. Engaged with three hellfire missiles.”

The “rocket propelled grenade”, was, of course, the camera, belonging to Reuters photographer Namir-Noor Eldeen, who was killed, with his colleague, Reuters driver Saeed Chmagh. The camera was taken away by US soldiers. Another pitiless act on a merciless day.

Further, as Patrick Cockburn pointed out, in the (London) *Independent* (July 14, 2007) Reuters had bitterly complained to the US military about their treatment of its staff. In one letter, from Editor-in-Chief, David Schlesinger, to Senator John Warner, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee (26th September 2005) he cited “... a long parade of disturbing incidents whereby professional journalists have been killed, wrongfully detained, and/or illegally abused by US forces in Iraq”.

The letter says: “On January 2-5, 2004, three Reuters personnel were beaten, taunted, and degraded by US forces while being arbitrarily detained at (Forward Operating Base) Volturno and St Mere, near Fallujah.

“Soldiers laughed, taunted, abused, photographed and degraded them by forcing them to insert their fingers up their anuses and then lick them.”

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The scale the casual killing grounds, towns, cities and villages of Iraq have become, will undoubtedly take years to be fully accounted for – if ever. But the known and that which continues to come to light, already reveal crimes equalling history’s darkest, most shameful atrocities

A month before the July killings, “Operation Arrowhead Ripper” took place in Baquba, captol of Iraq’s Diyala governorate. At the time, I wrote:

“ ‘We are enveloping the enemy into a kill sack,’ said Command Sergeant Major Jeff Huggins from the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade, according to Reuters (23rd June.) A ‘kill sack’? Good luck America, when these sickos return home. Shutter the windows, barr the doors – and above all, lock up your daughters. Remember little Abeer al-Janabi, multiply raped in nearby in Mahmoudiya, her family shot and she and all burned to cover the evidence? Remember Abu Ghraib? And where else? Think rape, rape, rape, sodomy, sodomy, sodomy – think the furthest other reaches of the most bestial inhumanity to man, women and yes, children. Think of America’s finest selling the pictures of the dead, dying, defiled on the internet, in exchange for porn. Think also of chains of command. Where does the cover up start and how high does it go?

“ ‘We are not carpet bombing these things. People know if we get resistance from a house, we’ll take out that house and the people in it, but not the entire street.’”

“‘Things’, by the way, were Iraqis. Another military spokesman said there were deaths, ‘But they were only Iraqis.’”

Calculated Killings, not “Isolated Incidents.”

The scale the casual killing grounds, towns, cities and villages of Iraq have become, will undoubtedly take years to be fully accounted for – if ever. But the known and that which continues to come to light, already reveal crimes equalling history’s darkest, most shameful atrocities.

Also, not to be forgotten is (UK) Channel Four’s footage of a mirror image of the Baghdad massacre, near Fallujah in April 2004. An overview of tactics comments that, “ ... once they decided to bomb cities, they decided to accept the routine killing of civilians as the price for hitting their target.”

The Fallujah attack, on people fleeing the terrifying carnage being wrought on this “City of Mosques”, confirms again, that far from “making every effort” to avoid civilian casualties, killing is routine, noncholar, and apparently, fun:

“The pilot tells ground control he can see numerous individuals on the road.

“He asks if he should take them out? Instantly he’s told to take them out.

“The pilot locks the bomb guidance system onto the crowd running along the street. The pilot’s reaction: “Aw dude.”

“Overnight, Channel 4 News received the following e-mail:

“‘This video is indeed gun film footage from a US Air Force F-16 fighter. The mission was not “recent”, it was in April 2004. This was a close air support mission, flown by an F-16 Fighting Falcon in the Fallujah vicinity, and under the control of a Joint Terminal Attack Controller serving with ground forces in the area. The JTAC designated the target and confirmed the hit.’”

Dahr Jamail, reviewing a book of testimonies from Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) describes actions on the ground too of calculated, sadism and depravity or as ever, just the most casual of killings. One involves a woman “ ... carrying a huge bag ... heading towards us, so we lit her up with the Mark 19” (automatic grenade launcher.) Then, “ ... we realised that the bag was full of groceries. She had been trying to bring us food and we blew her to pieces.”

“‘One time they said to fire on all taxi-cabs.’ It was queried, ‘ Excuse me? Did I hear that right? Fire on all taxi cabs?’ The Lt Colonel responded, ‘You heard me, Trooper, fire on all taxi cabs.’ After that the town lit up, with all the units firing on all cars ...”

Corpses were run over with Humvees, with personnel stopping to take “trophy” pictures. “Pot shots were taken at cars that drove by ... not isolated incidents.” And “ ... marines (defecated) into MRE bags or urinated in bottles and throw them at children at the side of the road.” One veteran related that candy was given to Iraqi children be-

cause: “If the kids were round our vehicle” Iraqis would not attack.

The children were unwitting human shields.

If an Iraqi was accidentally shot, weapons or shovels were routinely (tossed) “on the body to make him look like an insurgent.”

Yet it is through soldiers speaking out, that truth of what was set in train by the lies and duplicity of the George W. Bush Administration and the Blair government is coming to light. The Wikileaks video, seemingly, also came from another courageous military whistle blower. The clock of political wickedness, which was not of their making, cannot be turned back, but their voices and actions are powerful ammunition toward holding those to account up the chain of command – both in the armed forces and politics.

Recently a video showed an address to a Conference, by another IVAW.

He was in the marines, during the November 2004 attack on Fallujah, described as one of the greatest crimes since the worst excesses of the Second World War. He described how they brought down buildings (and those covering in them), detonated, killed, decimated. He was a leader and ordered his men to breach a building with explosive, then “clear” it. As they surged through it, he went in to a ground floor room. There he found two children of six and a young teen, struck dumb with terror, their young father, lying near death, on the floor, from his injuries and the mother, injured, and beside herself. In that moment, he said the enormity of the wrongs literally felled him.

He leaned against the wall and tears streamed down his face. The young woman approached him, put her hand against his

cheek and just said: “Insh’allah, Insh’allah ..” What God wills. He broke down again as he related the story, then said: “Now, my duty is to speak out.”

Since this latest Baghdad outrage has been exposed, the silence of, “We’re gonna git him dead or alive”, former President George W. Bush; President Barack Hussein “Nobel” Obama; unelected Prime Minister Gordon Brown (who wrote the cheques as Chancellor of the Exchequer for this illegality); Church leaders – even of the self styled “Vicar of Baghdad”, the former Peace Envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Coventry, Canon Andrew White – has been deafening.

Orwellian Middle East “Peace Envoy”, co-architect of the colonial foray in Mesopotamia, Charles Anthony Lynton Blair QC., is mute – and on Safari in Africa. The British Government’s “Human Rights Advisor”, Ann Clwyd, another cheer leader for the Iraq’s plight, is also missing in (in)action.

Incidentally, the most vociferous, seemingly blood hungry, of the pilots call-name was “CrazyHorse.”

Crazyhorse was a legendary 19th century Lakota Indian, who fought against the US government to “preserve the lands and traditions of the Lakota way of life.”

In December 2007, the Lakota Nation launched independence from the US, declaring: “Our young want to live, not just survive, or crawl, or be mascots.” What towering ironies. **CT**

Felicity Artbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, her coverage of which was nominated for several awards

He found two children of six and a young teen, struck dumb with terror, their young father, lying near death, on the floor, from his injuries and the mother, injured, and beside herself. In that moment, he said the enormity of the wrongs literally felled him

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT
<http://coldtype.net/joe.html>

Trying to explain the plunder and the crime

The outrage against the financial crime of the century has been diffused by its sheer complexity and lack of a readily understood narrative, says **Danny Schechter**

Grenier tries to speak calmly through his self-righteous indignation over people finding fault with his beloved country's mission, one he should know well as a CIA employee

In politics, it's always all about the narrative, about how issues are framed. We ask ourselves how we can be experiencing the largest economic meltdown in decades with millions out of work and millions more losing their homes, and yet, have such a tepid mass mobilization or ongoing response from the progressive world even as every pollster finds public anger registering on the Richter scale.

To understand this paradox, we need to reflect on how most of us define the problem. To this day, there has not been an aggressive investigation of whom and what brought down the system à la the Pecora Commission appointed by FDR. Instead we have a Financial Inquiry Commission, a wimpy ineffectual body that can't get its act together.

The *New York Times*, which hailed its appointment, now buries its de facto obit way back in the business section, noting it has "been hobbled by delays and internal disagreements and a lack of focus."

It took a Senate committee grilling of Goldman Sachs executives to throw down the gauntlet between Main Street and Wall Street. That was preceded by an SEC suit alleging the defrauding of investors and now a possible criminal prosecution.

At the same time, the bookshelves are filling up with volumes of complicated treatises on the complexities of derivatives, risky profit models and credit default swaps. The practi-

tioners of the "dismal science" of economics are having a field day with long-winded dissertations that fail to engage the popular imagination.

We had a word for this when I worked in network television — MEGO, standing for "My Eyes Glaze Over!"

More popular writers are spinning catchy "yarns" like "The Big Short" which explains the meltdown with psychologically-driven, character-based storytelling to how deluded everyone on Wall Street was. That leaves us feeling superior to the dunderheads who lost us trillions and then laughed all the way to their mansions in the Hamptons.

Hahahahah!

Missing is a hardnosed look at the financial crisis as a crime story — an approach that allows for morality as well as indignation, and resonates with public anger. It touches the nerve that most people feel. That's why I have made a film, "Plunder: The Crime of Our Time," out on DVD from Disinfo and a companion book detailing my argument, *The Crime Of Our Time*. (See Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com)

I am not alone.

Former bank examiner William Black focuses on looting and CEO fraud. He helped send over a thousand bankers to prison during the S&L crisis in the 1980's.

Sen. Ted Kaufman of Delaware, the state where most of our corporations are regis-

tered, says categorically the whole crisis rests on a foundation of crime.

Even Alan Greenspan admitted in his all-too-polite exchange with that government financial inquiry that resembles a Princeton seminar, “if you don’t have enforcement, and a lot of that stuff was just plain fraud, you’re not coming to grips with the issue.”

Of course, this “maestro” didn’t go into detail on “a lot of that stuff.”

Billionaire investor Jim Chanos does, expressing surprise that there have been so few prosecutions and perp walks.

Mostly, what we are watching is an obtuse debate about banks that are “too big to fail,” not too big to jail. Very little of the discourse speaks in terms of the victims — the millions of families now without breadwinners or homes.

Systemic Failure

Most of the coverage looks up at CEOs, not down at the people whom the CEOs — and their businesses — robbed by design, as Bob Dylan once put it, “not with a gun but a fountain pen.”

Sometimes, we don’t see what’s in front of our faces. No one who has followed the details of the catastrophe can deny that a financial failure was facilitated by the media failure to follow its trajectory and detail its criminality, causing inattention and denial within a distracted public, including its activist wing.

When most of us think of crime, we think of gangsters, not banksters, wrong-doers who can be shamed, named and if possible prosecuted. Conditioned by years of movie-going and TV watching, we look for bad guys, individuals, not institutions with well-elaborated schemes designed to transfer your wealth to their vaults.

In that respect, Bernie Madoff was the perfect villain, a poster child for financiers gone wild. Who doesn’t want to kick a “Ponzi King” when he’s down? Alas, Madoff’s \$65 billion dollar fraud was child’s play when compared to what the bigger firms pulled off.

There is another frame, which has yet to be adopted by the Left or the mainstream media.

It was articulated simply by Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, a publication more at home with Groucho Marx than Karl.

Carter wrote of the meltdown: “[This] may well turn out to be greatest non-violent crime against humanity in history ... never before have so few done so much to so many.”

This is the way I came to see the problem as I followed the money and examined how it was made. We are talking about what’s known as a criminal enterprise, a cabal, not simply a few high profile marauders.

It is the kind of crime that needs to be prosecuted under the RICO laws that not only recognize but go after real world, not imaginary, criminal conspiracies.

I document three interconnected rings in a circus spawned by what’s called our FIRE economy. F for Finance, I for Insurance and RE for Real Estate for the uninitiated.

First, there was the housing bubble built around what the FBI called an “epidemic of mortgage fraud.”

Then, there was the bundling, securitization and resale of those shady loans worldwide with phony assessments of their “asset” values by ratings agencies that were on the payroll.

And, finally, there were insurance scams by companies like AIG that guaranteed payments to those that knew there would be massive defaults and foreclosures. The insurance boys and the bankers leveraged their investments into pyramids of trillions with bogus algorithms that even they couldn’t understand.

This created a system staffed by tens of thousands of “professionals” who pumped out phony products on an assembly line, legitimating them with the imprimatur of financial institutions that practiced voodoo accounting. As James Kwak explained on *BaselineScenario*, for banks,

“There is no contradiction between fleecing customers and making lots of profits (which is what makes you safe and sound).

“(a) Originate bad loans; (b) Pocket fees; (c) Sell bad loans to an investment bank for distribution; (d) Repeat.”

It is about murder, as witnessed by the video and regardless of the mission imperatives, it is still murder. Not even collateral murder, murder straight and simple

PLUNDERING FOR PROFIT / 1

One thing missing from all these discussions was a statement from the Iraqis, unfortunately all who appeared to have died in the “heat” of the “battle”, the only heat coming from the gunship and the sun

Inside the industry, the term of art was “extraction,” another way of saying looting. A risky super-leveraged capital structure was built with no objections from politicians who took their cut and regulators who seem to have been hired to look the other way.

My learning curve on these issues took off back in 2005 with research for the film “In Debt We Trust,” somewhat prophetically subtitled “America Before The Bubble Bursts.” It warned of what could happen to our economy citing far more enlightened seers than myself.

We examined the growing wall of debt encouraged by massive predatory lending and mindless consumption.

We worried about the financialization of the commanding heights of the economy, a concentration of wealth and power in a Wild-West-like financial services industry that came to dominate the economy with 40 percent of all corporate profits.

The wall I later ran up against was more than a Street; it was a tower of indifference and denial, even on the Left.

I was asked: How can you be so negative about what was then an economic boom enriching so many? Was I a doom and gloomer, or an alarmist? “Hasn’t your apartment has gone up in value? Relax!”

I soon felt ignored and marginalized when other, perhaps more “sexy” issues, (mostly partisan and political and often personality driven) drove the public discourse. No wonder, most progressive activists got turned off.

What Went Wrong?

As analysts finally got around to explaining the crisis, their lists of what went wrong ignored predatory lending and white-collar crime.

Challenging this view were professor/authors like Michael Hudson, a former chief economist at Chase Bank (and, as it turns out, a cousin of the late Leon Trotsky, a relationship of which Chase was probably unaware).

He told me: “In practice, fraud is what has brought down almost every single expansion, every bank take over, the saving-and-loan cri-

sis in the 1980s, the stock market crisis in the 1920s...”

In fact, a closer look at what happened in these events reveals substantial corporate larceny, a term widely used by the late John Kenneth Galbraith in his recounting of the Great Depression.

It seems as if this lesson falls victim to amnesia, or perhaps the techniques are just passed along with a wink and a nod from generation to generation.

For every journalist willing to acknowledge pervasive criminality, others obscure the issue, as in a CNN Money article that asks, “Who caused the financial crisis, villains or jerks?” (Predictably, they leaned towards the latter.) Apparently, in TimeWarner’s world, you can’t be both?

So, yes, we need a jailout, not just a bailout, but we need more than that.

Financial industry insider Max Wolf told me, “I think you will see a bunch of people get some prison sentences. More importantly, and a bigger question to me is, will we see a structural change or will we go through a long, bad recession while we waste our money struggling to rebuild an unsustainable system that should have never been erected in the first place?”

So far, we haven’t seen those sentences, nor does it appear we will ever see those structural changes at the rate change is going, *The Crime of Our Time* goes on.

And I go on trying to get attention. So far the mainstream media that I used to work for has looked the other way.

That’s not quite true. I was booked on “The Happy Hour” on Fox Business News until the producer called to say that he as unhappy and would have to cancel my appearance because the network’s polit-bureau, the “Media Relations Department,” stepped in to censor me because I was not politically reliable enough.

At the same time, there was one delicious irony: the first major media organization to interview me was Rupert Murdoch’s Wall Street Journal. Finally, they found an anti-Wall Street film that’s “not just for Michael Moore fans.” Amen.

CT

Filmmaker and News Dissector
Danny Schechter
edits Mediachannel.org. He’s written 11 books, and made 20 films
Comments to Dissector@mediachannel.org.
For more on his film, visit plunderthecrimeofourtime.com

Zero tolerance on workplace slaughter

Windfall rewards give CEOs an incentive to put worker lives at risk. It's time for a fundamental rethink, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

In a perverse sort of way, CEOs like Don Blankenship, the chief executive at Massey Energy, the owner of the West Virginia mine where 29 coal miners died last month, perform a vital public service. They lay bare, with their brutal behavior and chilling candor, just how deadly our current corporate order can be.

Before last month, at least outside West Virginia, Blankenship toiled in relative obscurity. That would suddenly change once reporters, after the explosion at Massey's Upper Big Branch mine, asked the CEO about the mine's long history of safety violations. Americans the nation over shuddered at his response.

"Violations," the Massey chief unapologetically pronounced, "are unfortunately a normal part of the mining process."

At Upper Big Branch, we soon learned, "normal" meant plentiful. Mine safety officials last year cited the mine for over 500 violations – and 53 more just last April. In the two months before the blast, the mine's methane levels had run so dangerously high that miners had to evacuate three separate times.

Overall, adds the *Washington Post*, "significant" safety violations at Upper Big Branch have been running "11 times the national average."

Massey under CEO Blankenship isn't just racking up safety violations. The coal com-

pany, the nation's fourth largest, is aggressively appealing citations to court, part of an industry-wide counterattack against new federal safety rules enacted in 2006, after 12 miners died in the West Virginia mining town of Sago.

In 2009, Massey collected 50 serious safety violations and appealed 37, a pattern, Rep. George Miller charged at a recent hearing, that threatens to "render the federal efforts to hold mine operators accountable meaningless."

Massey CEO Blankenship has, over the years, devoted substantial time and treasure to keeping mine operators unaccountable. In 2004 he spent \$3 million to knock an incumbent off the West Virginia Supreme Court. The Blankenship-blessed winner went on to supply the decisive vote in the state high court rulings that negated a \$50 million jury verdict against Massey.

Labor leaders consider Blankenship the "main reason" why West Virginia's mines face little union oversight, on safety or anything else. Once 95 percent organized, the state's mines now run overwhelmingly non-union.

For environmentalists, Blankenship ranks as the nation's fiercest promoter of stripping away mountaintops to get at coal seams. As a U.S. Chamber of Commerce director, the Massey top exec has also emerged as a key ringleader among climate change deniers.

Labor leaders consider Blankenship the "main reason" why West Virginia's mines face little union oversight, on safety or anything else. Once 95 percent organized, the state's mines now run overwhelmingly nonunion

These outsized rewards give Blankenship all the wherewithal he needs to continue distorting the democratic process in West Virginia and Washington

Meanwhile, the members of Massey's corporate board of directors remain absolutely tickled with Blankenship's "performance" as CEO. Late this past December, they signed him to a new two-year pay deal.

The old deals hadn't been too shabby. In 2005, Blankenship pulled in nearly \$34 million, "roughly four times the industry standard," notes the New York Times. He followed that up, relate Associated Press reports, with over \$17.5 million in 2006 and \$23.7 million more in 2007. Blankenship's take-home would dip to \$19.7 million in 2008, and Massey hasn't yet released figures for 2009.

The new deal dishes Blankenship \$83,222 per month in base salary for 2010 and 2011, as much as \$10 million more each year in cash incentives, plus a tidy pile of "performance-based" stock incentives, not to mention retirement benefits and perks "including, but not limited to, use of the Company's airplanes."

These outsized rewards give Blankenship all the wherewithal he needs to continue distorting the democratic process in West Virginia and Washington. More importantly, these indecently lavish rewards give Blankenship a continuing incentive to behave indecently, to put miners at risk by cutting corners to speed production and meet his "maximum bonus" metrics.

Safety, to be sure, does appear as one of the "performance" standards in the pay deal Blankenship signed in December. In fact, safety has been one of his "performance" benchmarks almost all along. That sounds somewhat responsible, on the part of the Massey Energy board of directors, until you look more closely.

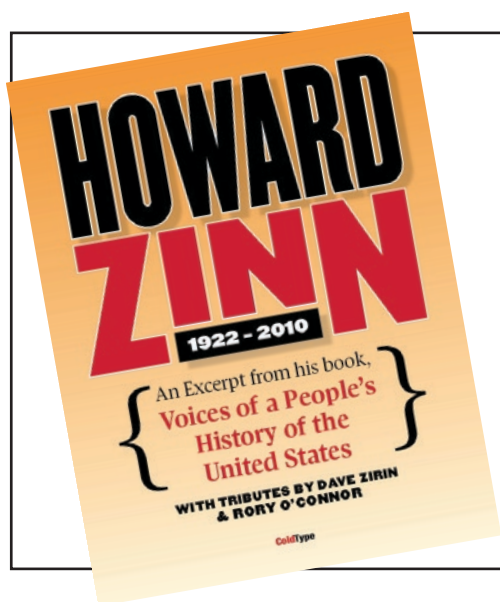
In 2007, for instance, safety turned out to count for only 10 percent of the criteria Blankenship needed to meet to grab his pay incentives. All the other criteria involved pumping coal out fast and maximizing corporate earnings.

And Massey's safety standard itself, "Non-Fatal Days Lost," doesn't exactly qualify as a "zero tolerance" stance against death in the mines. This "NFDL" standard merely multiplies "the number of employee work-related accidents times 200,000 hours, divided by the total employee hours worked." Death doesn't factor in.

In other words, miners can die and Blankenship's "performance" can still shine.

That's the magic – and the horror – of "performance-based" executive pay. Enhance shareholder value, all else will be forgiven. **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati is editor of TooMuch Online – www.toomuchonline.org – and author of *Greed And Good* (Apex Press)*



PAYING TRIBUTE TO HOWARD ZINN

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

www.coldtype.net/index.mar10.html

The Pentagon Papers are public this time

There's no secrecy, the lies have already been exposed. But no one seems to care, writes **David Swanson**

If a new Daniel Ellsberg were to release a new pile of Pentagon Papers exposing the lies behind the Afghanistan War, or even the past few decades of misdeeds by our country in that one, the result would differ from what happened to Ellsberg in a number of stark ways. No newspaper would touch it. The whistleblower would go to prison. Little of substance would be added to what we already know and tolerate. Nobody would be impeached. And no war would end.

These thoughts occurred to me for the second time on when I had occasion to watch for the second time the film “The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers,” when the Naro Cinema in Norfolk, Va., asked me to speak and lead a discussion following the screening.

In the movie, Ellsberg recounts his experience of trying to choose a patrol to go out with in Vietnam in order to experience the war for himself. He learns that all the maps of night patrols passed around in the Pentagon, even to high-level staff like himself, are pure fiction, that the U.S. troops stay home at night, when the entire nation is owned by the Viet Cong.

Following this year's glorious victory over the fictional city of Marja in Afghanistan, the Taliban still controls that rural area by night, and cooperation with the occupiers

is the surest way of getting yourself killed. Sounds at least similar, right? It's not. What was happening in Vietnam was kept from the American people. What is happening in Afghanistan is in newspapers and available online.

In the film, Ellsberg tells us about flying in a plane with Secretary of So-Called Defense Robert McNamara and having a conversation in which McNamara argues that the war has gone from bad to worse. Then McNamara gets off the plane and tells the press that the war is improving and things are looking up. Our ambassador in Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry recently wrote to President Obama about the hopelessness of the war in Afghanistan, and then lied about rosy progress to the United States Congress. See the parallel? There isn't one. Nobody knew what McNamara had said on that plane. Eikenberry's statements are public.

Stubborn president

In the film we see President Lyndon Johnson stubborn as a donkey in his determination to “win” in Vietnam, and we now know that the Pentagon understood there was no possible way to do that. Today we see the same approach from the White House and its servile court of congressional jesters, but it's public knowledge that military experts believe there's no possible way to win. The National Security Advisor says more troops

What was happening in Vietnam was kept from the American people. What is happening in Afghanistan is in newspapers and available online

Our paid assassins told the *LA Times*, in regard to moving their focus from Iraq to Afghanistan: “Hunting season is over in Iraq”

will just be swallowed up. Top generals say hundreds of thousands of troops would be needed, and that civilian efforts would be needed at a level four times higher than the military effort. There is no serious dispute that the war in Afghanistan cannot possibly be “won” and that the entire “global war on terror” has produced a global increase in terror. The Pentagon acknowledges that the enemy in the war, Al Qaeda, is not in the nation where the war is happening. Let me repeat that: the enemy ISN'T THERE. This is nothing like President Johnson's situation. When he sent troops to Vietnam, he pretended it would make a difference. When President Obama sent 21,000 troops and 5,000 mercenaries to Afghanistan last year, he did it for its own sake, saying he would later try to devise a strategy for the war.

Ellsberg is shown in footage from the time of the Pentagon Papers' release saying that he thought the lesson to be learned was that the president must not be allowed to run the country without the Congress or the public.

Yet, we now have members of congress who claim to be “opponents” or “critics” of the war who explain their votes to fund it by saying they want to obey the President. In a recent Senate committee hearing we watched Republican senators ask the Attorney General to violate the Constitution, and Democratic senators support allowing the president to comply with the law if he chooses, even arguing that complying with the law should be acceptable because President George W. Bush sometimes did so.

John Dean makes an appearance in the film. He came to believe that Bush's White House was far more abusive than Nixon's, and he predicted that Bush's successor would be one of two things, either the best or the worst president in history. He, or she, would either undo the damage and prosecute the crimes, or protect the criminals and continue the abuses. Ellsberg was active in the campaign to impeach Bush and Cheney. He argued that the impeachment campaign against Nixon facilitated the pas-

sage of progressive legislation and helped to end the Vietnam War.

Congress let Bush walk away, and we are left with a president who claims the powers of illegal war, murder, lawless imprisonment, torture, warrantless spying, and unprecedented secrecy and legal immunity. What's left to expose? We know the drones mostly kill innocent people, and that we are the illegal aggressor against all of those we kill. We know the night raids murder more people now than the drones. We know that the leading cause of death for U.S. troops is suicide. We know that we are going into financial debt and making ourselves less safe. Our paid assassins told the *LA Times*, in regard to moving their focus from Iraq to Afghanistan: “Hunting season is over in Iraq.” If you were going to blow a whistle, where the hell would you blow it?

That's not a rhetorical question. There is an answer. You would blow it on the internet. And if enough of them are blown, if enough people speak out, highlight atrocities, and refuse to cooperate with evil, it will make a difference. One whistleblower might not have as much impact anymore. We need deep reforms in our communications system and our election system, so we are playing with one hand tied behind our backs. But a thousand one-handed people can do anything.

Until we pass a whistleblowers' bill of rights and a media shield, and enforce them, we should be building a fund and a legal services organization to support and protect whistleblowers. There may not be a dangerous man left anywhere in government, given the openness of our public crimes. But there is still a dangerous group of men and women yet to be brought together, yet to grasp the superior and more enjoyable and rewarding life Ellsberg has led since he stepped out of line 39 years ago. **CT**

*David Swanson is the author of **Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union**, published by Seven Stories Press*

Warmongers of the world, unite

John Pilger asks if there is any difference between Australian and British leaders when it comes to attitudes to war

Is there any difference between Australia's leaders and the three front-runners in Britain's election when it comes to attitudes to war?

Staring at the vast military history section of the airport shop, I had a choice: the derring-do of psychopaths or scholarly tomes with their illicit devotion to the cult of organised killing. There was nothing I recognised from reporting war. Nothing on the spectacle of children's limbs hanging in trees and nothing on the burden of shit in your trousers. War is a good read. War is fun. More war, please.

On 25 April, the day before I flew out of Australia, I sat in a bar beneath the great sails of the Sydney Opera House. It was Anzac Day, the 95th anniversary of the invasion of Ottoman Turkey by Australian and New Zealand troops at the behest of British imperialism. The landing was an incompetent stunt of blood sacrifice conjured by Winston Churchill, yet it is celebrated in Australia as an unofficial national day. The ABC evening news always comes live from the sacred shore at Gallipoli, where, this year, as many as 8,000 flag-wrapped Antipodeans listened, dewy-eyed, to the Australian governor general, Quentin Bryce, who is the Queen's viceroy, describe the point of pointless mass killing. It was, she said, all about a "love of nation, of service, of family, the love we allow ourselves to receive. [It is

a love that] rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And it never fails."

You'll be a man, my son

Of all the attempts at justifying state murder I can recall, this drivel of DIY therapy, clearly aimed at the young, takes the blue riband. Not once did Bryce honour the fallen with the two words that the survivors of 1915 brought home with them: "Never again." Not once did she refer to a truly heroic anti-conscription campaign, led by women, that stemmed the flow of Australian blood in the First World War, the product not of a gormlessness that "believes all things", but of anger in defence of life.

The next item on the TV news was the Australian defence minister, John Faulkner, with the troops in Afghanistan. Bathed in the light of a perfect sunrise, he made the Anzac connection to the illegal invasion of Afghanistan in which, on 12 February last year, Australian soldiers killed five children. No mention was made of them. On cue, this was followed by an item that a war memorial in Sydney had been "defaced by men of Middle Eastern appearance". More war, please.

In the bar of the Opera House, a young man wore campaign medals that were not his. That is the fashion now. Smashing his beer glass on the floor, he stepped over the mess, which was cleaned up by another

The landing was an incompetent stunt of blood sacrifice conjured by Winston Churchill, yet it is celebrated in Australia as an unofficial national day

REMEMBER THIS

In this, the ninth year of the thoroughly Edwardian invasion of Afghanistan, more than two-thirds of the home populations of the invaders want their troops to get out of where they have no right to be

young man who the TV newsreader would say was of Middle Eastern appearance. Once again, war is a fashionable extremism for those suckered by the Edwardian notion that a man needs to prove himself “under fire” in a country whose people he derides as “gooks” or “ragheads” or simply “scum”. (The current public inquiry in London into the torture and murder of an Iraqi hotel receptionist, Baha Mousa, by British troops has heard that “the attitude held” was that “all Iraqis were scum”.)

There is a hitch. In this, the ninth year of the thoroughly Edwardian invasion of Afghanistan, more than two-thirds of the home populations of the invaders want their troops to get out of where they have no right to be. This is true of Australia, the United States, Britain, Canada and Germany. What this says is that, behind the media façade of politicised ritual – such as the parade of coffins through Wootton Bassett – millions of people are trusting their own critical and moral intelligence and ignoring propaganda that has militarised contemporary history, journalism and parliamentary politics – Australia’s Labor prime minister, Kevin Rudd, for instance, describes the military as his country’s “highest calling”.

Here in Britain, Polly Toynbee anoints the war criminal Tony Blair as “the perfect emblem for his people’s own contradictory whims”. No, he was the perfect emblem for a liberal intelligentsia prepared cynically to indulge his crime. That is the unsaid of the British election campaign, along with the fact that 77 per cent of the British people want the troops home. In Iraq, duly forgotten, what has been done is a holocaust. More than a million people are dead and four mil-

lion have been driven from their homes. Not a single mention has been made of them in the entire campaign. Rather, the news is that Blair is Labour’s “secret weapon”.

All three party leaders are warmongers. Nick Clegg, the darling of former Blair lovers, says that, as prime minister, he will “participate” in another invasion of a “failed state” provided there is “the right equipment, the right resources”. His one reservation is the standard genuflection towards a military now scandalised by a colonial cruelty of which the Baha Mousa case is but one of many.

For Clegg, as for Brown and Cameron, the horrific weapons used by British forces, such as cluster bombs, depleted uranium and the Hellfire missile, which sucks the air out of its victims’ lungs, do not exist. The limbs of children in trees do not exist. This year alone, Britain will spend £4bn on the war in Afghanistan. That is what Brown and Cameron almost certainly intend to cut from the health service.

Edward S Herman explained this genteel extremism in his essay “The Banality of Evil”. There is a strict division of labour, ranging from the scientists working in the laboratories of the weapons industry, to the intelligence and “national security” personnel who supply the paranoia and “strategies”, to the politicians who approve them. As for journalists, our task is to censor by omission and make the crime seem normal for you, the public. For, above all, it is your understanding and your awakening that are feared. **CT**

John Pilger recently received the Sydney Peace Prize. His latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now available in paperback

READ THE ORIGINAL TABLOID ISSUES
OF **COLDTYPE** MAGAZINE

<http://coldtype.net/old.html>

Putting the Pope on trial

George Monbiot believes international law presents a radical challenge to the powerful: They should be judged by the same standards as the rest of us

Confession and repentance are not among the Christian virtues practised by the Pope. He has apologised for the rape of children by Catholic priests in Ireland; but this is one of the few paedophilia scandals now shaking the Church in which neither he nor members of his inner circle were involved. He condemned the Irish bishops' "grave errors of judgement" and "failures of leadership", but of his own grave errors and failures – in Munich, Wisconsin and California – he says not a word, except to dismiss the issue as "petty gossip". His response to this scandal reminds you of the origins of the verb to pontificate.

Shut out of his closed, self-regulated world, the victims of sacerdotal rape could only rage in frustration. Until now.

Last month the authors Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens announced that they've asked lawyers to prepare a case against the Pope. In the *Guardian* Geoffrey Robertson, the barrister they are consulting, explained that senior churchmen who protected paedophile priests, swore their victims to secrecy and allowed the perpetrators to continue working with children committed the offence of aiding and abetting sex with minors. Practised on a large scale, this becomes a crime against humanity recognised by the International Criminal Court. This is the general Vatican policy over which the then Cardinal Ratzinger is accused of presid-

ing. When Benedict comes to the UK in September he could, if Dawkins and Hitchens get their warrant, be arrested.

At last we are waking up to what international law means. For the first time in modern history the underlying assumption of political life – that those who exercise power will not be judged by the same norms as common citizens – is beginning to crack.

International law is the belated reply to one of the oldest surviving aphorisms in the English language. There are half a dozen versions, but the best-known is this: "They hang the man and flog the woman / That steals the goose from off the common / But let the greater villain loose / That steals the common from the goose." This is the way we thought it would remain. The powerful were licenced by our expectations to carry on committing great crimes, while their subjects were punished for lesser offences. No longer. Picture the Pope awaiting trial in a British prison, and you begin to grasp the implications of the radical idea: equality before the law.

At the same time as Dawkins and Hitchens laid out their case, the barrister Polly Higgins challenged our perceptions of what legal equality means. When she launched a campaign to have a fifth crime against peace recognised by the International Criminal Court. The crime is ecocide: the destruction of the natural world.

The laws of most nations protect property

For the first time in modern history the underlying assumption of political life – that those who exercise power will not be judged by the same norms as common citizens – is beginning to crack

CITIZENS' JUSTICE

While shoplifters are sent down, alleged mass murderers walk freely among us

fiercely, the individual capriciously and society scarcely at all. A single murder is prosecuted; mass murder is the legitimate business of states. Only when these acts are given names – genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression – do we begin to understand their moral significance.

The same applies to nature. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 criminalises anyone who “intentionally picks” a single flower from a protected plan. But you can grub up as many as you like as long as it’s “an incidental result of a lawful operation.” Pick a buttonhole and you could find yourself in the dock. Plough out the whole habitat and the law can’t touch you.

Higgins gives some examples of ecocide: the tar sands mining in Alberta, the Pacific garbage patch, the pollution of the Niger Delta by oil companies. She points out that ecocide is rarely a crime of intent, but in most cases an incidental consequence of other policies. Company directors or politicians could be prosecuted individually, but instead of being fined they would be charged for the restoration of the natural systems they’ve damaged. The purpose of criminalising ecocide is to raise the costs of trashing the planet to the point at which it ceases to be worthwhile. This is the obvious outcome of a wider understanding of legal equality: why should private property be protected while the common wealth of humanity is not?

International law as currently applied is often described as victors’ justice: the only people who get prosecuted are those who lose the wars they fight with powerful states. It’s not even that. Recently we learnt that some 50 suspected war criminals or human rights abusers are living in Britain. Among them are alleged torturers who worked for Saddam Hussein’s government, one of Robert Mugabe’s henchman, a member of Sudan’s janjaweed militia and a gruesome collection of Afghan warlords. But the police have been given no budget to investigate them and the Crown Prosecution Service has no resources with which to pursue them. So, while shoplifters are sent down, alleged mass murderers

walk freely among us.

So much for the prime minister’s promises. A month ago, after Tzipi Livni, the former Israeli foreign minister, cancelled her visit to Britain for fear of being arrested under a warrant obtained by human rights campaigners, Gordon Brown wrote an article for the *Telegraph* in which he proposed to stop private prosecutions for crimes against humanity. Brown maintained that the warrant was supported by only “the slightest of evidence” and that those seeking Livni’s arrest had “set out only to grab headlines.” But the evidence for the crimes against humanity to which Livni has been linked – laid out in the Goldstone report and elsewhere – is massive, detailed and hard to dispute.

Brown went on to make another statement that was plainly false: “Britain will always honour its commitment to international justice. The police here remain ready to investigate cases; the Crown Prosecution Service to bring them; the courts to hear them.” His government has rebuffed calls to set up a specialist war crimes unit and failed to produce a dedicated penny for the prosecution of war crimes suspects.

Then he explained his real purpose in seeking to prevent private actions. People like Livni, he said, represent “countries and interests with which the UK must engage if we are not only to defend our national interest but maintain and extend an influence for good across the globe.” Britain, in other words, will not investigate or prosecute its allies. His article demonstrated the opposite of what he set out to show: that if there is a case for prosecuting foreign dignitaries visiting this country, the authorities will take care of it. Without actions of the kind that Dawkins and Hitchens hope to launch, equality before the law remains an empty threat.

Brown’s desperate wriggling over the Livni case suggests that governments are beginning to grasp the shocking implications of what they have signed up to. It’s time we did the same. There’s a promise implicit in international law: the end of the age of exceptions. **CT**

George Monbiot’s latest book is *Bring On The Apocalypse*. His website is www.monbiot.com

Anderson Cooper and class solidarity

You can't man the barricades with a mouthful of Cheetos, says **Joe Bageant**

Class solidarity was such a good idea. It really was. Obviously, most of the people who need solidarity are in the world's laboring classes. After all, the rich have more than enough solidarity already, as was recently demonstrated by their successful execution of the greatest global financial heist in history. Oh sure, we'll see some state sponsored mock show trials of a few of them – they always throw a few of their own out of the sleigh to the wolves during their escapes. The big heist was big news. Working Americans will be applying Preparation H to their keisters for a long time to come.

But the ultimate accomplishment of the already rich, the newly rich and the corporate rich, has been their global solidarity on the corporate/financial front. It's been a long run up to globalism, but the rich have great patience. As an American, all my life I've heard their chief mouthpiece, the president of the United States, beginning with Eisenhower, right on up through Kennedy, Reagan, Ford, Carter and Bush, and now Obama, sing the same song. Which goes moreover like this:

"Trade is the road to peace. Commerce and business know no national boundaries. They link nations together on productivity, creating jobs and peace across the world."

It sounded good at the time. Who would have thought that the people enjoying all

this harmony and peace brought about through globalization would be enjoying it in a one big happy planetary work gulag? And if they are not doing so at the moment, they will be as soon global capitalism, under the watchful solidarity of the rich, bears full fruit.

Thanks to globalization, the American, Australian and European working classes are on their way to extinction, in terms of their traditional rights, and quality of life. Just like the workers being poisoned to death by circuit board toxins in Guiyu, China, their fates will be determined by global capital, either by default or by bitter struggle against it. We are not seeing much of the latter and are not likely to, until it is too late, which it may already be. After all, you cannot put up much of a struggle against global capital when you worship it as a creed and are addicted to commodities too.

Out of the slave labor workhouse

Oh yeah, I forgot. We're gonna "develop" and "stimulus" our way out of what is happening now – which is that we are fast becoming a slave labor workhouse planet. Now let me see here – hmmm – who is in charge of development? Oh yeah, the global financiers.

There is no way the world's working people can win in the long run, which is getting pretty damned short, or even survive,

There is no way the world's working people can win in the long run, which is getting pretty damned short, or even survive, except by joining the worker struggles, of China, Asia and Africa and India

TIMES OF STRUGGLE

American news is first and foremost entertainment. If you happen to stumble onto some accidental truth, be assured there will be a correction in the name of Republican sponsored “fairness and balance in media”

except by joining the worker struggles, of China, Asia and Africa and India. The idea that American workers are the same as the Asian and Latin American and African working people goes down hard in American gullets. (I’m no expert, but it looks to me like the Euros and the Aussies and the Canadians are snotty that way too. In fact, now that I am meeting dozens upon dozens of Canadians from all walks of life, they are looking worse than Americans.)

But for Americans, it does not go down at all. As a people, they’ll never ever accept that fact, because they’ll never know it for at least two reasons.

(1) They are too over worked and under-educated to find out for themselves, and

(2) American corporate media machinery will never let them hear of it. Americans are screwed, blued and tattooed.

And for that I blame Anderson Cooper. That’s right, CNN’s boyishly good looking, sincere faced, Emmy Award winning Anderson Cooper. Let me explain.

Between the corporate and financial elites and the slobbering masses stands the American Information Class – the reporters, talking heads, news anchors and pundits. In short, the entire gaggle of meat puppets and journalism hacks who have been cultivated and bred to be clueless by the university industry and others serving our corporate empire. In other words, serving global capitalism, and the national fictions it maintains, including that sizable piece of corporate feudal turf known as America. And that fiction is maintained through la danse des marionnettes de viande.

Not that these meat puppets are to be pitied for their cluelessness. Lordy no! When your employer is throwing celebrity and money at you faster than you can suck up the adulation or blow the bucks, why would anybody pause long enough to get a clue. I sure as hell wouldn’t. I’d pull a Bill Clinton, buy me some Cuban cigars and tell the secretary, “Under the desk, baby! And crack open a bottle of Jack Daniels for me on your way down.”

It’s certainly an easy gig. Move your lips like a reporter, wear a black shirt and a \$600 bush jacket in disaster and war porn spots as Anderson Cooper does, and make at least 4 million a year base salary (plus a few hundred thousand more a year in speakers fees for canned talks. Cooper’s agency will provide the list).

Anderson’s basic message is that the world is a horrific place filled with miserable inferior lives, ridden by want, African machete amputations and the like. The guy in front of the flat screen in Cedar Rapids, Iowa doesn’t even have to stop and think to draw the corpo-state approved conclusion Anderson delivers. It’s instantaneous into his deep reptilian brain: “Haitians fucked. Iraqis fucked. Greeks fucked. Me live in best place of all.”

Robotic mouthpiece

Attractive, serious and sincere looking, and presented as calm and rational against the backdrop of world terror and misery, Anderson is the perfect robotic mouthpiece, easy on the eyes, poised in the “Anderson Cooper suit,” (actually, it’s Ralph Lauren, the gay aesthetic goes a long way in his business). And most importantly, despite what he’s seen first hand, he remains clueless about the world. Bullet proof to reality. Robot. Then again, that’s a job qualification in the entertainment business. American news is first and foremost entertainment. If you happen to stumble onto some accidental truth, be assured there will be a correction in the name of Republican sponsored “fairness and balance in media.”

Now this may be a stretch for some more open minded readers, but to my mind, anyone such as Cooper, who actually believes he is worth 4 million, and can put it in the bank without dying of shame, has no idea what’s going on in this world – no matter how much he or she is paid to look like they do. In fact, anyone doing so for over \$50,000 is in the same category. Which includes everyone you see on your television screen. It’s all just self-absorbed celebrity preening.

At the local level the rubes watch you on Keokuk Cable. At the national level, an indoctrinated people read *Vanity Fair's* writers going down on you, telling you what a brave and saintly journalist you are. And the internet dedicating hundreds of thousands of word to your choice in suits.

There is no way out of our culture manufacturing machinery. We're not in charge. It would be bigger than any one of us because it consists of all of us. It tells us all we are individuals supremely worthy of our silliest notions and desires, thereby making us soft and lazy, infantilized and incapable of truly effective solidarity as a people. Instead, we are fed Tea Party drivel. Even if CNN decided to send Coop to Guiyu to cover the blood

poisoned worker women with the deformed children, the result would be the same. The guy in Cedar Rapids would see further proof that "Me live in best place in world. Got Cheetos." Or perhaps a nice Cotes du Rhône if you are a member of the commodity drugged educated faux middle class.

And I wanna say to them: "Not for much longer, buddy. Not much longer. And you can thank Anderson Cooper and a helluva lot of other people like him who do not have a clue, but nevertheless inhabit your very mind, for that." **CT**

*Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War.***

The guy in Cedar Rapids would see further proof that "Me live in best place in world. Got Cheetos"

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



A grand adventure

War is good, until it gets you ... a cautionary tale for fathers and sons, by **Fred Reed**

His father, an angry man emitting the foul stench of patriotism, said his duty was to become a soldier and kill whoever it was in the far country, wherever it was

He grew up in the woods and rivers of the county, fishing and swimming and hunting under sprawling blue skies and driving his rattletrap car insanely and lying on the moss with his girl and watching the branches above groping the sky and marveling as the young do at the strangeness of life, and the war came in a far country. It doesn't matter which. It was just a country.

His father, an angry man emitting the foul stench of patriotism, said his duty was to become a soldier and kill whoever it was in the far country, wherever it was. His father didn't know or much care. It didn't matter. Somebody would know. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. It would be a grand adventure, an uncle said.

He enlisted. In the aching humid heat of a hot state he drew toothpaste and seven-eighths gear and green clothes from supply and learned to march in squares while a sergeant said *Lef-rye-lef-rye-lef*. He felt the sense of power and invincibility that comes of rhythmic camaraderie with thudding boots.

He learned to use grenades and flame-throwers and the proper placement of a bayonet in a kidney. He learned obedience and various forms of likely suicide, but it was for his country, dulce et decorum est, and he sang fierce cadences on the march. *If I die on the Russian front, bury me with a*

Russian cunt, lef-rye-lef-rye-lef-rye-lef. It was a grand adventure, calling to a young male's desperation to defy existence, to cross the mountains, to see the dragon, to overcome. The colonels at Training Command had calculated this nicely.

He felt the romance and variety and absurdity that men love in the military in time of peace, and collected the stories that soldiers tell in bars. *See, we was in TJ at the Blue Fox, and Murphy was getting a lap dance from this senorita with frigging water-melon tits, I mean those hangers just wouldn't quit, and this owl flies in, some kind of freaking bird anyway, and she screams and falls on Murphy and...* He felt the freedom of being away from the county, in wild bars nobody back home had ever heard of. It was the life.

Off to war

Then he was on the late-night tarmac of the airfield, staging out for the remote country of which he knew nothing. Wind swirled and jet wash smelled of aviation kerosene and he was fit and hardly noticed the weight of his pack.

Heavies roared in and out, taking troops. He savored a new phrase, FMF WesPac. Fleet Marine Force Western Pacific, alive with hormonal appeals of armies on the march, of foreign legions and Marcus Aurelius on the Rhine-Danube line, though he had never

heard of the man, and he was part of huge events happening in the night.

On the first day in-country he went to his posting in the remote land, in a convoy of open six-bys. The heat and strange people along the road exhilarated him and he was really, truly out of the county and he took it all in with wide eyes and the mine went off under the lead truck and the driver landed screaming by the road, his legs gone. Mines do that. Marines ran to him and said *Jesus, oh Jesus. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Get a corpsman. Oh shit. Oh Jesus.* The screaming stopped, that being the nature of femoral arteries.

Three months passed. He now hated the people of the remote country, though he still knew nothing of it. Soldiers hate. He killed some enemy soldiers and some who may have been enemy soldiers and then some he knew weren't but who were in the wrong place after his platoon took casualties from a sniper. It didn't affect him, not that he knew. Dead people were just dead people, so what. He hated the scuttling cockroaches anyway. *Light'em up. Light'em all up. Let God sort'em out.* He had never heard of the Albigensians, but soldiers vary little.

Killing the village

One day the platoon approached a town and a sniper fired at them. "Light'em up" said the lieutenant, who hated the locals. Ten minutes later thirty-seven villagers were dead and the reporter who had been there got pictures of it all. They appeared around the world. The platoon didn't know why they were being picked on. If villagers didn't want to get shot, they shouldn't let heavily armed insurgents come into their village. At a thousand legion halls, members said, *war is war, people get hurt. You gotta expect it. The press are wimps, comsymps, unrealistic idealists. We need to unleash the troops, let them win.*

Officers, knowing that reporters were the most dangerous of their enemies, said that it hadn't happened, that the enemy had really done it, that it was an isolated incident,

and that there would be an investigation. The commanding general in what interestingly was called "the theater" had presidential aspirations, and so sacrificed the lieutenant, who eventually received three months house arrest.

The soldier from the county almost made it. He was approaching PCOD, Pussy Cut-off Date, determined by the germination time of gonorrhea, when his truck hit the mine. Nothing new here. Men in agony, exposed bone, crushed lungs, and the dying crying out for the trinity of the badly wounded, mother wife, and water. This time the soldier from the county was half gutted.

It was a grand adventure, though.

On the ward where they removed a length of his intestines, he saw many things. He saw the soldier with his jaw shot away who fed through a tube in his nose. He watched a high-school girl of seventeen from Tennessee as she saw her betrothed, stone blind, his face a hideous porridge that would gag a maggot.

Johnny... Johnny ... oh Johnny.

He left the hospital with a colostomy bag and instructions never to eat anything he liked. Women do not like colostomy bags, so he had time on his hands. He read. He thought. He came to hate, to hate with a shuddering intensity that unnerved his friends, who learned not to talk about the war.

Like soldiers since before time existed, he learned that the war was not about the noble things it was supposed to be about, God and country and democracy, but about money, power, contracts, and the egos of the men who, on the principle that shit floats, always rise to the top. For the rest of his life, he would really, truly, want to kill.

He had come a long way from the county. It had been a grand adventure. **CT**

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

Ten minutes later thirty-seven villagers were dead and the reporter who had been there got pictures of it all. They appeared around the world

Facing the threat from the far right

At 80, says **Chris Hedges**, Noam Chomsky still sees a need to stand up to the liberal intellectual guardians of the faith

As our nation's most prescient critic of unregulated capitalism, globalization and the poison of empire, Chomsky enters his 81st year warning us that we have little time left to save our anemic democracy

Noam Chomsky is America's greatest intellectual. His massive body of work, which includes nearly 100 books, has for decades deflated and exposed the lies of the power elite and the myths they perpetrate.

Chomsky has done this despite being blacklisted by the commercial media, turned into a pariah by the academy and, by his own admission, being a pedantic and at times slightly boring speaker.

He combines moral autonomy with rigorous scholarship, a remarkable grasp of detail and a searing intellect. He curtly dismisses our two-party system as a mirage orchestrated by the corporate state, excoriates the liberal intelligentsia for being fops and courtiers and describes the drivel of the commercial media as a form of "brainwashing." And as our nation's most prescient critic of unregulated capitalism, globalization and the poison of empire, Chomsky enters his 81st year warning us that we have little time left to save our anemic democracy.

The Weimar connection

"It is very similar to late Weimar Germany," Chomsky told me when I called him at his office in Cambridge, Mass. "The parallels are striking. There was also tremendous disillusionment with the parliamentary system. The most striking fact about Weimar was not that the Nazis managed to destroy

the Social Democrats and the Communists but that the traditional parties, the Conservative and Liberal parties, were hated and disappeared. It left a vacuum which the Nazis very cleverly and intelligently managed to take over."

"The United States is extremely lucky that no honest, charismatic figure has arisen," Chomsky went on. "Every charismatic figure is such an obvious crook that he destroys himself, like McCarthy or Nixon or the evangelist preachers. If somebody comes along who is charismatic and honest this country is in real trouble because of the frustration, disillusionment, the justified anger and the absence of any coherent response. What are people supposed to think if someone says 'I have got an answer, we have an enemy'? There it was the Jews. Here it will be the illegal immigrants and the blacks. We will be told that white males are a persecuted minority. We will be told we have to defend ourselves and the honor of the nation. Military force will be exalted. People will be beaten up. This could become an overwhelming force. And if it happens it will be more dangerous than Germany. The United States is the world power. Germany was powerful but had more powerful antagonists.

"I don't think all this is very far away. If the polls are accurate it is not the Republicans but the right-wing Republicans, the

crazed Republicans, who will sweep the next election.

"I have never seen anything like this in my lifetime," Chomsky added. "I am old enough to remember the 1930s. My whole family was unemployed. There were far more desperate conditions than today. But it was hopeful. People had hope. The CIO was organizing. No one wants to say it anymore but the Communist Party was the spearhead for labor and civil rights organizing. Even things like giving my unemployed seamstress aunt a week in the country. It was a life. There is nothing like that now. The mood of the country is frightening. The level of anger, frustration and hatred of institutions is not organized in a constructive way. It is going off into self-destructive fantasies."

"I listen to talk radio," Chomsky said. "I don't want to hear Rush Limbaugh. I want to hear the people calling in. They are like [suicide pilot] Joe Stack. What is happening to me? I have done all the right things. I am a God-fearing Christian. I work hard for my family. I have a gun. I believe in the values of the country and my life is collapsing."

Downward spiral

Chomsky has, more than any other American intellectual, charted the downward spiral of the American political and economic system, in works such as *On Power and Ideology: The Managua Lectures*, *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War, and US Political Culture*, *A New Generation Draws the Line: Kosovo, East Timor and the Standards of the West*, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, *Manufacturing Consent* and *Letters From Lexington: Reflections on Propaganda*.

He reminds us that genuine intellectual inquiry is always subversive. It challenges cultural and political assumptions. It critiques structures. It is relentlessly self-critical. It implodes the self-indulgent myths and stereotypes we use to elevate ourselves and ignore our complicity in acts of violence and oppression. And it makes the powerful, as well as their liberal apologists, deeply un-

comfortable.

Chomsky reserves his fiercest venom for the liberal elite in the press, the universities and the political system who serve as a smoke screen for the cruelty of unchecked capitalism and imperial war. He exposes their moral and intellectual posturing as a fraud. And this is why Chomsky is hated, and perhaps feared, more among liberal elites than among the right wing he also excoriates.

When Christopher Hitchens decided to become a windup doll for the Bush administration after the attacks of 9/11, one of the first things he did was write a vicious article attacking Chomsky. Hitchens, unlike most of those he served, knew which intellectual in America mattered.

"I don't bother writing about Fox News," Chomsky said. "It is too easy. What I talk about are the liberal intellectuals, the ones who portray themselves and perceive themselves as challenging power, as courageous, as standing up for truth and justice. They are basically the guardians of the faith. They set the limits. They tell us how far we can go. They say, 'Look how courageous I am.' But do not go one millimeter beyond that. At least for the educated sectors, they are the most dangerous in supporting power."

Chomsky, because he steps outside of every group and eschews all ideologies, has been crucial to American discourse for decades, from his work on the Vietnam War to his criticisms of the Obama administration. He stubbornly maintains his position as an iconoclast, one who distrusts power in any form.

"Most intellectuals have a self-understanding of themselves as the conscience of humanity," said the Middle East scholar Norman Finkelstein. "They revel in and admire someone like Vaclav Havel. Chomsky is contemptuous of Havel. Chomsky embraces the Julien Benda view of the world. There are two sets of principles. They are the principles of power and privilege and the principles of truth and justice. If you pursue truth and justice it will always mean a dimi-

When Christopher Hitchens decided to become a windup doll for the Bush administration after the attacks of 9/11, one of the first things he did was write a vicious article attacking Chomsky. Hitchens, unlike most of those he served, knew which intellectual in America mattered

CHOMSKY'S VENOM

Don't ever ask any of your officers what we're fighting for. Even the generals don't know. In fact, the generals especially don't know. They would never have reached their high position if they had been able to go beyond the propaganda we're all fed

nution of power and privilege. If you pursue power and privilege it will always be at the expense of truth and justice. Benda says that the credo of any true intellectual has to be, as Christ said, 'my kingdom is not of this world.' Chomsky exposes the pretenses of those who claim to be the bearers of truth and justice. He shows that in fact these intellectuals are the bearers of power and privilege and all the evil that attends it.

"Some of Chomsky's books will consist of things like analyzing the misrepresentations of the Arias plan in Central America, and he will devote 200 pages to it," Finkelstein said. "And two years later, who will have heard of Oscar Arias? It causes you to wonder would Chomsky have been wiser to write things on a grander scale, things with a more enduring quality so that you read them forty or sixty years later. This is what Russell did in books like *Marriage and Morals*. Can you even read any longer what Chomsky wrote on Vietnam and Central America? The answer has to often be no. This tells you something about him. He is not writing for ego. If he were writing for ego he would have written in a grand style that would have buttressed his legacy. He is writing because he wants to effect political change. He cares about the lives of people and there the details count. He is trying to refute the daily lies spewed out by the establishment media. He could have devoted his time to writing philosophical treatises that would have endured like Kant or Russell. But he invested in the tiny details which make a difference to win a political battle."

"I try to encourage people to think for themselves, to question standard assumptions," Chomsky said when asked about his goals. "Don't take assumptions for granted. Begin by taking a skeptical attitude toward anything that is conventional wisdom. Make it justify itself. It usually can't. Be willing to ask questions about what is taken for granted. Try to think things through for yourself. There is plenty of information. You have got to learn how to judge, evaluate and compare it with other things. You have to take

some things on trust or you can't survive. But if there is something significant and important don't take it on trust. As soon as you read anything that is anonymous you should immediately distrust it. If you read in the newspapers that Iran is defying the international community, ask who is the international community? India is opposed to sanctions. China is opposed to sanctions. Brazil is opposed to sanctions. The Non-Aligned Movement is vigorously opposed to sanctions and has been for years. Who is the international community? It is Washington and anyone who happens to agree with it. You can figure that out, but you have to do work. It is the same on issue after issue."

Chomsky's courage to speak on behalf of those, such as the Palestinians, whose suffering is often minimized or ignored in mass culture, holds up the possibility of the moral life. And, perhaps even more than his scholarship, his example of intellectual and moral independence sustains all who defy the cant of the crowd to speak the truth.

"I cannot tell you how many people, myself included, and this is not hyperbole, whose lives were changed by him," said Finkelstein, who has been driven out of several university posts for his intellectual courage and independence. "Were it not for Chomsky I would have long ago succumbed. I was beaten and battered in my professional life. It was only the knowledge that one of the greatest minds in human history has faith in me that compensates for this constant, relentless and vicious battering. There are many people who are considered nonentities, the so-called little people of this world, who suddenly get an e-mail from Noam Chomsky. It breathes new life into you. Chomsky has stirred many, many people to realize a level of their potential that would forever been lost."

CT

*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, is a senior fellow at the Nation Institute. His latest book is **Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle.***

Shell and the Irish fishermen

Trouble is brewing off the coast of Ireland as battle lines are drawn over a vast new gas refinery and pipeline, writes **Miriam Cotton**

I defy anyone to go to Erris, County Mayo, in Ireland, and spend time with the local people there without finding that the place eventually gets into your soul. Though it seems at first to be a strange, even bleak landscape, the extensive peatland with all the colour of its extraordinary plant life, the surrounding mountains and the superb Atlantic coastline all conspire to draw you in.

Driving along the road through the small town of Bangor on the Belmullet road, the atmosphere is palpable. Here a community of people had been attending to what is still in some respects a remote and unique way of life in undisturbed peace and quiet until the arrival in their midst of the giant oil and gas conglomerate, Royal Dutch Shell.

Shell were invited in by the Irish government with all the decorum of a gangster's moll for the purpose of building a gas refinery and exporting gas reserves that hitherto had been the property of the Irish people until the rights to it were sold in secret by a government politician, Ray Burke, who was subsequently jailed on unrelated corruption charges.

At first the community were unsure quite what to make of it all but they welcomed it cautiously as seeming to be something that would bring prosperity to the area. As the project advanced, however, they began to

wake up to some alarming realities and during the last ten years have gone from that initial attitude of welcome to one of vehement and hugely distressed opposition to it.

Among the many people with painful experiences of resisting the project is Mayo fisherman, Pat "The Chief" O'Donnell. The Chief has been a vocal objector to the present configuration of the benighted Corrib Gas project in the North West region of the Republic of Ireland. In 2008 he was instrumental in preventing Shell, the main partner in the consortium which owns the Corrib Gas field, from laying its disputed pipeline in Broadhaven Bay.

As I write this in April, 2010, Pat O'Donnell is in Castlerea prison in County Roscommon, convicted of a public order offence which Gardai [police] say he committed during a public protest. The circumstances of his arrest and conviction are strongly contested by his many friends and family who say that O'Donnell has been subject to vindictive treatment because of his effective opposition to what Shell are doing in County Mayo. The claims made in his defence have also to be considered against the fact that since Pat O'Donnell's fishing boat was scuttled there has been no proper investigation into the events of that night.

Though shocked at what happened, O'Donnell nevertheless continued his spirit-

The circumstances of O'Donnell's arrest and conviction are strongly contested by his many friends and family who say that O'Donnell has been subject to vindictive treatment because of his effective opposition to what Shell are doing in County Mayo

SHELL GAME

The Norwegian state-owned company Statoil, one of the partners in the project, will be able to generate huge sums of money for the Norwegian people from Corrib while the Irish people will see not one farthing from their own gas, even at a time of catastrophic economic stress in Ireland

ed protest during the summer of 2009 when he made a valiant attempt with a small fishing boat to stop the colossal pipe-laying ship 'The Solitaire' when it finally arrived to begin work at Glengad – the beachhead in Broadhaven Bay at which the 80km pipeline would hit landfall from the gas field out in the ocean. He contends that neither Shell nor the Irish government have the legal right to damage the fishing grounds on which his and others' livelihoods depend.

In advance of this summer's work on the pipeline however, O'Donnell is conveniently out of the way in Castlerea for five months.

Core objections

The core of the Mayo community's objections to the gas project are three-fold. Firstly, that it is unique in the world – a fact which was confirmed at a public oral hearing in May 2009. This means that the project is experimental in some vital respects. Locals, who of necessity over the last ten years have acquired unwanted, industry-standard expertise in the subject of oil and gas exploration and extraction, point to the unprecedented high pressure at which the gas will be travelling inland over 9km to the refinery – at anywhere between 144bar and 345 bar pressure.

The gas would also be unrefined and therefore much more volatile than would ordinarily be the case which increases the possibility of ruptures or explosions. Ordinary domestic pipes operate at a maximum of 70bar carrying refined, stable gas. These concerns have recently been vindicated by An Bord Pleanála – the official body responsible for planning approvals – who have ruled that sections of the pipeline as presently planned are dangerous.

The community is asking for the gas to be refined at sea or at an alternative landfall site away from communities and fishing grounds as is the norm in other countries with comparable facilities. The community is not opposed to bringing the gas ashore as is often claimed in an Irish media that

has proved itself largely impenetrable, if not determinedly and manipulatively hostile towards the community in too many instances, but only ask that it be done safely and with regard for their environment – according to standards and conditions that are observed in many other places.

Secondly the terms on which Shell have been given the gas are also acknowledged to be unprecedented, with no royalties accruing to the state. Generous tax write-offs against costs mean that no revenue will be raised by that route either and in any case would only apply to future finds. Most of the Irish gas and oil field discoveries off the West Coast have already been licensed for extraction.

As is often observed in Ireland, the Norwegian state-owned company Statoil, one of the partners in the project, will be able to generate huge sums of money for the Norwegian people from Corrib while the Irish people will see not one farthing from their own gas, even at a time of catastrophic economic stress in Ireland. That the entire population of Ireland has not taken to the streets in protest at this is testament to the role of the media in subduing the truth by means of what they describe as 'balanced reporting' – in reality heavily weighted in favour of input from Shell, the government and the Gardai.

Thirdly, there is the manner in which the project is being planned and constructed. The Mayo community are horrified at the level of government, commercial and political complicity in undermining planning and other procedures – again a matter of established fact, though largely unreported in the media. They believe that the entire apparatus of the state has been ranged against them including at times the army, navy and police forces in order to silence opposition on behalf of the powerful Royal Dutch Shell and its partners – who have deployed a much-loathed private security firm, IRMS, as their enforcers in the area. This state-sponsored onslaught has included serious physical brutality and other forms of

intimidation resulting in complaints to the Garda Ombudsman – many of them upheld, though the state has so far refused to bring prosecutions.

There is already evidence of pollution of the drinking water supply at Carrowmore Lake from works at the Ballinaboy refinery site. Sruwaddacon Bay, upstream from the Rosport Sound, is the place where the legendary Children of Lir are said to have spent their last 300 years as swans before taking on human form again. If the project is allowed to go ahead as currently proposed an ugly pipeline will zig zag the tranquil beauty of the whole bay – a designated Special Area of Conservation.

Aggravating the whole sorry saga is a national media who have been mostly duped into believing an idiotic caricature of a protest with alleged, unspecified IRA connections and motives – which leaves the local

community feeling bewildered and abandoned by their fellow citizens. Having spoken to many of the farmers, business people, school teachers and others living in Erris, it is striking how much at odds with the truth it is. “We’re up here in Mayo,” one local business woman said “where nobody outside Erris can really see what is going on and they are getting away with it for that reason. They have all the money they need to spend on public relations and it has succeeded very well for them. Sure, several journalists who used to write about this have ended up working for Shell, including their main man John Egan who used to work for RTE and the BBC. What chance do we stand of getting the truth across to people?” **CT**

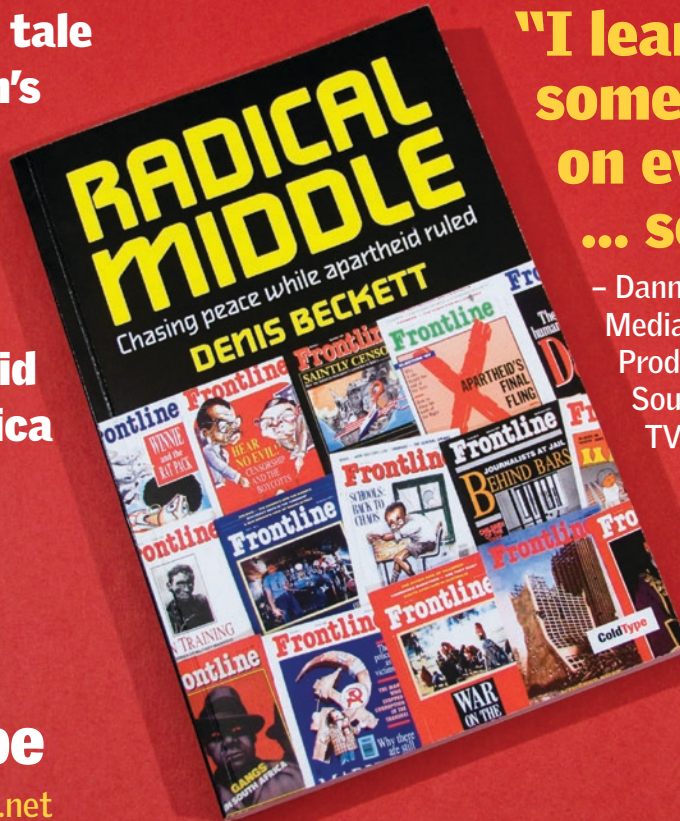
Miriam Cotton is co-editor of the Irish media watchdog at mediabite, at www.mediabite.org

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Collateral damage of smart sanctions

The prospects for democracy, socio-economic development, and conflict resolution will suffer if the West continues to rely on punitive measures, writes **Ali Fathollah-Nejad**

As the history of the West–Iran conflict proves, sanctions have rather kept the state of crisis alive than contributed to its resolution

This time, the warmongers’ silly season found its apogée in U.S. neo-conservative Daniel Pipes’ advice to Obama to “bomb Iran,” shortly after Tony Blair, having outlined why he helped invade Iraq, remarked ominously, “We face the same problem about Iran today.” The UK’s Chilcot Inquiry into the launching of the Iraq War ironically coincided with a considerable military build-up in the Persian Gulf region. All this occurred amidst the continued struggle of Iran’s civil rights movement and proclamations of Western leaders to be in support of the latter’s efforts. But is there any evidence for this?

Sanctions are widely portrayed as necessary, almost healthy medicine to bring about change in the opponent’s policies. However, as the history of the West–Iran conflict proves, sanctions have rather kept the state of crisis alive than contributed to its resolution. Nonetheless, Western governments do not seem to have lost their dubious fascination for them.

“Smart sanctions”, it is claimed, are a magic wand with which to decapitate evil. In the Iranian case, evil is identified with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Originally a defense organization to counter Iraqi aggression in the 1980s, the Guardians have developed into an expansive socio-politico-economic conglomerate believed to possess great economic and political power in today’s Islamic Republic.

As we are told, “smart sanctions” shall target the Guardians’ grip on the Iranian power

structure. The much neglected difficulty here – though it is widely acknowledged that the bulk of Iranian economy is now in the hands of the Guardians – is that millions of civilians connected to these wide-ranging sectors thought to be controlled by the Guardians will be affected. Seen in this light, the gigantic dimension of these alleged “smart sanctions” comes to the fore.

Moreover, so-called “crippling sanctions” that target the petrol supply to Iran are still en route. In anticipation of those U.S. unilateral sanctions, the world’s largest insurance companies have announced their retreat from Iran. This concerns both the financial and shipping sectors, and affects petrol supplies to Iran which imports 40 percent of its needs. Also three giant oil traders ended supplies to Iran, which amounted to half of Tehran’s imports. Needless to say, such sanctions ultimately harm the population. To add, a complete implementation thereof – i.e. preventing Asian competitors to step in – would require a naval blockade which amounts to an act of war.

As stressed by civil society figures and economists, the price of sanctions is being paid by the Iranian population. The Iranian economy – manufacturing, agriculture, bank and financial sectors etc. – has been hurt from almost three decades of sanctions. Even today, businesses cannot easily obtain much needed goods on the international market to continue production and must often pay above-standard

prices. Moreover, the scientific community has faced discrimination in areas of research and Iran's technological advances been slowed down. Reflecting the dangers sanctions pose to the Green Movement, last fall Mir-Hossein Mousavi said, "We are opposed to any types of sanctions against our nation." The same was recently uttered by his fellow opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi in an interview with *Corriere della Serra*.

Meanwhile a more fundamental problem remains, one that is hardly acknowledged by many proponents who succumb to the adventurous illusion of having a say in the design and implementation of sanctions: They are mainly designed by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), introduced to the U.S. Congress and finally implemented by the Treasury Department's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Stuart Levey – an AIPAC confidant. Along this process, the potential suffering by Iran's civil society hardly plays a role.

Sanctions – either "crippling" or "smart" – ultimately harm ordinary citizens. "Smart sanctions" is as much of an oxymoron as "smart weapons" which supposedly through "surgical strikes" only take out evil components. Indeed, much as in the case of their militaristic brothers-in-spirit, in the end the "collateral damages" of "smart sanctions" remain dominant.

More generally, in an increasingly multi-polar globalized world, sanctions imposed upon energy-rich countries are basically futile as an effective policy tool. Too numerous are business-driven actors that are only too happy to jump in. Thus, Chinese, Russian, and even U.S. companies (acting via Dubai) have hugely benefitted from the European, U.S.-pressured withdrawal from the Iranian market.

Thus, sanctions – a medicine with which Western policy-circles are so obsessed with – are not a cure but a slow poison applied to the civil society. Sanctions as prototype of economic warfare in concert with the seasonal flaring-up of war-mongering are a dangerous mix. The deafening "drums of war" continue to bang upon the beating heart of Iran's civil society.

All this suggests that sanctions are perhaps

a fig leaf for other agendas. For, in contrast to Western proclamations, sanctions do harm civil society while cementing the position of hardliners. Iran's middle class, as a result, will be affected by this further isolation of the country as sanctions punish honest traders and reward corrupt ones. The Guardians with their assumed 60 harbors in the Persian Gulf control the bulk of imports and sanctions will only bolster the trend of flourishing "black channels".

One might indeed argue that the not-so-unconscious "collateral damage" of never-ending sanctions is any meaningful transition to more democracy in Iran – a prospect which would set an uncomfortable precedent for the West's authoritarian friends in the region.

At the very least, the unending story of sanctions bears testimony to Western leaders' commitment to uphold "credibility" in the face of adverse conditions as much as to imposing their will on Iran. A futile exercise – even a dangerous one – if one begins to contemplate the aftermath of "smart sanctions" being imposed: Will the next desperate move entail "surgical strikes"?

Instead of going on believing that sanctions will one day develop their desired effects, it is high time to put the brakes. Hence, the only way forward would be to adopt a set of policies that would disarm hardliners of all sides whose business flourishes in the vicious cycle of enmity. It is only by détente that grist to the mills of radicalism can be removed – and a sustainable de-securitization of Iranian politics attained. Revoking existing sanctions on goods for civilian use could work wonders that would shake the very fundamentals of confrontational postures.

Despite all frivolous claims, the diplomatic route has not been exhausted. Indeed, we are far from it. Since the core problem remains the "security dilemma" in the region, it would be wise for the West to call upon Israel to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The transatlantic "coercive strategy" vis-à-vis Iran – as it is accurately described in Diplomatic Studies – must be suspended for it undermines prospects for peace and development towards democracy.

The only way forward would be to adopt a set of policies that would disarm hardliners of all sides whose business flourishes in the vicious cycle of enmity

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CT

Is Iran really a threat to world peace?

The Obama administration ratchets up the rhetoric about Iran, but **Ray McGovern** wonders if this is just more dangerous hype

In a rambling comment, Clinton had lamented that, despite President Barack Obama's reaching out to the Iranian leaders, he had elicited no sign they were willing to engage

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said publicly that Iran “doesn’t directly threaten the United States.” Her momentary lapse came while answering a question at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar, on Feb. 14.

Fortunately for her, most of her Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) fellow travelers must have been either jet-lagged or sunning themselves poolside when she made her unusual admission.

And those who were present did Clinton the favor of disappearing her gaffe and ignoring its significance. (All one happy traveling family, you know.)

But she said it: it’s on the State Department Web site. Those who had been poolside could even have read the text after showering. They might have recognized a real story there – but, granted, it was one so off-message that it would probably not be welcomed by editors back home.

In a rambling comment, Clinton had lamented that, despite President Barack Obama’s reaching out to the Iranian leaders, he had elicited no sign they were willing to engage:

“Part of the goal – not the only goal, but part of the goal – that we were pursuing was to try to influence the Iranian decision regarding whether or not to pursue a nuclear weapon. And, as I said in my speech, you know, the evidence is accumulating that that

[pursuing a nuclear weapon] is exactly what they are trying to do, which is deeply concerning, because it doesn’t directly threaten the United States, but it directly threatens a lot of our friends, allies, and partners here in this region and beyond.”

Qatar afraid? Not so much

The moderator turned to Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al-Thani and invited him to give his perspective on “the danger that the Secretary just alluded to...if Iran gets the bomb.”

Al-Thani pointed to Iran’s “official answer” that it is not seeking to have a nuclear bomb; instead, the Iranians “explain to us that their intention is to use these facilities for their peaceful reactors for electricity and medical use...”

“We have good relations with Iran,” he added. “And we have continuous dialogue with the Iranians.”

The prime minister added, “the best thing for this problem is a direct dialogue between the United States and Iran,” and “dialogue through messenger is not good.”

Al-Thani stressed that, “For a small country, stability and peace are very important,” and intimated – diplomatically but clearly – that he was at least as afraid of what Israel and the U.S. might do, as what Iran might do.

All right. Secretary Clinton concedes that

Iran does not directly threaten the United States; so who are these “friends” to whom she refers? First and foremost, Israel, of course.

How often have we heard the Israelis say they would consider nuclear weapons in Iran’s hands an “existential” threat? But let’s try a reality check.

Former French President Jacques Chirac is perhaps the best-known statesman to hold up to ridicule the notion that Israel, with between 200 and 300 nuclear weapons in its arsenal, would consider Iran’s possession of a nuclear bomb an existential threat.

In a recorded interview with the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, on Jan. 29, 2007, Chirac put it this way:

“Where will it drop it, this bomb? On Israel?” Chirac asked. “It would not have gone 200 meters into the atmosphere before Tehran would be razed.” Thus, Iran’s possession of a nuclear bomb would not be “very dangerous.”

Chirac and a hard place

Soon, the former French president found himself caught between Chirac and a hard place. He was immediately forced to retract, but did so in what seemed to be so clumsy a way as to deliberately demonstrate that his initial candor was spot on.

On Jan. 30, Chirac told the *New York Times*: “I should rather have paid attention to what I was saying and understood that perhaps I was on record. ... I don’t think I spoke about Israel yesterday. Maybe I did so, but I don’t think so. I have no recollection of that.”

The Israeli leaders must have been laughing up their sleeve at that. Their continued ability to intimidate presidents of other countries – including President Barack Obama – is truly remarkable, particularly when it comes to helping to keep Israel’s precious “secret,” that it possesses one of the world’s most sophisticated nuclear arsenals.

Shortly after Obama became U.S. President, veteran reporter Helen Thomas asked him if he knew of any country in the Middle East that has nuclear weapons, and Obama awkwardly responded that he didn’t want to “speculate.”

On April 13, 2010, Obama looked like a deer caught in the headlights when the *Washington Post*’s Scott Wilson, taking a leaf out of Helen Thomas’ book, asked him if he would “call on Israel to declare its nuclear program and sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

Our normally articulate President stuttered his way through with a mini-filibuster answer, the highlight of which was, “And, as far as Israel goes, I’m not going to comment on their program ...”

The following day the *Jerusalem Post* smirked, “President Dodges Question About Israel’s Nuclear Program.” The article continued: “Obama took a few seconds to formulate his response, but quickly took the weight off Israel and called on all countries to abide by the NPT.”

The *Jerusalem Post* added that Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak chose that same day to send a clear message “also to those who are our friends and allies,” that Israel will not be pressured into signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

(Also the following day, the *Washington Post* made no reference to the question from its own reporter or Obama’s stumbling non-answer.)

In his response to Scott Wilson, Obama felt it necessary to tack on the observation that his words regarding the NPT represented the “consistent policy” of prior U.S. administrations, presumably to avert any adverse reaction from the Likud Lobby to even the slightest suggestion that Obama might be ratcheting up, even a notch or two, any pressure on Israel to acknowledge its nuclear arsenal and sign the NPT.

The greatest consistency to the policy, however, has been the U.S. obsequiousness to this double standard. Clearly, *Washington* and the FCM find it easier to draw black-

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I am reminded of an early Sunday morning talk show over five years ago at which Sen. Richard Lugar, then chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was asked why Iran would think it has to acquire nuclear weapons

and-white distinctions between noble Israel and evil Iran if there's no acknowledgement that Israel already has nukes and Iran has disavowed any intention of getting them.

This never-ending hypocrisy shows itself in various telling ways. I am reminded of an early Sunday morning talk show over five years ago at which Sen. Richard Lugar, then chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was asked why Iran would think it has to acquire nuclear weapons. Perhaps Lugar had not yet had his morning coffee, because he almost blew it with his answer:

"Well, you know, Israel has..." Oops. At that point he caught himself and abruptly stopped. The pause was embarrassing, but he then recovered and tried to limit the damage.

Aware that he could not simply leave the words "Israel has" twisting in the wind, Lugar began again: "Well, Israel is alleged to have a nuclear capability."

Is "alleged" to have? Lugar was chair of the Foreign Relations Committee from 1985 to 1987; and then again from 2003 to 2007. No one told him that Israel has nuclear weapons? But, of course, he did know, but he also knew that U.S. policy on disclosure of this "secret" – over four decades – has been to protect Israel's nuclear "ambiguity."

Small wonder that our most senior officials and lawmakers – and Lugar, remember, is one of the more honest among them – are widely seen as hypocritical, the word Scott Wilson used to frame his question.

The Fawning Corporate Media, of course, ignores this hypocrisy, which is their standard operating procedure when the word "Israel" is spoken in unflattering contexts. But the Iranians, Syrians and others in the Middle East pay closer attention.

Obama Overachieving

As for Obama, the die was cast during the presidential campaign when, on June 3, 2008, in the obligatory appearance before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), he threw raw red meat to the

Likud Lobby.

Someone wrote into his speech: "Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel and it must remain undivided." This obsequious gesture went well beyond the policy of prior U.S. administrations on this highly sensitive issue, and Obama had to backtrack two days later.

"Well, obviously, it's going to be up to the parties to negotiate a range of these issues. And Jerusalem will be part of those negotiations," Obama said when asked if he was saying the Palestinians had no future claim to the city.

The person who inserted the offending sentence into his speech was not identified nor fired, as he or she should have been. My guess is that the sentence inserter has only risen in power within the Obama administration.

So, why am I reprising this sorry history? Because this is what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sees as the context of the U.S.-Israeli relationship.

Even when Israel acts in a manner that flies in the face of stated U.S. policy – calling on all nations to sign the NPT and to submit to transparency in their nuclear programs – Netanyahu has every reason to believe that Washington's power-players will back down and the U.S. FCM will intuitively understand its role in the cover-up.

L'Affaire Biden – when the Vice President was humiliated by having Israel announce new Jewish construction in East Jerusalem as he arrived to reaffirm U.S. solidarity with Israel – was dismissed as a mere "spat" by the neoconservative editorial page of the *Washington Post*.

Rather than Israel making amends to the United States, it has been vice versa.

Obama's national security adviser, James Jones, trudged over to an affair organized by the AIPAC offshoot think tank, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), to make a major address.

I got to wondering, after reading his text, which planet Jones lives on. He devoted his first nine paragraphs to fulsome praise for

WINEP's "objective analysis" and scholarship, adding that "our nation – and indeed the world – needs institutions like yours now more than ever."

Most importantly, Jones gave pride of place to "preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them," and only then tacking on the need to forge "lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians." He was particularly effusive in stating:

"There is no space – no space – between the United States and Israel when it comes to Israel's security."

Those were the exact words used by Vice President Joe Biden in Israel on March 9, before he was mouse-trapped by the announcement of Israel's plans for East Jerusalem.

The message is inescapably clear: Netanyahu has every reason to believe that the Siamese-twin relationship with the United States is back to normal, despite the suggestion from CENTCOM Commander, Gen. David Petraeus, earlier this year that total identification with Israel costs the lives of American troops.

Petraeus's main message was that this identification fosters the widespread impression that the U.S. is incapable of standing up to Israel. The briefing that he sponsored reportedly noted, "America was not only viewed as weak, but there was a growing perception that its military posture in the region was eroding."

However, in the address to WINEP, National Security Adviser Jones evidenced no concern on that score. Worse still, in hyping the threat from Iran, he seemed to be channeling Dick Cheney's rhetoric before the attack on Iraq, simply substituting an "n" for the "q." Thus:

"Iran's continued defiance of its international obligations on its nuclear program and its support of terrorism represents (sic) a significant regional and global threat. A nuclear-armed Iran could transform the landscape of the Middle East...fatally wounding the global non-proliferation regime, and

emboldening terrorists and extremists who threaten the United States and our allies."

A Bigger Mousetrap?

Jacques Chirac may have gone a bit too far in belittling Israel's concern over the possibility of Iran acquiring a small nuclear capability, but it is truly hard to imagine that Israel would feel incapable of deterring what would be a suicidal Iranian attack.

The real threat to Israel's "security interests" would be something quite different. If Iran acquired one or two nuclear weapons, Israel might be deprived of the full freedom of action it now enjoys in attacking its Arab neighbors.

Even a rudimentary Iranian capability could work as a deterrent the next time the Israelis decide they would like to attack Lebanon, Syria or Gaza. Clearly, the Israelis would prefer not to have to look over their shoulder at what Tehran might contemplate doing in the way of retaliation.

However, there has been a big downside for Israel in hyping the "existential threat" supposedly posed by Iran. This exaggerated danger and the fear it engenders have caused many highly qualified Israelis, who find a ready market for their skills abroad, to emigrate.

That could well become a true "existential threat" to a small country traditionally dependent on immigration to populate it and on its skilled population to make its economy function.

The departure of well-educated secular Jews also could tip the country's political balance more in favor of the ultra-conservative settlers who are already an important part of Netanyahu's Likud coalition.

Still, at this point, Netanyahu has the initiative regarding what will happen next with Iran, assuming Tehran doesn't fully capitulate to the U.S.-led pressure campaign. Netanyahu could decide if and when to launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, thus forcing Washington's hand in deciding whether to back Israel if Iran retaliates.

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If Iran sought to retaliate, would Obama feel compelled to come to Israel's defense and "finish the job" by devastating what was left of Iran's nuclear and military capacity?

Netanyahu may not be impressed – or deterred – by anything short of a public pronouncement from Obama that the U.S. will not support Israel if it provokes war with Iran. The more Obama avoids such blunt language, the more Netanyahu is likely to view Obama as a weakling who can be played politically.

If Netanyahu feels himself in the catbird seat, then an Israeli attack on Iran seems to me more likely than not. For instance, would Netanyahu judge that Obama lacked the political spine to have U.S. forces in control of Iraqi airspace shoot down Israeli aircraft on their way to Iran? Many analysts feel that Obama would back down and let the warplanes proceed to their targets.

Then, if Iran sought to retaliate, would Obama feel compelled to come to Israel's defense and "finish the job" by devastating what was left of Iran's nuclear and military capacity?

Again, many analysts believe that Obama would see little choice, politically.

Yet, whatever we think the answers are, the only calculation that matters is Israel's. My guess is Netanyahu would not anticipate a strong reaction from President Obama, who has, time and again, showed himself to be more politician than statesman.

James Jones is, after all, Obama's national security adviser, and is throwing off signals that can only encourage Netanyahu to believe that Jones's boss would scurry to find some way to avoid the domestic political opprobrium that would accrue, were he to seem less than fully supportive of Israel.

Backing Off the NIE?

Netanyahu has other reasons to take heart with the political directions of Washington.

According to the *Washington Post*, the U.S. intelligence community is preparing what is called "a memorandum to holders of Iran Estimate," in other words an update to the full-scale National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) completed in November 2007, which downplayed Iran's nuclear capabilities and intentions.

The NIE's update is now projected for completion this August, delayed from last fall reportedly because of new incoming information.

The *Post* article recalls that the 2007 NIE presented the "startling conclusion" that Iran had halted work on developing a nuclear warhead. Why "startling?" Because this contradicted what President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney had been saying during the previous months.

It is a hopeful thing that senior intelligence officials from both CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency have, the way the *Post* puts it, "avoided contradicting the language used in the 2007 NIE," although some are said to privately assert that Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon.

The *Post* says there is an expectation that the previous NIE "will be corrected" to indicate a darker interpretation of Iranian nuclear intentions.

It seems a safe, if sad, bet that the same Likud-friendly forces that attacked experienced diplomat Chas Freeman as a "realist" and got him "un-appointed," after National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair had named him Director of the National Intelligence Council, will try to Netanyahu-ize the upcoming Memorandum to Holders.

The National Intelligence Council has purview over such memoranda, as well as over NIEs. Without Freeman, or anyone similarly substantive and strong, it seems likely that the intelligence community will not be able to resist the political pressures to conform.

Nevertheless, the intelligence admirals, generals and other high officials seem to be avoiding the temptation to play games, so far.

The Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Gen. Ronald Burgess, and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. James Cartwright, hewed to the intelligence analysts' judgments in their testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee last month.

Indeed, their answer to the question as

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to how soon Iran could have a deliverable nuclear weapon, if fact, sounded familiar:

“Experience says it is going to take you three to five years” to move from having enough highly enriched uranium to having a “deliverable weapon that is usable... something that can actually create a detonation, an explosion that would be considered a nuclear weapon,” Cartwright told the panel.

What makes Cartwright’s assessment familiar – and relatively reassuring – is that five years ago, the director of DIA told Congress that Iran is not likely to have a nuclear weapon until “early in the next decade” – this decade. Now, we’re early in that decade and Iran’s nuclear timetable, assuming it does intend to build a bomb, has been pushed back to the middle of this decade at the earliest.

Indeed, the Iranians have been about five years away from a nuclear weapon for several decades now, according to periodic intelligence estimates. They just never seem

to get much closer. But there’s not a trace of embarrassment among U.S. policymakers or any notice of this slipping timetable by the FCM.

Not that NIEs – or U.S. officials – matter much in terms of a potential military showdown with Iran. The “decider” here is Netanyahu, unless Obama stands up and tells him, publicly, “If you attack Iran, you’re on your own.”

But don’t hold your breath. **CT**

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