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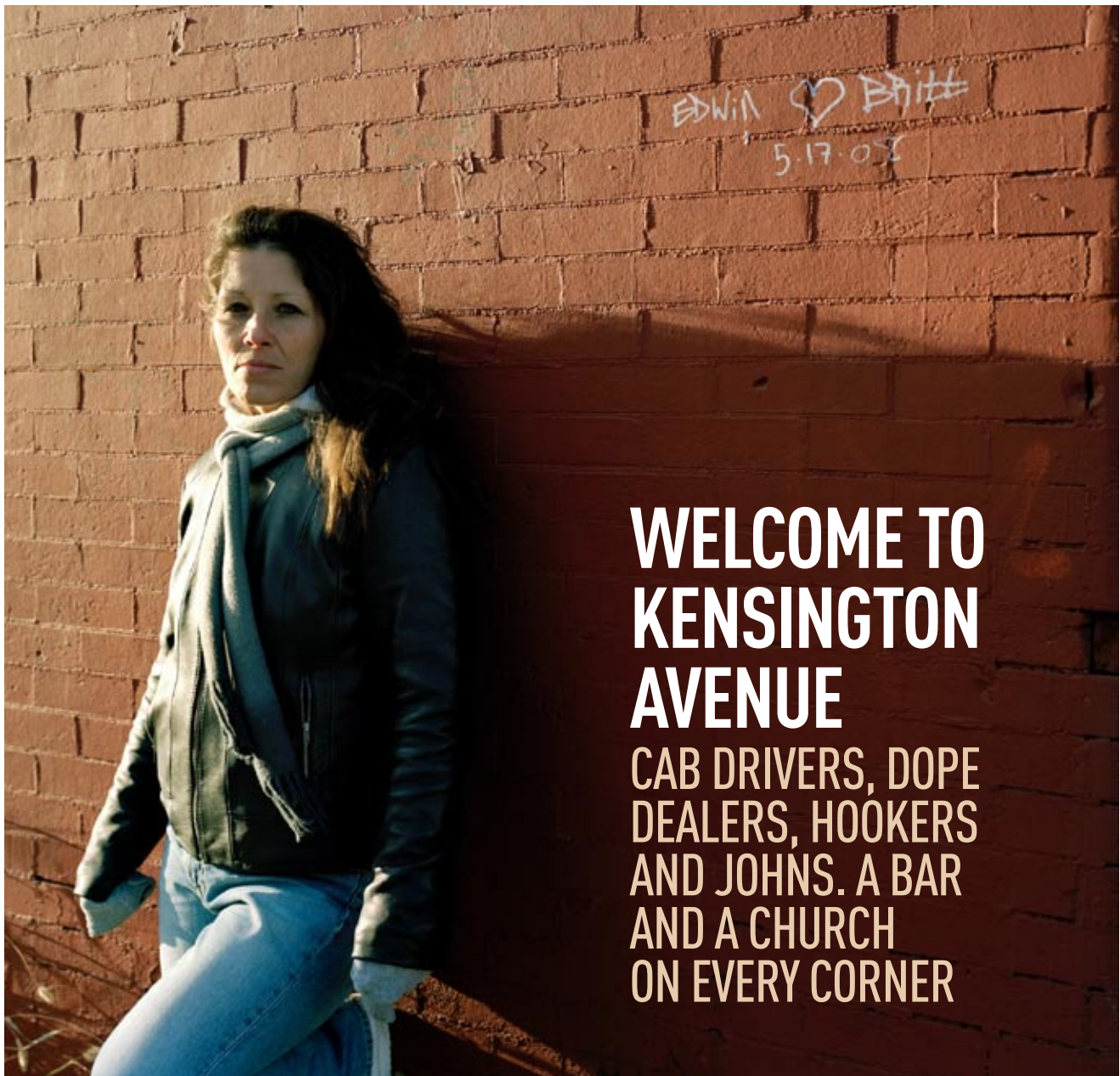


Photo: Jeffrey Stockbridge

WELCOME TO KENSINGTON AVENUE

CAB DRIVERS, DOPE
DEALERS, HOOKERS
AND JOHNS. A BAR
AND A CHURCH
ON EVERY CORNER

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7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada LG7 1E3

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Climate denialism at the BBC

David Cromwell & David Edwards examine the corporation's coverage of Hurricane Harvey and the South Asian floods by the UK's state broadcaster

Around 80 per cent of Hurricane Harvey victims do not even have flood insurance; many had skipped buying insurance believing it to have been a "low-risk gamble"

In J. Ballard's classic novel, *The Drowned World*, people are struggling for survival on a post-apocalyptic, overheating planet. A "sudden instability in the Sun" has unleashed increased solar radiation, melting the polar ice caps and causing global temperatures to rise by a few degrees each year. Once-temperate areas, such as Europe and North America, have become flooded tropical lands, "sweltering under continuous heat waves." Life has become tolerable only within the former Arctic and Antarctic Circles.

The frailty of civilisation and the attempts to cope with psychological changes in the human condition as a result of the catastrophe are laid bare. It is a frightening surreal vision of the human predicament by a master novelist. At one point, one of the characters is asked about his life before the apocalypse. He answers, "I'm afraid I remember nothing. The immediate past is of no interest to me."

Hurricane Harvey has provided a genuinely terrifying glimpse of a global Ballardian dystopia that may actually be humanity's fate. And yet, even now, corporate media are suppressing the truth.

On August 25, the category 4 Hurricane Harvey, with 130 mph winds, made landfall near Corpus Christi on the southern coast of Texas. Harvey's progress then stalled over Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, dumping enormous "unprecedented" quantities of water, creating "a 1-in-1,000-

year flood event." To date, 50 people have been killed, around a million residents have been displaced, and 200,000 homes have been damaged in a "path of destruction" stretching for over 300 miles." The Washington Post reported that, "The intensity and scope of the disaster were so enormous that weather forecasters, first responders, the victims, everyone really, couldn't believe their eyes."

The total financial cost of Harvey is yet to be determined. But, according to the governor of Texas, damages will likely be in the range of \$150-billion to \$180-billion, exceeding the \$118-billion cost of Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans in 2005. Around 80 per cent of Hurricane Harvey victims do not even have flood insurance; many had skipped buying insurance believing it to have been a "low-risk gamble."

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus surveyed the deaths and devastation caused by Harvey and said bluntly, "This is what climate change looks like." He added, "The symbolism of the worst flooding disaster in US history hitting the sprawled-out capital city of America's oil industry is likely not lost on many. Institutionalised climate denial in our political system and climate denial by inaction by the rest of us have real consequences. They look like Houston."

BBC News reported that Harvey had actually shut down almost a quarter of the US



A person in an inflatable boat paddles down a flooded road in the Houston area as rains associated with Hurricane Harvey wreak havoc in the area.

Photo: Mannie Garcia/Greenpeace USA

“The US government was warned 20 years ago, in a National Wildlife Federation report, that its flood insurance programme was encouraging homes to be built, and rebuilt, in flood-prone areas of the country”

capacity for oil refining.

Other societal factors have played their part in worsening the crisis. Dr Andrew King, a climate extremes research fellow at the University of Melbourne, observes that Houston is the second-fastest growing city in the US, adding, “As the region’s population grows, more and more of southern Texas is being paved with impermeable surfaces. This means that when there is extreme rainfall the water takes longer to drain away, prolonging and intensifying the floods.”

As Robert McSweeney and Simon Evans note in a piece for Carbon Brief, “The rising population also changes flood risk in some unexpected ways. Parts of Houston are subsiding rapidly as a result of people extracting too much groundwater.”

Moreover, “The US government was warned 20 years ago, in a National Wildlife Federation report, that its flood insurance programme was encouraging homes to be built, and rebuilt, in flood-prone areas of the country. [. . .] Two decades on, the author of the report says a flood event like Hurricane Harvey ‘was inevitable.’”

Meanwhile, halfway around the planet

in South Asia, an even greater climate-related catastrophe was taking place. Reuters observed that “the worst monsoon floods in a decade’ have killed over 1,400 people across India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Around 41-million people have been displaced. That number is simply staggering. And in areas with little infrastructure and financial resources, the consequences are almost unthinkable. The Times of India reported that rains had brought Mumbai, a city of 18 million people, ‘to its knees.’”

EA Crunden wrote in a piece for Think-Progress that the crisis, “is alarming aid officials, who say the issue is spiralling into an unprecedented disaster.”

Francis Markus, a spokesman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told the New York Times of his concern that the disaster in South Asia might not get the attention it needs: “We hope people won’t overlook the desperate needs of the people here because of the disasters closer [to] home.”

Although coverage of the monsoon flooding in South Asia was not entirely absent in British media by any means, it was swamped

Weather Woes / 1

It is significant that when the flagship BBC News at Ten programme on BBC1 had extensive coverage of Harvey on three successive nights, there was not a single mention of global warming

by the coverage devoted to Harvey in Texas and Louisiana. We conducted a ProQuest newspaper database search on September 4 for the period since August 25 (the day Hurricane Harvey hit Texas). Our search yielded just 26 stories in the UK national press on the South Asian flooding, while there were 695 articles on Harvey. Thus, coverage from the US dominated South Asia by a factor of almost 30 to 1, even though the scale of deaths and flooding was far greater in the latter. There was some good coverage of both, notably in the Guardian. But the general trend was glaring. Somehow, people in South Asia just don't matter as much as Americans; or Westerners in general.

Similarly, Ben Parker, a senior editor at IRIN, a non-profit group specialising in humanitarian news, consulted databases of online news stories and noted that "US media last week [August 24-31] mentioned Hurricane Harvey at least 100 times more than India." As for the rest of the world, the gap was smaller: non-US media gave 3-4 times as much attention to Harvey as to the monsoons.

'Grossly irresponsible to leave climate out of the picture'

An excellent Facebook post by climate scientist Michael Mann, republished by the Guardian, began with a simple question that was routinely missing from "mainstream" coverage, especially on BBC News, "What can we say about the role of climate change in the unprecedented disaster that is unfolding in Houston with Hurricane Harvey?"

Mann noted that the rise in sea level and moisture in the atmosphere, both the result of global warming, had created a "combination of coastal flooding and heavy rainfall [that] is responsible for the devastating flooding that Houston is experiencing." Moreover, rising global temperatures had created a pool of deep warm water in the Gulf of Mexico that had helped to feed the power of Hurricane Harvey. Other potential factors of human-induced climate change involve changes in

atmospheric pressure systems that stalled the progress of Harvey and kept it "locked in place" over Houston to devastating effect.

Mann concluded, "While we cannot say climate change 'caused' Hurricane Harvey (that is an ill-posed question), we can say that it exacerbated several characteristics of the storm in a way that greatly increased the risk of damage and loss of life. Climate change worsened the impact of Hurricane Harvey."

James Hansen, the former senior NASA climate scientist who first warned the public of the dangers of global warming back in 1988, told Democracy Now! that, "There is a clear link between climate change and stronger hurricanes." He warned, "You know, we have not yet felt the full impact of the gases that are already in the atmosphere, just because of the delays in the system. It takes decades for the ocean to warm up and for ice sheets to melt. So there's consequences for young people that are already built into the system."

However, these consequences are routinely ignored. Closely monitoring British newspaper coverage of Harvey, Carbon Brief observed, "The UK print media has been relatively silent on the relation between climate change and Hurricane Harvey."

David Roberts noted in a piece for Vox that, "It's grossly irresponsible to leave climate out of the picture." That, however, is overwhelmingly what the BBC did in its coverage. With our limited resources, there is simply no way for us to monitor the entirety of BBC News output across television, radio and the internet. But it is significant that when the flagship BBC News at Ten programme on BBC1 had extensive coverage of Harvey on three successive nights (August 28-30), there was not a single mention of global warming. This is simply appalling. Likewise, when BBC2's Newsnight devoted fully 14 minutes on August 29, climate change was glaringly absent.

BBC television coverage seemed to be shaped almost entirely by a ratings-driven desire to provide dramatic footage: flooded residential neighbourhoods and highways,

interviews with rescuers and those rescued, residents trying to go about their normal business, such as going to the supermarket, on kayaks. BBC North American correspondent James Cook was even filmed on a helicopter guiding a rescue boat towards two residents waiting to be picked up from the water.

BBC coverage was also devoted to Trump's visit, how presidential it made him look, and how he had, so far, skillfully managed to avoid a "Hurricane Katrina" moment of glib indifference that had fatally damaged the presidency of George W. Bush.

At one point on BBC News at Ten, for a few nanoseconds, it sounded like BBC North America editor Jon Sopel was going to mention the unmentionable when he uttered the words, "And the biggest question of them all..."

Was he about to raise the issue of a possible connection with global warming? And, if so, what the world needed to do about it? No.

"And the biggest question of them all: as Louisiana stands next in the path, has Tropical Storm Harvey done his worst, or is there more devastation to come?"

Certainly, that was a significant question. But the biggest question of all was whether abrupt and dangerous climate change means there is far worse devastation to come for all of us? Again, to emphasise, night after night, BBC News simply avoided any mention of climate change.

To its credit, the BBC did publish an article on its website, "Hurricane Harvey: The link to climate change;" and it is possible they made reference to it somewhere in their television or radio coverage. But this hardly compensated for the seeming reluctance to utter the words "climate change" in its extensive coverage over several days.

Killing debate; killing the planet

It is not merely that this climate silence is an abhorrent dereliction of the BBC's supposed responsibility to the public which pays for it. In not addressing climate change – indeed, not giving it the very prominent coverage it

deserves – the BBC is obstructing the public debate that is vital to prevent climate catastrophe. In effect, the BBC is firmly on the side of the state and corporate forces that have been fighting a decades-long, heavily-funded campaign to prevent the radical measures needed to avoid climate chaos.

Given that the BBC isn't even mentioning climate change in any meaningful sustained way, they are also avoiding any rational discussion of root causes and what needs to be done to tackle the terrifying threat of climate instability and societal breakdown. One day, historians may look back at archive footage of BBC News in 2017 and marvel at the inane, blind, ignorant reporting and commentary.

Could it be that BBC News editors took a decision not to "politicise" Hurricane Harvey by discussing climate change? (The BBC did not respond when we challenged them about it on Twitter). Naomi Klein hit that argument on the head with a cogent article in which she argued that, "Now is exactly the time to talk about climate change, and all the other systemic injustices – from racial profiling to economic austerity – that turn disasters like Harvey into human catastrophes. She continued, "The records being broken year after year – whether for drought, storm surges, wildfires, or just heat – are happening because the planet is markedly warmer than it has been since record-keeping began. Covering events like Harvey while ignoring those facts, failing to provide a platform to climate scientists who can make them plain, all while never mentioning President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accords, fails in the most basic duty of journalism: to provide important facts and relevant context. It leaves the public with the false impression that these are disasters without root causes, which also means that nothing could have been done to prevent them (and that nothing can be done now to prevent them from getting much worse in the future)."

Klein called for an "informed public debate about the policy implications of the cri-

The biggest question of all was whether abrupt and dangerous climate change means there is far worse devastation to come for all of us?

Weather Woes / 1

Corporate media are effectively covering up the root causes of this mass extinction event: rampant capitalism that mostly benefits a tiny elite of bankers, financiers, big business and the politicians that shape state policy on their behalf

sis” we have all just witnessed. Crucially, that needs to address the urgent need to switch to renewable energy: an issue “with jarring implications for the dominant industry in the region being hit hardest: oil and gas.”

The Guardian’s George Monbiot noted (*see next feature*) that “most reports on Hurricane Harvey have made no mention of the human contribution to it.” Like Klein, Monbiot rejected the argument that it is wrong to “politicise” Harvey right now, “I believe it is the silence that’s political. To report the storm as if it were an entirely natural phenomenon, like last week’s eclipse of the sun, is to take a position. By failing to make the obvious link and talk about climate breakdown, media organisations ensure our greatest challenge goes unanswered. They help push the world towards catastrophe.”

As usual, however, Monbiot kept quiet about his own paper’s role in pushing a consumerist, high-energy, aspirational lifestyle in conformity with the planet-devouring capitalism that, the Guardian’s editors tell readers, only needs to be made a little bit kinder; a classic liberal delusion.

Imagine if, day after day, BBC News and other major corporate media featured stories about children dying in a hospital with unexplained breathing difficulties. There would be interviews with anguished parents and teachers, with the doctors and nurses who were desperately treating the children, with political leaders keen to be seen responding in a decisive and compassionate manner. Imagine that the cause of the children’s breathing difficulties was simply ignored in media reports: a leak from a nearby chemical factory releasing toxic gases into the air, with the prevailing winds dumping the gases in the vicinity of a local school. Would we not be justifiably appalled that news coverage was covering up the facts? And that the media was letting the factory owners and politicians off the hook?

To put everything in perspective, Earth is entering its sixth mass extinction event in geological history, posing a “frightening as-

sault on the foundations of human civilisation,” according to a new study co-authored by Professor Gerardo Ceballos at the University of Mexico. All five previous mass extinction events were natural. This is the first one caused by human activity, not least a dangerous increase of atmospheric greenhouse gases that may well cause runaway heating.

The authors warn that, “The window for effective action is very short, probably two or three decades at most. [. . .] All signs point to ever more powerful assaults on biodiversity in the next two decades, painting a dismal picture of the future of life including human life.”

The truth is, on a national and global scale, corporate media are effectively covering up the root causes of this mass extinction event: rampant capitalism that mostly benefits a tiny elite of bankers, financiers, big business and the politicians that shape state policy on their behalf. Corporate media are an intrinsic component of these same state-corporate interests: they are the PR wing of a vast world-encircling system that is burning the planet. And it’s all sold with a smile as “democracy,” “freedom,” “open markets,” “aspiration” and other “Western values.”

In his book, *Value Wars: The Global Market Versus the Life Economy*, Canadian philosopher John McMurtry noted that “the regime” of state-corporate power, “depends throughout on keeping knowledge silenced and repressed. This is its Achilles’ heel. As soon as people see through it and flag it to the surrounding community, the collective trance on which it depends begins to lose its power.” (Pluto Press, London, 2002).

A principal function of the corporate media is to keep uncomfortable truths about elite power, not least its role in driving humanity towards climate chaos and mass extinctions, “silenced and repressed.” We must resist this with every fibre of our being. **CT**

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David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of Medialens, the UK media watchdog at www.medialens.org

Don't look now

The media avoids the subject of climate breakdown – to do otherwise is to bring the entire infrastructure of thought crashing down, writes **George Monbiot**

It is not only Donald Trump's government that censors the discussion of climate change; it is the entire body of polite opinion. This is why, though the links are clear and obvious, most reports on Hurricane Harvey have made no mention of the human contribution to it.

In 2016, the US elected a president who believes that human-driven global warming is a hoax. It was the hottest year on record, in which the US was hammered by a series of climate-related disasters. Yet the total combined coverage for the entire year on the evening and Sunday news programmes on ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox News amounted to 50 minutes. Our greatest predicament, the issue that will define our lives, has been blotted from the public's mind.

This is not an accident. But nor (with the exception of Fox News) is it likely to be a matter of policy. It reflects a deeply ingrained and scarcely conscious self-censorship. Reporters and editors ignore the subject because they have an instinct for avoiding trouble. To talk about climate breakdown (which in my view is a better term than the curiously bland labels we attach to this crisis) is to question not only Trump, not only current environmental policy, not only current economic policy – but the entire political and economic system.

It is to expose a programme that relies on robbing the future to fuel the present, that demands perpetual growth on a finite planet. It is to challenge the very basis of capitalism; to inform us that our lives are dominated by a system that cannot be sustained – a system that is destined, if it is not replaced, to destroy everything.

To claim there is no link between climate breakdown and the severity of Hurricane Harvey is like claiming there is no link between the warm summer we have experienced and the end of the last ice age. Every aspect of our weather is affected by the fact that global temperatures rose by about 4C between the ice age and the 19th century. And every aspect of our weather is affected by the 1C of global warming caused by human activities. While no weather event can be blamed solely on human-driven warming, none is unaffected by it.

Factors that affect hurricanes

We know that the severity and impact of hurricanes on coastal cities is exacerbated by at least two factors: higher sea levels, caused primarily by the thermal expansion of seawater; and greater storm intensity, caused by higher sea temperatures and the ability of warm air to hold more water than cold air.

Before it reached the Gulf of Mexico,

To claim there is no link between climate breakdown and the severity of Hurricane Harvey is like claiming there is no link between the warm summer we have experienced and the end of the last ice age

Weather Woes / 2



Texas National Guard soldiers arrive in Houston, Texas to aid citizens in heavily flooded areas from the storms of Hurricane Harvey.

Photo: Lt. Zachary West, 100th MPAD

By failing to make the obvious link and talk about climate breakdown, media organisations ensure our greatest challenge goes unanswered. They help push the world towards catastrophe

Harvey had been demoted from a tropical storm to a tropical wave. But as it reached the Gulf, where temperatures have been far above average, it was upgraded first to a tropical depression, then to a category one hurricane. It might have been expected to weaken as it approached the coast, as hurricanes churn the sea, bringing cooler waters to the surface. But the water it brought up from 100 metres and more was also unusually warm. By the time it reached land, Harvey had intensified to a category four hurricane.

We were warned about this. In June, for instance, Robert Kopp, a professor of Earth sciences, predicted: “In the absence of major efforts to reduce emissions and strengthen resilience, the Gulf Coast will take a massive hit. Its exposure to sea-level rise – made worse by potentially

stronger hurricanes – poses a major risk to its communities.”

To raise this issue, I’ve been told on social media, is to politicise Hurricane Harvey. It is an insult to the victims and a distraction from their urgent need. The proper time to discuss it is when people have rebuilt their homes, and scientists have been able to conduct an analysis of just how great the contribution from climate breakdown might have been. In other words, talk about it only when it’s out of the news. When researchers determined, nine years on, that human activity had made a significant contribution to Hurricane Katrina, the information scarcely registered.

Political silence

I believe it is the silence that’s political. To

report the storm as if it were an entirely natural phenomenon, like last month's eclipse of the sun, is to take a position. By failing to make the obvious link and talk about climate breakdown, media organisations ensure our greatest challenge goes unanswered. They help push the world towards catastrophe.

Hurricane Harvey offers a glimpse of a likely global future; a future whose average temperatures are as different from ours as ours are from those of the last ice age. It is a future in which emergency becomes the norm, and no state has the capacity to respond. It is a future in which, as a paper in the journal Environmental Research Letters notes, disasters like Houston's occur in some cities several times a year. It is a future that, for people in countries such as Bangladesh, has already arrived, almost unremarked on by the rich world's media. It is the act of not talking that makes this nightmare likely to materialise.

In Texas, the connection could scarcely be more apparent. The storm ripped through the oil fields, forcing rigs and refineries to shut down, including those owned by some of the 25 companies that have produced more than half the greenhouse gas emissions humans have released since the start of the Industrial Revolution. Hurricane Harvey has devastated a place in which climate breakdown is generated, and in which the policies that prevent it from being addressed are formulated.

Like Trump, who denies human-driven global warming but who wants to build a wall around his golf resort in Ireland to protect it from the rising seas, these companies, some of which have spent millions sponsoring climate deniers, have progressively raised the height of their platforms in the Gulf of Mexico, in response to warnings about higher seas and stronger storms. They have grown from 40ft above sea level in 1940, to 70ft in the

1990s, to 91ft today.

This is not, however, a story of mortal justice. In Houston, as everywhere else, it is generally the poorer communities, least responsible for the problem, who are hit first and hit worst. But the connection between cause and effect should appeal to even the slowest minds.

The problem is not confined to the US. Across the world, the issue that hangs over every aspect of our lives is marginalised, except on the rare occasions where world leaders gather to discuss it in sombre tones (then sombrely agree to do almost nothing), whereupon the instinct to follow the machinations of power overrides the instinct to avoid a troubling subject. When they do cover the issue, they tend to mangle it.

Balancing conflicting facts

In the UK, the BBC this month again invited the climate-change denier Nigel Lawson on to the Today programme, in the mistaken belief that impartiality requires a balance between correct facts and false ones. The broadcaster seldom makes such a mess of other topics, because it takes them more seriously.

When Trump's enforcers instruct officials and scientists to purge any mention of climate change from their publications, we are scandalised. But when the media does it, without the need for a memo, we let it pass. This censorship is invisible even to the perpetrators, woven into the fabric of organisations that are constitutionally destined to leave the major questions of our times unasked. To acknowledge this issue is to challenge everything. To challenge everything is to become an outcast.

CT

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George Monbiot's latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian newspaper. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com

Hurricane Harvey has devastated a place in which climate breakdown is generated, and in which the policies that prevent it from being addressed are formulated

Even Southern France can't escape the CIA

Reflections on a different, more peaceful, life – despite the CIA.
Linh Dinh sends a postcard from his travels in Europe

After two plastic cups of sangria, bought for two-euros each, we tried a pitcher of rosé for five. Though terrible, it couldn't ruin our mood, for it was wonderful to see a community enjoying itself

For the price of a Motel 6, Jonathan Revusky and I have three floors in Floren-sac, a village of 5,000 in southern France. This house is older than the USA, for sure, with raw wooden beams in the ceilings, stone floors, twisting stairs, odd angled walls, and an entrance to the bathroom so low the owner had to pad the top casing, lest her guests be knocked out cold.

A small couch has a café crème floral design on a faded indigo background. Plopped on top are three cushions of red, red, and Prussian blue. A tall casement window stares down at it. Matisse's ghost must be here. Hi, Henri.

We arrived just in time to catch the Pat Cryspol band performing outdoors for free. Trumpet, trombone, saxophone, bass and drums. In the night, dozens of people, mostly old, were dancing. Dozens more sat at long tables to watch and, when the mood struck, sing along. *Près de la grève, souvenez-vous/ Des voix de rêve chantaient pour nous/ Minute brève du cher passé/Pas encore e-face, etc.*

After two plastic cups of sangria, bought for two-euros each, we tried a pitcher of rosé for five. Though terrible, it couldn't ruin our mood, for it was wonderful to see a community enjoying itself. An old lady encouraged Jon to sing, too. For one number, all the dancers formed a large circle, held raised hands and turned clockwise, then vice versa.

A boy and a girl, no older than ten, asked if they could clear our table.

Next to the concert area, there was an inflatable slide, shooting gallery, bumper car rinks, merry-go-round and other rides. Cotton candies, churros, hot dogs, pizzas and fries were being sold.

Two police cars, four cops and a bomb sniffing dog guarded one entrance to the amusement area, but real terrorists would have had no problem causing havoc there, not to mention so many other targets in Floren-sac itself. It's merely theatre and social conditioning, my dear chumps, from the same people who brought us 9/11 and the endless War on Terror.

No problems

We met a Polish-born retired professor who's living in Germany, "I had a house here for 20 years. I come back often. Floren-sac is wonderful. It is peaceful, and there is never any problem."

We were sitting at a round wooden table under a maple tree. His wife and daughter were also present. College professors are conditioned to pontificate because, well, they're always surrounded by blank slates. I asked him, "In the US, many people think that Europe is being overrun by immigrants. Do you think that's the case? Are people grumbling here?"

"Here, we think the US is being overrun



"We arrived in Florensac just in time to catch the Pat Cryspol band perform for free."

Photo: Linh Dinh

by immigrants! We keep hearing all this talk about Mexicans this, Mexicans that." The man laughed and grabbed the stem of his Bordeaux glass.

"Are there many Muslims in this town?"

"Maybe 7 percent, but they've been here a long time and very well integrated. If you go to the main square in the evening, you will see about 20 Muslim men, sitting on benches and talking. They don't drink alcohol. It's their way."

"So there is no tension here?"

"No, not at all, although about 50 percent voted for the National Front during the last election. They don't like the news coming out of Germany. Merkel has caused a lot of problems by inviting the immigrants."

In Florensac, there are two kebab joints. At the weekly farmer's market, there's a very popular truck that sells Vietnamese spring rolls, rice noodles, Chinese dim sums, Thai curried chicken and other Asian dishes. Its

proprietor is a 25-year-old born in France. His parents immigrated here from Nha Trang.

At Bistro d'Alex, the waiter is from Coventry, England. He's been in France for nine years. When told that I was from Philly, the man shouted, "I must go there some day, to try the famous sandwich!"

"Oh man," I laughed, "it's seriously over-rated."

Fake bread, fake cheese, fake news

Later, I remarked to Jon, "Most Americans don't even have access to a decent loaf of bread, man. This is basic stuff. They hardly know what cheese is. How did that happen? In the 'greatest country on earth,' people are fed fake bread, fake cheese and fake news!"

Each day at dawn in Florensac the church bell peals, then it tolls again an hour later. The boulangeries open at six, for bread should be bought daily, and eaten the same

In the 'greatest country on earth,' people are fed fake bread, fake cheese and fake news!"

On The Road

“Here, the grandparents still bother with the children, and during the summer holiday, all the grandparents we know have their grandchildren stay with them for six weeks, and so they teach them old values”

day. Seeing your baker each morning, he becomes practically a part of your family.

Since this is Occitan country, the street signs are in French and Occitan. The Occitan cross shows up in shops and even cars. Regionalism rules, as it should. Famous Occitans include Petronius, Balzac, Ingres, Lautréamont, Valéry, Artaud, Ponge and Duras.

Half the price of England

In nearby Olargues, I saw graffiti, C’EST LA TERRE, NOTRE RELIGION [It’s The Land, Our Religion]. A small museum displayed mostly daily objects donated from the locals. The man at the desk, though, was a Brit. A baker for 20 years in Tavistock, near Plymouth, Bill moved to Olargues 15 years ago, “We decided we wanted something in the 34th département, so we drove around. We saw this real estate agent. He showed us a few things. We saw the house and liked it so much, we put a deposit on it the same day. It’s as simple as that. The house we bought was in fairly good condition, it didn’t need any work on it, and it was about half the price of places in England. When we sold our place in England, the extra half gave us the money to live on.”

“Buying a place here allowed you to retire early!” I said.

“Exactly! Moving to France allowed me to retire at 52. I have my pension now. I have no regrets.”

“How much French did you have when you first came?”

“Oh, just schoolboy French, not very good, but my wife’s French was very, very good. All the legal papers, all the dealings with the real estate agent, I just pushed it in front of her and said, ‘You sort it out!’ Since I’ve been here, my French has improved by leaps and bounds, because you use it all the time, you know, and I’m on the council now, so my French has definitely improved.”

“The council?”

“The town council. There are 15 of us. We meet every week. Old guys, mostly. The town is getting older, but there are still young peo-

ple here. Some of them work in the city. It’s an hour away.”

By city, Bill meant Béziers, population 76,000. Despite its modest size, it has a huge and lively downtown. In 1209, Catholics troops besieged a Carthar-occupied Béziers, which prompted the papal legate to famously advise, “Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.” Bastardised, it’s best translated as, “Kill them all. Let God sort them out.”

Bill, “Some of the people here may work in Montpellier, they may have a flat there, but they come back here on the weekend.”

“So they’re still very attached to this place.”

“Oh, yes. A lot of these old places that don’t look inhabited, the people may work in the north of France or wherever, but all the family come back during the summer. They still keep their family homes. These may look pretty tatty on the outside, but on the inside, they’re fine.”

“Do you go back to England often?”

“Since my mum died two-and-a-half years ago, we haven’t bothered to go back to England. If my children want to see me, they can come here, but they haven’t. I don’t think I’ll go back to England again. I don’t miss it.”

“Why did you leave England in the first place?”

“The England I liked doesn’t exist anymore. It’s changing too quickly.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, just people’s attitude, the young people, the binge drinking, the swearing, the drugs. Here, the young people have the freedom to run around, but they’re still polite. If you see a whole pile of kids coming down the street, you don’t feel threatened, and they always say hello, ‘Bonjour.’”

“But isn’t the countryside in England the same?”

“I lived in the countryside in England, and it’s changing. The French still have a family way of life, whereas in England, they put all the kids in front of the TV to watch the TV, they don’t bother with them, but here, the

grandparents still bother with the children, and during the summer holiday, all the grandparents we know have their grandchildren stay with them for six weeks, and so they teach them old values.”

“Do you think it’s because England is too influenced by the United States?”

“Very much. Nothing against you, but it’s definitely the influence of the United States.”

At the top of Olargues is a 13th-century bell tower. At the bottom, there’s a 12th-century bridge. You don’t build such structures, then move away. They’re meant for your great, great, great, great, great grandchildren. All over the US, I’ve seen so many dilapidated churches, abandoned by whites as they escaped to the suburbs, away from blacks.

Southern France isn’t all medieval villages and vineyards. There are also strip malls and hideous, characterless buildings. The outskirts of Castres, for example, are filled with so many car dealerships and chain stores, with each fronted by a large parking lot, that you can easily think you’re in the USA.

Jonathan Revusky, “This kind of layout is built for the automobile, and it’s very convenient, but you still have the historical core. Across most of the US, the strip malls are all you have! If you think of Orange County, for example, which is all freeways and strip malls, how can you feel attached to that?”

American politicians always cite “main street,” but that concept is mostly abandoned or boarded up, thanks to the big box boys.

Here in Florensac, there are still plenty of mom and pops, and no chain fast foods. I’m typing this outside the Brasserie Le Calypso. At adjacent tables are men, women and children, everyone relaxed and friendly. Peugeot and Citroens zoom by. One woman and four men, one a north African, stand around a barrel to sip drinks and talk. Walking her Yorkshire Terrier, an old woman in a red dress greets a child, “Bonjour, mon bébé!” Then she sits down next to a tattooed man, orders a wine.

Driven mad by the CIA

Two hours by car from Florensac is Point-Sainte-Espirit. With a population of 4,200 in 1951, it suffered a hellish week then when more than 250 villagers went mad, with people running down the street delirious, tearing their clothes off or even jumping from windows. Seven died and 50 were interned in an insane asylum.

Known as the Cursed Bread Incident [Affaire du Pain Maudit], it caused a local baker to be jailed for two months, before laboratory tests of his flour, baguettes and biscuits cleared the innocent man.

Fifty-one years later, it was finally revealed that this tranquil, postcard-perfect village had been subjected to a CIA experiment with LSD. Big friggin’ deal! It’s just another day in the life of the Evil Empire. Friends, foes, it’s all fair game. Ruling over us, these criminals never care how many lives they destroy.

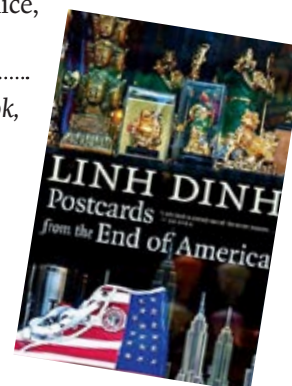
Meanwhile, though, life is still beautiful in rural France, and it’s precisely because it’s not thoroughly poisoned by American bread, cheese and news.

I finish this article in Adge, on Rue de l’Amour, the Street of Love. It’s just an alley, really, intimate and soothing. When a svelte and quite gorgeous 50-something walked by in a body-hugging dress, a dark, tattooed lady got up from her table to sashay, touch her own hips and compliment her friend and neighbour, “Très chic, madame!”

Everyone laughs. We’re all we need, really. If only the mass poisoners and murderers would disappear. Kill them all. Let God sort them out. Very nice, huh? **CT**

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Linh Dinh’s latest book, *Postcards from the End of America*, has just been released by Seven Stories Press. He blogs at www.linhdinphotos.blogspot.co.uk

Point-Sainte-Espirit suffered a hellish week in 1951 when more than 250 villagers went mad, with people running down the street delirious, tearing their clothes off or even jumping from windows



In The Picture



Cab drivers, dope dealers, hookers and johns. A bar and a church on every corner of this forboding area of Philadelphia

WELCOME TO KENSINGTON AVE

An 8-page photo essay by **Jeffrey Stockbridge**



Bentley's Place Bar, Kensington and Somerset Street, North Philadelphia, 2009

In The Picture

Photographs © Jeffrey Stockbridge, from Kensington Blues



Charlie, Kensington & Ruth Street, 2010

From **Kensington Blues**, a fine-art photography book documenting the trials and tribulations of people affected by drug addiction and prostitution along Kensington Avenue in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The book, containing 91 large-format colour photographs paired with audio transcripts and handwritten journal entries, was created over five years

Photographs and text by Jeffrey Stockbridge

When I first started coming out here, I had no idea what I was myself getting into. I drove aimlessly up and down Kensington Avenue, peering out from behind my steering wheel, too scared to get out of the car. Every woman on every corner was making eyes at me. They were staring me down, hoping I'd pick them up. Here I am, a scruffy looking guy driving a beat up black sedan... I looked the part. When I stopped at a red light, a woman opened the passenger door and jumped in without hesitation.

I ditched the car and headed out on foot to approach

strangers on the street. Hey, how's it going? How's your day today? What do you know about this neighbourhood? What's it like living here? Wanna look at some photographs? I asked a lot of questions and handed out prints from my last project, sharing them with anyone willing to look. The first pictures I made on the Ave. were of women. The majority were homeless, addicted to drugs and had turned to prostitution as a last resort. After losing everything, they sold the only thing they had left, their bodies. Their situation was dire, yet they weren't shy about sharing their personal hardships.



Tanya, Kensington & Somerset Street, 2010: "Uh, I escorted since I was 18-years-old with a, uh, an agency. Um, I only been out here for about a month, on the streets. Um, but, all together, I'm 25 now. So, 18 to 25, you know, I been doing this for, like, um... a couple... a lot of years. \$181 for food stamps, you know? It's like... you know. So, once all that's gone, you know, I gotta come out here and make as much money as I can."

In The Picture

Photographs © Jeffrey Stockbridge, from Kensington Blues



Tic Tac & Tootsie, Kensington & Harold Street, 2009: "We barely prostitute, we do it once in a while so we can get somewhere to sleep. We do one a day."

Initially, I was caught off guard by the depth of their confessions. I hadn't prepared myself to listen to people pour their hearts out with such candour, but I quickly recognised the importance of their stories – they were impossible to ignore. How was I supposed to capture this in a photograph? Don't get me wrong, I believe that photography has the power to communicate complex and compelling narratives, but at the end of the day, a single, silent picture just didn't tell the full story. On my next visit, I brought along an audio recorder.

On a busy day, I could easily shoot over 50 sheets of film. I'm not working with a digital camera here. I shot everything with my 4x5. It's big, bulky and looks like an antique. It stands tall on a tripod, grounding me in the environment. Don't worry, I'm not gonna steal your photo and run off... I can't. The camera has a non-threatening presence which puts people at ease. Everyone I photographed had to wait for me to set up, compose and hold still while I focused, closed the lens, loaded a film holder, took a light meter reading and finally, made a picture. For those hustling along the Ave., this wasn't exactly what they had in mind. And no, I'm sorry, you



Robert Merchel, Kensington & Somerset Street, 2011: Robert holds a photo of his recently deceased brother Edward – "I know I will see you again. I hope you are with Mom, Nana and Jayme. I miss you."

can't see it right now. It's film. I have to take it to the lab and process it. Your prints will be ready next week. Where will you be? You don't have a phone number? You don't have an address? Well, here's my info. If I don't hear from you I hope I bump into you again soon. If, by chance, we did bump into each other . . . It was a celebration.

The more people I photographed the more other people wanted to be photographed too. "Oh, Flo's in your book? You better put me in there! I got a story to tell ya," people often remarked. Everybody knows everybody in Kensington.

Once I was in it, it was hard to stop. The hustle of Kensington Avenue was addictive. "You're gonna ride down and you're gonna see girls out here and it's not gonna phase you," Sam told me one afternoon. "It's part of the norm down here. Cab drivers, dope dealers, hookers and johns. A bar and church on every corner. This is what you're used to seeing. The Avenue will always be."

At the intersection of Kensington and Somerset, heroin, crack and Xanax are sold out in the open. This is the Bermuda Triangle of Kensington – once you enter,



Teri, Kensington & Somerset Street, 2009: “I first came out here when I was 18. I, I haven’t been out here constantly, I mean, like, of course you know, I was locked up here and there and I got clean a couple of times. The longest I ever got clean was five years and, um, most of, most of the ladies that, um, I first knew when I came out are either up state doing time or they’re, uh, you know, they’re, I hate to say it, but dead.”

you’re unlikely to make it out. I often stood on this corner for hours and watched the drama unfold. “Works, works, works,” is yelled over and over by addicts with clean needles for sale. At a dollar a piece – ten needles equal a bag of dope.

It may be hard to imagine, but Kensington wasn’t always this way. During the nineteenth century, Kensington was a strong working-class neighbourhood, a national leader of the textile industry and home to a diverse population of immigrants. Fisherman, boat builders, machine and textile workers from England, Poland, Germany, and Ireland worked alongside native residents. With a factory on every block, they say you couldn’t take a walk without being offered a job. Indus-

trial restructuring of the mid 20th-century led to a sharp economic decline, high unemployment and significant population loss. Every manufacturing city in America was adversely affected; Philadelphia and its northern neighbourhood of Kensington were no exception.

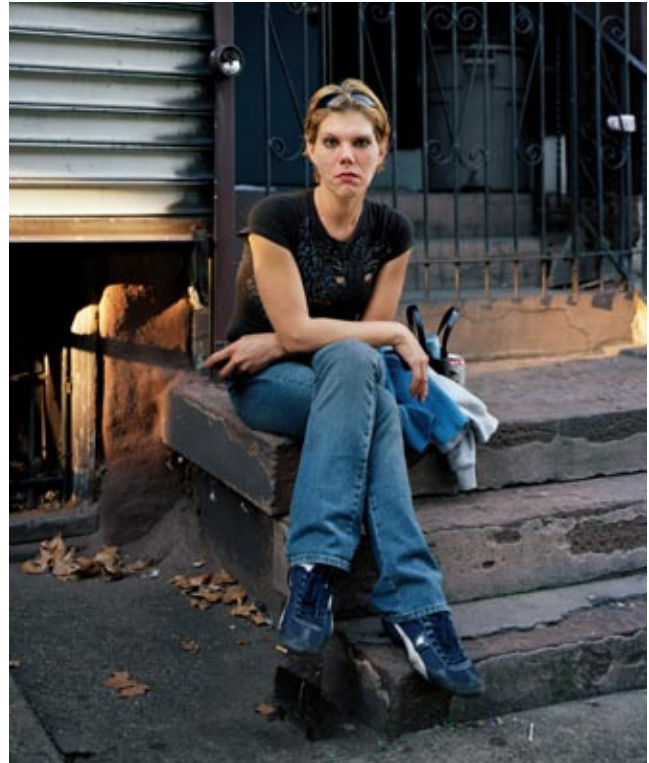
Today, Philadelphia is considered the biggest-poorest city in America. US Census data from 2014 reveals that one quarter of Philadelphia residents live below the poverty line. Half of those residents live in what is considered deep poverty; the household income for a family of four is at or below \$12,000 a year. These are the people who live in Kensington. In the winter of 2014, I was out shooting when I got a tip that a woman had been found dead in an abandoned lot just off the Ave. I went to have

In The Picture

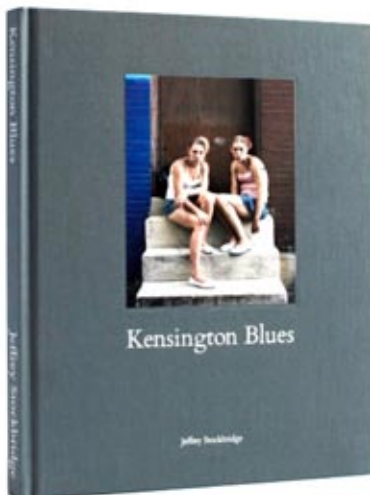
Photographs © Jeffrey Stockbridge, from Kensington Blues



Sam, Kensington Avenue, 2009: "You could be out here at three o'clock in the morning, the dates would line up in the streets. You were just making money over fist but you were spending it on drugs."



Sarah, Kensington & Lehigh Ave, 2009: "I, I, I live day-to-day . . . If I don't make money to pay somebody to stay in their house, I stay in an abandoned house or I just stay up for a couple days . . ."



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a look. When I got to the scene, there was a lonely yellow ribbon, torn and half tied to a post, meant to block the entrance to the trash-strewn lot. It was a brutally cold and windy day so I tried to be quick setting up my camera. My fingers went numb before I was able to take a shot and I was forced back into my car to warm up, leaving my camera set up on the street. As I sat rubbing my hands together, I noticed a woman standing on the corner looking in my direction. I couldn't believe my eyes. Is it possible? Was she really out here working today? I didn't want to believe it, but then again, this is Kensington. I got out of the car and quickly made the photograph I had come to take, all the while glancing over at the woman standing behind me. When I finished, I waved her over and we sat in my car together with the heat blasting. I asked her, "How can you stand out here looking for a date in the exact same spot where a woman was found dead just the day before? Aren't you scared?" She replied, "You know, I've been doing this for so long... I'm just numb to it." Her answer didn't surprise me, I'd heard it many times before. I'd been photographing along Kensington Avenue for over five years and in that moment, as we sat in my car looking out the window at the freezing cold, I had the sudden feeling it was time to move on. **CT**

Jeffrey Stockbridge is based in Philadelphia, PA. His photographs have been included in recent exhibitions in London, Delaware and Houston. His website is www.jeffreystockbridge.com



D Street Boyz, Danny, Tor & Bobby (left to right), Lehigh Viaduct, 2010: "From days when Kensington was Kensington, when the blacks couldn't come through here, until the fucking beginning of the 2000s. The white boys from D Street ran this whole fucking area."

Is it worth dying for?

When it comes to the war in the Greater Middle East, maybe we're the bad guys, writes **Danny Sjursen**

I once saw him step into an irrigation canal and disappear from sight – all but the two-foot antenna on his radio. In my daydreams, I always see the same scene, the moment his filthy, grizzled baby face reappeared above that ditch, a cigarette still dangling loosely from his lips

I used to command soldiers. Over the years, lots of them actually. In Iraq, Colorado, Afghanistan, and Kansas. And I'm still fixated on a few of them like this one private first class (PFC) in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2011. All of 18, he was short, scrawny, and popular. Nine months after graduating from high school, he'd found himself chasing the Taliban with the rest of our gang. At five foot nothing, I once saw him step into an irrigation canal and disappear from sight – all but the two-foot antenna on his radio. In my daydreams, I always see the same scene, the moment his filthy, grizzled baby face reappeared above that ditch, a cigarette still dangling loosely from his lips. His name was Anderson and I can remember thinking at that moment: What will I tell his mother if he gets killed out here?

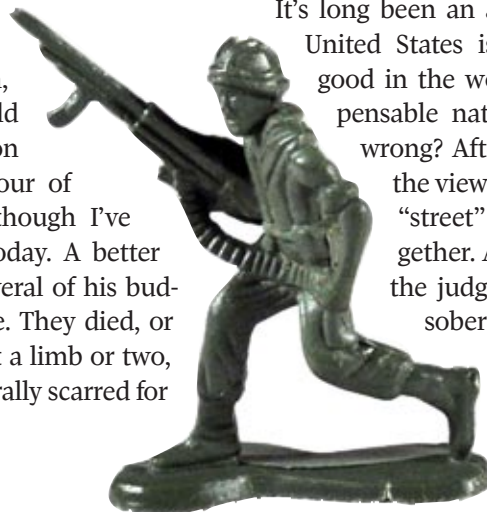
And then . . . poof . . . it's 2017 again and I'm here in Kansas, pushing papers at Fort Leavenworth, those days in the field long gone. Anderson himself survived his tour of duty in Afghanistan, though I've no idea where he is today. A better commander might. Several of his buddies were less fortunate. They died, or found themselves short a limb or two, or emotionally and morally scarred for life.

From time to time I can't help thinking of Anderson, and others like him, alive and dead. In fact, I wear two bracelets on my wrist engraved with the names of the young men who died under my command in Afghanistan and Iraq, six names in all. When I find a moment, I need to add another. It wasn't too long ago that one of my soldiers took his own life. Sometimes the war doesn't kill you until years later.

And of this much I'm certain: the moment our nation puts any PFC Anderson in harm's way, thousands of miles and light years from Kansas, there had better be a damn good reason for it, a vital, tangible national interest at stake. At the very least, this country better be on the right side in the conflicts we're fighting.

The wrong side

It's long been an article of faith here: the United States is the greatest force for good in the world, the planet's "indispensable nation." But what if we're wrong? After all, as far as I can tell, the view from the Arab or African "street" tells a different story altogether. Americans tend to loathe the judgments of foreigners, but sober strategy demands that once in a while we walk the proverbial mile in the global shoes of oth-



ers. After all, almost 16 years into the war on terror it should be apparent that something isn't working. Perhaps it's time to ask whether the United States is really playing the role of the positive protagonist in a great global drama.

I know what you're thinking: ISIS, the Islamic State, is a truly awful outfit. And so it is and the US is indeed combatting it, though various allies and even adversaries (think: Iran) are doing most of the fighting. Still, with the broader war for the Greater Middle East in mind, wouldn't it be appropriate to stop for a moment and ask: Just whose side is America really on?

Certainly, it's not the side of the average Arab. That should be apparent. Take a good, hard look at the region and it's obvious that Washington mainly supports the interests of Israel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt's military dictator, and various Gulf State autocracies. Or consider the actions and statements of the Trump administration and of the two administrations that preceded it and here's what seems obvious: the United States is in many ways little more than an air force, military trainer, and weapons depot for assorted Sunni despots. Now, that's not a point made too often – not in this context anyway – because it's neither a comfortable thought for most Americans, nor a particularly convenient reality for establishment policymakers to broadcast, but it's the truth.

Yes, we do fight ISIS, but it's hardly that simple. Saudi Arabia, our main regional ally, may portray itself as the leader of a “moderate Sunni block” when it comes to both Iran and terrorism, but the reality is, at best, far grayer than that. The Saudis – with whom President Trump announced a \$110-billion arms deal during the first stop on his inaugural foreign trip back in May – have spent the last few decades spreading their intolerant brand of Islam across the region. In the process, they've also supported al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria.

Maybe you're willing to argue that al-

Qaeda spin-offs aren't ISIS, but don't forget who brought down those towers in New York. While President Trump enjoyed a traditional sword dance with his Saudi hosts – no doubt gratifying his martial tastes – the air forces of the Saudis and their Gulf state allies were bombing and missileing Yemeni civilians into the grimmest of situations, including a massive famine and a spreading cholera epidemic amid the ruins of their impoverished country. So much for the disastrous two-year Saudi war there, which goes by the grimly ironic moniker of Operation Restoring Hope and for which the US military provides midair refuelling and advanced munitions, as well as intelligence.

If you're a human rights enthusiast, it's also worth asking just what kind of states we're working with here. In Saudi Arabia, women can't drive automobiles, “sorcery” is a capital offence, and people are beheaded in public. Hooray for American values! And newsflash: Iran's leaders – whom the Trump administration and its generals are obsessed with demonising – may be no angels, but the Islamic republic they preside over is a far more democratic country than Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy. Imagine Louis XIV in a kufiyah and you've just about nailed the nature of Saudi rule.

After Israel, Egypt is the number two recipient of direct US military aid, to the tune of \$1.3-billion annually. And that bedrock of liberal values is led by US-trained General Abdul el-Sisi, a strongman who seized power in a coup and then, just for good measure, had his army gun down a crowd demonstrating in favour of the deposed democratically elected president. And how did the American beacon of hope respond? Well, Sisi's still in power; the Egyptian military is once again receiving aid from the Pentagon; and, in April, President Trump paraded the general around the White House, assuring reporters, “in case there was any doubt, that we are very much behind President el-Sisi . . . he's done a fantastic job!”

In Syria and Iraq, the US military is fight-

The United States is in many ways little more than an air force, military trainer, and weapons depot for assorted Sunni despots

A Soldier's Lament

In Iraq it's not clear that the future rule of Shia-dominated militia groups and others in the rubble left by the last years of grim battle in areas ISIS previously controlled will actually prove measurably superior to the nightmare that preceded them

ing a loathsome adversary in ISIS, but even so, the situation is far more complicated than usually imagined here. As a start, the US air offensive to support allied Syrian and Kurdish rebels fighting to take ISIS's "capital," Raqqa – grimly titled Operation Wrath of the Euphrates – killed more civilians this past May and June than the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. In addition, America's brutal air campaign appears unhinged from any coherent long-term strategy. No one in charge seems to have the faintest clue what exactly will follow ISIS's rule in eastern Syria. A Kurdish mini-state? A three-way civil war between Kurds, Sunni tribes, and Assad's forces (with Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly autocratic Turkey as the wild card in the situation)? Which begs the question: Are American bombs actually helping?

Similarly, in Iraq it's not clear that the future rule of Shia-dominated militia groups and others in the rubble left by the last years of grim battle in areas ISIS previously controlled will actually prove measurably superior to the nightmare that preceded them. The present Shia-dominated government might even slip back into the sectarian chauvinism that helped empower ISIS in the first place. That way, the US can fight its fourth war in Iraq since 1991!

And keep in mind that the war for the Greater Middle East – and I fought in it myself both in Iraq and Afghanistan – is just the latest venture in the depressing annals of Washington's geo-strategic thinking since President Ronald Reagan's administration, along with the Saudis and Pakistanis, armed, funded, and supported extreme fundamentalist Afghan mujahedeen rebels in a Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union that eventually led to the 9/11 attacks. His administration also threw money, guns, and training – sometimes illegally – at the brutal Nicaraguan Contras in another Cold War covert conflict in which about 100,000 civilians died.

In those years, the United States also stood by apartheid South Africa – long after the

rest of the world shunned that racist state – not even removing Nelson Mandela's name from its terrorist watch list until 2008! And don't forget Washington's support for Jonas Savimbi's National Movement for the Total Independence of Angola that would contribute to the death of some 500,000 Angolans. And that's just to begin a list that would roll on and on.

That, of course, is the relatively distant past, but the history of US military action in the twenty-first century suggests that Washington seems destined to repeat the process of choosing the wrong, or one of the wrong, sides into the foreseeable future. Today's Middle East is but a single exhibit in a prolonged tour of hypocrisy.

Boundless hypocrisy

Maybe it's because most Americans just aren't paying attention or maybe we're a nation of true believers, but it's clear that most of us still cling to the idea that our country is a beacon of hope for the planet. Never known for our collective self-awareness, we're eternally aghast to discover that so many elsewhere find little but insincerity in the promise of US foreign policy. "Why do they hate us," Americans have asked, with evident disbelief, for much of this century. Here are just a few hints related to the Greater Middle East:

- Post-9/11, the United States unleashed chaos in the region, destabilised it in stunning ways, and via an invasion launched on false premises created the conditions for ISIS's rise. (That terror group quite literally formed in an American prison in post-invasion Iraq.) Later, with failing or failed states dotting the region, the US response to the worst refugee crisis since World War II has been to admit – to choose but a single devastated country – a paltry 18,000 Syrians since 2011. Canada took in three times that number last year; Sweden more than 50,000 in 2015 alone; and Turkey hosts three million displaced Syrians.

● Meanwhile, Donald Trump's attempts to put in place a Muslim travel ban haven't won this country any friends in the region either; nor will the president's – or White House aide Stephen Miller's – proposed "reform" of US immigration policy, which would prioritise English-speakers, cut in half legal migration within a decade, and limit the ability of citizens and legal residents to sponsor relatives. How do you think that's going to play in the global war for hearts and minds? As much as Miller would love to change Emma Lazarus's inscription on the Statue of Liberty to "give me your well educated, your highly skilled, your English-speaking masses yearning to be free," count on one thing: world opinion won't miss the duplicity and hypocrisy of such an approach.

● Guantánamo – perhaps the single best Islamist recruiting tool on Earth – is still open. And, says President Trump, we're "keeping it open . . . and we're gonna load it up with some bad dudes, believe me, we're gonna load it up." On this, he's likely to be a man of his word. A new executive order is expected soon, preparing the way for an expansion of that prison's population, while the Pentagon is already planning to put almost half a billion dollars into the construction of new facilities there in the coming years. No matter how upset the world gets at any of this, no matter how ISIS and other terror groups use it for their brand of advertising, no American officials will be held to account, because the United States is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court. Hypocritical? Nope, just utterly all-American.

● And speaking of prisons, thanks to nearly unqualified – sometimes almost irrational – US support for Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank increasingly resemble walled off pe-

nal complexes. You almost have to admire President Trump for not even pretending to play the honest broker in the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He typically told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, "One state, two state . . . I like whichever you like." The safe money says Netanyahu will choose neither, opting instead to keep the Palestinians in political limbo without civil rights or a sovereign state, while Israel embarks on a settlement bonanza in the occupied territories. And speaking of American exceptionalism, we're almost alone on the world stage when it comes to our support for the Israeli occupation.

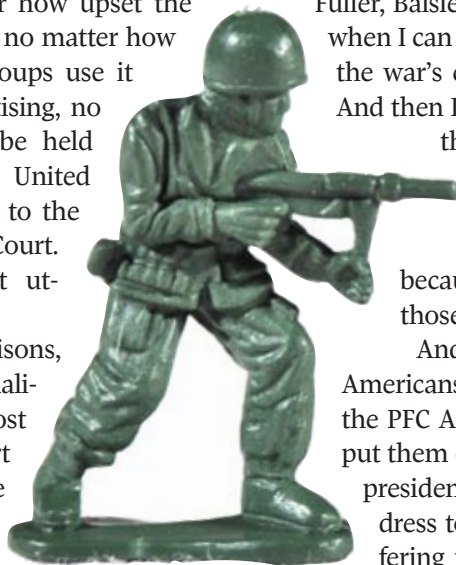
The cost

Given the nature of contemporary American war-fighting (far away and generally lightly covered by the media, which has an endless stream of Trump tweets to fawn over), it's easy to forget that American troops are still dying in modest numbers in the Greater Middle East, in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and – almost 16 years after the American invasion of that country – Afghanistan.

As for myself, from time to time (too often for comfort) I can't help thinking of PFC Anderson and those I led who were so much less fortunate than him: Rios, Hensley, Clark, Hockenberry (a triple amputee), Fuller, Balsley, and Smith. Sometimes, when I can bear it, I even think about the war's countless Afghan victims. And then I wish I could truly believe that we were indisputably the "good guys" in our unending wars across the Greater Middle East because that's what we owed those soldiers.

And it pains me no less that Americans tend to blindly venerate the PFC Andersons of our world, to put them on such a pedestal (as the president did in his Afghan address to the nation recently), offering them eternal thanks, and

It pains me no less that Americans tend to blindly venerate the PFC Andersons of our world, to put them on such a pedestal, offering them eternal thanks, and so making them and their heroism the reason for fighting on, while most of the rest of us don't waste a moment thinking about what (and whom) they're truly fighting for



A Soldier's Lament

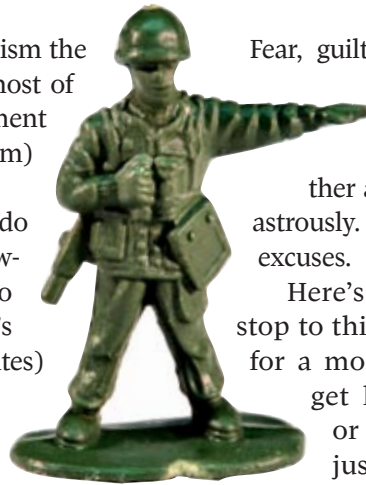
If you just stop to think about America's wars for a moment: it's only going to get harder to look a widow or mother in the eye and justify them in the years to come

so making them and their heroism the reason for fighting on, while most of the rest of us don't waste a moment thinking about what (and whom) they're truly fighting for.

If ever you have the urge to do just that, ask yourself the following question: Would I be able to confidently explain to someone's mother what (besides his mates) her child actually died for?

What would you tell her? That he (or she) died to ensure Saudi hegemony in the Persian Gulf, or to facilitate the rise of ISIS, or an eternal Guantanamo, or the spread of terror groups, or the creation of yet more refugees for us to fear, or the further bombing of Yemen to ensure a famine of epic proportions?

Maybe you could do that, but I couldn't and can't. Not anymore, anyway. There have already been too many mothers, too many widows, for whom those explanations couldn't be lamer. And so many dead – American, Afghan, Iraqi, and all the rest – that eventually I find myself sitting on a bar stool staring at the six names on those bracelets of mine, the wreckage of two wars reflecting back at me, knowing I'll never be able to articulate a coherent explanation for their loved ones, should I ever have the courage to try.



Fear, guilt, embarrassment . . . my crosses to bear, as the war Anderson and I fought only expands further and undoubtedly more disastrously. My choices, my shame. No excuses.

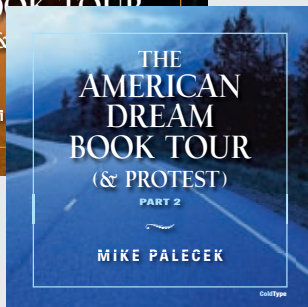
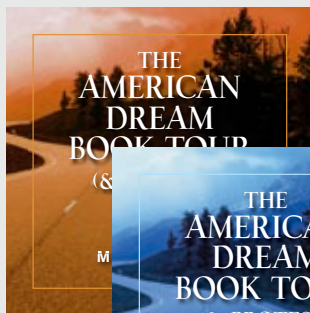
Here's the truth of it, if you just stop to think about America's wars for a moment: it's only going to get harder to look a widow or mother in the eye and justify them in the years to come. Maybe a good soldier

doesn't bother to worry about that . . . but I now know one thing at least: I'm not that.

CT

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Major Danny Sjursen is a US Army strategist and former history instructor at West Point. He served tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has written a memoir and critical analysis of the Iraq War, *Ghost Riders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge*. Follow him on Twitter at @Skeptical_Vet. This article originally appeared at www.tomdispatch.com

[Note: The views expressed here are those of the author, expressed in an unofficial capacity, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US government.]



Another chance to join Mike Palecek's Dream Book Tour (and Protest)

Ten years ago, Mike Palecek took a trip around America to promote his book, *The American Dream*. In his biting, often-hilarious, 2-part journal, he tells a rollicking tale of an adventure that finally ended after 9,876 miles on the road

Download the two parts at

<http://coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0507.RoadTrip.pdf>

<http://coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0607.RoadTrip2.pdf>

A hellhole created by the West's regime-changers

Neil Clark examines the difference in Western reporting of the bombing of ISIS-controlled cities in Syria by Russia and by the US-led 'coalition'

As Jan Egeland, the UN humanitarian adviser on Syria, has stated, if there's a worse place to be in the world at the moment than the Syrian city of Raqqa, it's hard to imagine.

The UN has estimated that the battle to capture the de facto ISIS capital is costing the lives of 27 civilians a day.

It's not just the almost non-stop aerial bombardment and shelling from the mainly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces that the 25,000 or so citizens in ISIS-held parts of the city have to endure. "Access to safe drinking water, food and other basic services is at an all-time low with many residents relying on food they had stored up earlier to survive," says UN public information officer David Swanson.

Both ISIS snipers and the US-led coalition have been targeting people trying to flee from the Middle Eastern hellhole. The UN notes that coalition forces have even been attacking boats on the Euphrates River, described as "one of the remaining escape routes for civilians."

We can only imagine the headlines if Russia was doing all this. But because it's the US and its allies, the international reaction has been muted, to say the least. It's revealing to compare the "humanitarian" concern voiced by pro-war Western politicians and mainstream media outlets when Russia began its military operations in Syria in September 2015, with the lack of concern over what's been happen-

ing in Raqqa.

The claim that Russia was fighting terrorists was widely ridiculed. The US and its allies issued a statement saying Russia's actions, which included a strike on a ISIS training camp near Raqqa, would "only fuel more extremism and radicalisation."

On October 2, 2015, the claim made by then-US President Barack Obama that Russian strikes would only "strengthen ISIS" made Western news headlines. Accusations that Russia was committing war crimes also received prominent coverage.

But when the US-led coalition bombs ISIS, the reporting from mainstream outlets is different. Then, the operation is presented much more positively, with little or no talk about how it will "strengthen" the enemy or "fuel more extremism and radicalisation." There is also little or no talk of war crimes.

A meticulously-researched alert from Media Lens earlier this summer compared the coverage of the sieges of Aleppo and Mosul, "When Russian and Syrian forces were bombarding 'rebel-held' East Aleppo last year, newspapers and television screens were full of anguished reporting about the plight of civilians killed, injured, trapped, traumatised or desperately fleeing . . .

"By contrast, there was little of this evident in media coverage as the Iraqi city of Mosul, with a population of around one million, was being pulverised by the US-led 'coalition'

We can only imagine the headlines if Russia was doing all this. But because it's the US and its allies, the international reaction has been muted, to say the least

Western Hypocrisy

Israel has bombed Syria on countless occasions in the last few years, but each time its attacks have been against those fighting ISIS

from 2015; particularly since the massive assault launched last October to ‘liberate’ the city from ISIS, with ‘victory’ declared a few days ago.”

It was deemed a “Thought Crime” by Imperial Truth Enforcers to actually refer to the recapture of eastern Aleppo by Syrian government forces as a “liberation.” Pro-war Labour British MP John Woodcock even went so far as to call the left-wing Morning Star newspaper “traitorous scum” for daring to defy the gatekeepers and use the “L” word. But of course, if it’s the US and its allies doing the bombing, then using the word “liberation” is de rigeur, regardless of how much death and destruction the “liberation” causes.

There have been no calls from “Inside the Bastille” Western politicians or media pundits for people to protest outside US embassies about the number of civilians killed by coalition airstrikes in Raqqa – as there were over Aleppo. And absolutely no likening of coalition actions to those of the Nazis.

It’s worth noting, too, that while the US and its allies repeatedly called for a “humanitarian pause” in the fighting for Aleppo, they’ve rejected UN calls for one in Raqqa. “Going slower only delays the liberation and subsequently costs more civilians their lives,” US Colonel Joe Scrocca, director of public affairs for combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, told Middle East Eye.

What makes the double standards more outrageous is that without the war-mongering actions of the US and its allies in the Middle East, there would be no ISIS/ISIL in the first place. The “coalition” is fighting in Raqqa a monster that – like Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s famous novel – they helped to create. The terrorist organisation known by the names of “Islamic State,” “ISIS/ISIL,” or “Daesh,” grew out of the chaos that Bush and Blair’s illegal invasion of Iraq had unleashed. As Patrick Cockburn, author of the book *The Rise of Islamic State*, puts it, “ISIS is the child of war.”

Furthermore, the spread of IS to Syria was actually welcomed by the US and its allies as

a way of weakening the secular Ba’athist government in Damascus, which Western neo-cons were desperate to see toppled because of its friendly links with Iran and Russia.

“If the situation unravels there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria, and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran),” – declared a secret US intelligence report, which was declassified in 2015.

In 2016, a leaked tape conversation between US Secretary of State John Kerry and anti-government Syrian activists revealed how the US was pleased to see Islamic State gain territory. “The reason Russia came in is because ISIL was getting stronger,” Kerry admits, flatly contradicting the claims made publicly by the State Department in October 2015 that Russia wasn’t targeting ISIS/ISIL. “Daesh was threatening the possibility of going to Damascus and so forth,” Kerry went on. “We were watching. We saw that Daesh was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened. We thought, however, we could probably manage. You know, that Assad might then negotiate,” he said.

The US and its allies didn’t just watch with pleasure as ISIS expanded – they aided the process. They did this not only by giving money and weaponry to “moderate rebels,” who then – surprise, surprise – defected to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s head-chopping outfit, but by targeting forces that were opposed to Islamic State. Israel, for instance, has bombed Syria on countless occasions in the last few years, but each time its attacks have been against those fighting ISIS. “An aspect of the conflict in Syria that has not received the attention it undoubtedly deserves, has been the role of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) in acting as the de facto air force of Daesh [ISIS] and sundry other Salafi-jihadi and rebel groups fighting in the country,” notes John Wight, a regular commentator on BBC Radio Scotland

We must not forget, too, that if Washing-

ton's Endless War lobby had got their way in August 2013, and the US and its allies launched a full-scale military assault on the Syrian government – then Islamic State and its affiliates would probably now be in charge of the entire country. Yet the failure to bomb Assad four years ago is still openly regarded as a tragedy by Western regime-change hawks. Of course, the key role that the US and its coalition have played in the rise – and expansion – of the forces they are now bombing, is never mentioned in the mainstream reporting of the “Battle for Raqqa.” We’re meant to believe that ISIS fighters appeared and took control of Syria’s seventh largest city by complete accident. And, we’re certainly not meant to ask questions, such as, “From where did these terrorists obtain their weapons?” or, “Under what legal authority do the US and its allies carry out air strikes in Syria?”

My 1987 Lonely Planet Guide to Jordan and Syria, says of Raqqa, “There’s really nothing to do or see but it can be a good base from which to visit Lake Assad and the walled city of Rasafah, 30km to the south.” The city is most definitely not a “good base” for tourists today.

One person who did manage to get out of “the worst place on Earth” earlier this year told RT’s Ruptly news agency, “The streets are full of dead bodies. The schools were targeted, the bridges, and mosques. The [dead] people are lying on the streets; some people were dragged by cars . . . Dogs were eating the [dead] bodies for there was no one to pick them up.” The bombed-out ruins of Raqqa and the rotting corpses lying on its streets are a testament to a “liberal interventionist” neo-con foreign policy, in all its bloodstained, hypocritical, “humanitarian” glory. **CT**

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Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. He is a regular pundit on RT and has also appeared on BBC TV and radio, Sky News, Press TV and the Voice of Russia. His award winning blog can be found at www.neilclark66.blogspot.com

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The United States of Manufactured Hysteria

Just when it seemed we might be able to undertake more careful scrutiny of the state of America, along came another national crisis, writes **CJ Hopkins**

Corporate media apparatchiks, mandarins of the Internet Left, professional and amateur Naziologists, and assorted other Nazi experts immediately went to DEFCON 1, signalling imminent Nazi invasion

Thank God for the Charlottesville Nazis! For a moment there, it was looking like we were actually going to have a few days to stop and reflect on the state of America without being subjected to some new form of manufactured mass hysteria.

Seriously, just a few short weeks ago, as the corporatist ruling classes' ridiculous attempt to convince the world that Donald Trump is some sort of Russian sleeper agent appeared to be finally fizzling out, a significant number of leftist types were beginning to wonder if maybe, just maybe, the fact that the United States government is controlled by a global corporate plutocracy that has no allegiance to any nation, or people, or to anything other than itself, and that is in the process of demonising and potentially deposing an elected president . . . that maybe that might be something to focus on, not exclusively, by any means, but alongside other vital issues, such as defending the rights of transgender drone pilots and purging syllabi of oppressive pronouns.

Fortunately, thanks to the Nazis of Charlottesville, this dangerous moment of doubt has now passed. If you were listening closely on August 11, you could hear the collective sigh of relief whooshing out of Resistance quarters like a hypnagogic idiot wind as roughly 100 white supremacists marched into town with their tiki torches, barking NSDA slogans and otherwise making

asses of themselves. Corporate media apparatchiks, mandarins of the Internet Left, professional and amateur Naziologists, and assorted other Nazi experts immediately went to DEFCON 1, signalling imminent Nazi invasion. Photos of bug-eyed, torch-bearing Nazis, their mouths wide open in mid-Nazi shriek, veins bulging out of their Nazi necks, were released to the public and circulated widely.

Millions of conflicted leftists (many of whom had been feeling uneasy about collaborating with the corporate plutocracy in their efforts to delegitimise Trump, and every last American who voted for him), upon seeing glossy, colour close-ups of these Nazis waved in front of their faces, responded as every Good American has been conditioned to respond since early childhood. They instantly switched off their critical faculties and began reenacting the Second World War . . . or rather, the mythical version of it wherein the USA defeated the Nazis, which is one of Americans' favourite pastimes.

Look, I don't mean to make light of Charlottesville. We're talking actual neo-Nazis, with actual Nazi flags and haircuts, shouting actual Nazi slogans, and the Ku Klux Klan, and heavily-armed militia, and just garden variety racist rednecks . . . all of which have been standard features of American life for decades, and longer, but this is no time to reflect on history, or try to put



Flags fly as clashes erupt at the Unite The Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Photo: Wespennest, via Flickr.com

things into perspective. Also, one of these Nazi morons ran over people with his car the next day, killing one woman, and injuring many others, which renders any critical thinking about the actual size of the Nazi menace (which remains ridiculously small, as ever) or the motives of the corporate media in blowing it up all out of proportion tantamount to Nazi sympathising, and I'm already in enough trouble as it is.

Plus, Charlottesville was just the beginning . . . like a Nazi Tet Offensive. Just a week later, on August 19, 40 to 50y Nazis (cleverly disguised as Trump supporters, libertarians, and right-wing oddballs) occupied a public gazebo in Boston, and were right on the verge of expressing virulent Nazi views to the cops surrounding them. Luckily, just in the nick of time, a contingent of approximately 40,000 anti-fascist Resistance members arrived on the scene to deny them a platform, and chase down anyone wearing one of those MAGA hats, while verbally abusing them.

You'd think the Nazis would have got the message . . . but no, on August 27, another 10 or 11 Nazis audaciously tried to assem-

ble in Berkeley, California. The Resistance showed them no mercy this time. Thousands of peaceful counter-protesters quickly frightened the Nazis away, then squads of masked-up anti-fascists hunted down any Nazi-looking stragglers, "apparent alt-righters," and nosy photographers, and stomped the living Hitler out of them. This alarmed the more liberal Resistance, which set about branding the anti-fascists who beat the crap out of the folks the liberals had branded Nazis as "domestic terrorists."

Elsewhere in America, Resistance members were frantically tearing down Confederate monuments, which had suddenly become intolerably offensive, and searching through online business directories for anyone named after Robert E. Lee, or horses named after General Lee's horse, or the horses of other racist Nazis. That, and hastily organising the upcoming March to Confront White Supremacy (presumably in order to make a mockery of the 1963 March on Washington), and penning lengthy explications of the evils of racism, white supremacy, and all other forms of Naziism associated with Donald Trump . . . and other-

Thousands of peaceful counter-protesters quickly frightened the California Nazis away, then squads of masked-up anti-fascists hunted down any Nazi-looking stragglers, "apparent alt-righters," and nosy photographers, and stomped the living Hitler out of them

Diverting Attention

**Corporatocracy?
What
corporatocracy?
We got goddamned
Nazis coming out
of the woodwork!
This is no time to
worry about who's
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political power,
or how they're
manufacturing
hysteria and
otherwise
manipulating
people (not you,
of course . . .
other people)**

wise whipping people up into a sputtering frenzy of Nazi hysteria.

Now, you have to hand it to the fake Resistance . . . this Nazi hysteria is good for everyone. Not only is it an easier sell than that ridiculous Russian hacking nonsense (because Trump really is a racist, of course), but it's something the broader Left can embrace, as it plugs straight into identity politics, which is pretty much all we've got these days.

See, up to now, the dilemma we've been facing (or some of us have been facing, anyway) is how to respond to the ruling establishment's concerted campaign to "regime-change" Trump. On the one hand, Trump is a living embodiment of everything the Left opposes. On the other hand, going after Trump has meant carrying water for the fake Resistance, ie, that global corporatocracy (which, by the way, does not mean "the Jews." I always like to slip that in to piss off my anti-Semitic readers.) This has been a bit awkward for some of us, restraining our impulse to stick it to Trump (at least on whatever talking points the Resistance is currently putting out) because in doing so we would align ourselves with the ruling establishment's attempt to demonise, and eventually depose an American president who isn't playing ball with them properly. If we oppose regime change in other countries, shouldn't we also oppose it at home? Or do the ruling classes get a pass this time because Trump is such an exceptional monster? But wait . . . wasn't Saddam a monster? And Gaddafi? And all the other "Hitlers" who wouldn't play ball with the corporatocracy? And Assad? Isn't he a monster?

You can see how confusing all this gets . . . when you're trying to figure out how to oppose both the supranational corporatocracy that is superseding sovereign nations as the hegemonic power in the world and the neo-nationalist reaction against it, which is essentially fascist in nature, and which the corporatocracy also opposes, and desperately wants you to help them oppose by buying

their manufactured hysteria about Russians, or Nazis, or whatever scary monster they wave in front of your face. After a while, your brain starts to hurt, and you just want someone to make things simple.

Charlottesville Nazis to the rescue! How much simpler could it possibly get? Corporatocracy? What corporatocracy? We got goddamned Nazis coming out of the woodwork! Racist Nazis! Confederate Nazis! Nazi apologists! Nazi sympathizers! This is no time to worry about who's actually wielding political power, or how they're manufacturing hysteria and otherwise manipulating people (not you, of course . . . other people). No, what we need to do now is censor the Internet, and other venues for Nazi hate speech, and round up all these racist Nazis and subject them to anti-Nazi therapy, or anti-racist empathy programmes, or just gang up on them and beat them senseless.

OK, sure, that might sound extreme, or authoritarian, or just plain old creepy, but keep in mind that This Is Not Normal! And racism and Naziism is very, very bad. And Love Trumps Hate! And Scope Kills Germs! And we never literally meant that Trump was an actual Russian agent or anything. Forget about all that Russia stuff now. Trump is Hitler. Trump has always been Hitler. America has always been at war with Hitler. America will always be at war with Hitler.

Oh, yeah, and I almost forgot, today's edition of the Two Minutes Hate will begin in approximately 15 minutes. Please assemble in the usual location. Thank you for your cooperation. **CT**

C J Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, *ZONE 23*, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org

Among the racists

The American neo-Nazi world is a non-stop tape-loop of race hatred and genocide dreams, writes **John Eskow**

I have walked among them since I first learned to walk. They surrounded me in blue-collar Utica, New York – an early capitol of Rust Belt America, back in the 1950s, where “nigger” was an all-purpose, white-on-white epithet on the Little League diamonds and basketball courts – though I never saw a black person in the flesh until I was 11. I still remember how astonished I was by the sight of him: somehow a “Negro” kid, roughly my age, had strayed into our Italian/Irish/Polish neighbourhood, and he was sprinting desperately to escape before he got caught and stomped. I was riding down Genesee Street with my friend Clark Battie in his dad’s pick-up truck. Old man Battie slowed down as we passed the terrified, wide-eyed kid and laughed quietly. “Look at that, Johnny. The things ya see when ya don’t have your gun, huh?”

At 18 I stood on Boston Common with my girlfriend Connie and 20,000 other white people as George Wallace conducted the biggest rally of his presidential campaign.

Then, in 1993, as research for a screenplay, I had the monstrously foolish idea not only to go among them, but to become one of them. I spent three days as an undercover Klansman, ushered into the racist underworld by a legendary Nazi/Klan felon who served as my “rabbi.” Introducing me as one of his bodyguards, he took me to

a weekend retreat in rural Pennsylvania, where rival Klan factions hooked up with American Nazis, Aryan Brothers, and members of The Posse Comitatus, the Michigan Militia, and – my favourite name of all – The Cross, the Sword, and the Covenant of the Lord. Hair slicked back into a rockabilly DA underneath an orange Florida Gators cap, loudly proclaiming my hatred for the national Jews’-media, I drank the \$3 champagne with them, popped their No-Doz, and smoked their cut-rate generic cigarettes. That adventure, which ended in a near-fatal stabbing –and with both my rabbi and me being held for three hours at (multiple) gunpoint(s) – is a story for another day. But what I learned over that lost weekend has stuck with me for nearly 25 years. And of course it has flared up again, a retrovirus coming back to haunt me.

Many of the Klan/Nazi leaders I met were much smarter than we’d like to think – thoughtful students of history and tactics. They had learned from the fratricide of the 1960s left, and that was the reason for the weekend convocation: they were determined to rise above petty factional differences. The foot soldiers, of course, are stone losers – so unloved by their fathers that they are forced to live out self-created images of manhood that constantly flicker and blur – I’m a killer! I’m a victim! I’m a defender! I’m a martyr! – and so loathed by

Many of the Klan/Nazi leaders I met were much smarter than we’d like to think – thoughtful students of history and tactics. They had learned from the fratricide of the 1960s left

Nazi Wisdom?

Hard-core genocide-talk is akin to hard-core pornography: the author has to keep upping the ante, super-charging every adjective, mercilessly slicing away any word that doesn't make the reader hard

women that they try to immunise themselves by loathing women in return. When they talk – and the first lesson I learned about hard-core racists, travelling 120 miles with them in a beat-to-crap station wagon daubed with Rust-o-Leum – is that everybody talks; you don't join a racist group in order to keep silent – they keep crashing into the contradictions of their badly-cobbled-together world-view. The Holocaust never happened – but it was great. Black people are too stupid to do white people's jobs – but black people are doing white people's jobs.

The prevailing sense you get – the “wisdom of the (Klan/Nazi) crowd,” if you will – is that even though black people are simian, lust-maddened imbeciles, like other jungle creatures they are relatively harmless as long as they're confined to their native habitat. Ah, but the Jew! Those hook-nosed mosquitos feasting on the blood of the goyim! (They say “good taste is timeless,” but so are antisemitic cartoons – the stuff floating around on the internet is indistinguishable from what you'd see on a 1930s German broadsheet.) The Hebrews are comic-book evil geniuses – every Jew a Lex Luthor – who mind-controls black and white alike. Jews invented hip-hop, for example. Jews ghost-write all the raps, from Public Enemy and Tupac Shakur straight through to Kendrick Lamar. (“Hymie! Hurry up and finish that gangsta rap, ya big schlemiel!”) And by seducing white teens with its sinister beats, Jews infect them all with irresistible urges for inter-racial sex. These super-Jews transcend time itself; the semites of 2017 are executing Talmudic plots dreamed up in the Middle Ages.

It's enough to make Alan Dershowitz blush.

But, like those crude black-and-white mosquito-Jew cartoons, the Final Solution never changes. Hanging them from lamp-posts. Gassing them with Zyklon B. (Arcane debates about the efficacy of various gaseous poisons are common.) Rendering them

into lampshades. It's a nonstop tape-loop of race-hatred and genocide-dreams. And this is where the outsider – no matter how well-versed in the rhetoric, no matter how he steels himself against it – begins to falter. I was an eager infiltrator, but this is where I lost heart. Because to live through that ongoing conversation – and not just to endure it, but to be a laughing participant in it – is something that my nervous system was not wired for. The synapses of any faintly decent human being are wired to short out and shut down at this point. You have to keep kick-starting your brain. And in the end it's too exhausting.

Hard-core genocide-talk is akin to hard-core pornography: the author has to keep upping the ante, super-charging every adjective, mercilessly slicing away any word that doesn't make the reader hard. There is a dismal but very real art to it. I can only imagine that years of reading and speaking this porno-racist lingo permanently alter the brain.

How many of these full-blown psychos move among us? Probably no more now than there were in the Utica of my childhood. But no less – Bill Clinton made sure of that with NAFA and GATT, thus gutting whatever blue-collar jobs, and whatever chances for self-respect, were left in all of America's many Uticas. What's so strange about this moment is that – whatever the number of hard-core racists–now they have open sympathisers in the White House.

I once read an account of the Warsaw Ghetto in which a survivor, an old woman, said that at first the Nazis would kidnap Jews at night; you'd wake up to find that two of your neighbours had disappeared. But she could make a kind of queasy compact with that reality, because it happened in the night, when everyone was asleep. Then one morning she woke up to see bodies hanging from the lamp-posts, and her first thought was: oh, God – now they're doing it in the daylight.

I'm not sure which is worse.

CT

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John Eskow is a writer and musician. He wrote or co-wrote the movies *Air America*, *The Mask of Zorro*, and *Pink Cadillac*, as well as the novel *Smokestack Lightning*. He is a contributor to *Killing Trayvons: an Anthology of American Violence*. He can be reached at: johneskow@yahoo.com

Nuclear threat that Trumps all others

Steve Leigh and **Alan Maass** point out that the main source of nuclear tension lies in an arsenal many times bigger than the one North Korea has developed

The unthinkable possibility of nuclear war is once again in the headlines after US officials reacted with shrill threats to a North Korean government claim to have tested its most powerful nuclear bomb yet.

This is the latest escalation in a game of nuclear chicken, with calculated provocations on all sides – though to judge from the mainstream media, it is only North Korea’s Kim Jung-un who is driving the world to the brink of a nightmare.

This is false. The North Korean test of what it says was a more destructive hydrogen bomb, along with more launches of missiles supposedly capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, came within days of the annual large-scale military exercises carried out by South Korea, Japan and the US

These “war games” are an aggressive threat directed explicitly at North Korea – but US political leaders and media commentators present them as if they are purely defensive, while heaping scorn on anyone who suggests otherwise.

North Korea’s latest nuclear detonation, the first since Trump was inaugurated, is a frightening development. Media outlets reported that this bomb was estimated to be as much 10 times more powerful than previous blasts, and the regime claimed the bomb could be loaded onto an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Yet in all the talk of kilotons and missile ranges, the media left out one important statistic: The nuclear arsenal at the command of the warlord-in-chief in Washington, DC, is 700 times bigger than North Korea’s.

One nuclear warhead anywhere in the world – and controlled by unaccountable leaders, as is true of every government that possesses them – is one too many. But the undeniable fact is that North Korea is a bit player among the nuclear powers.

According to the Arms Control Association, as of July 2017, North Korea possessed an estimated 10 nuclear warheads. Israel was estimated to have eight times as many warheads in an arsenal it has never publicly acknowledged – but you won’t hear Donald Trump complaining about the reactionary fanatic, bent on the ethnic cleansing of the original inhabitants of Palestine, in charge of those weapons.

Regional rivals India and Pakistan are each thought to possess well over 100 nukes. That’s the same India that Donald Trump, in his speech announcing the escalation of the US war on Afghanistan, invited to join in Washington’s colonial war, “a sure-fire way to bring nuclear-armed India and Pakistan [which borders Afghanistan] into a terrifying confrontation,” wrote columnist and author Eric Margolis.

The United Kingdom, China and France

Israel was estimated to have eight times as many warheads in an arsenal it has never publicly acknowledged – but you won’t hear Donald Trump complaining about the reactionary fanatic, bent on the ethnic cleansing of the original inhabitants of Palestine, in charge of those weapons

War Games

The US has about 1,400 active strategic weapons deployed in missile silos or on aircraft and submarines – remember that the sabre-rattling rhetoric about North Korea is in response to the regime’s attempt to build one working missile

have between 200 and 300 warheads each, but their stockpiles are dwarfed by the two countries that possess over 90 percent of the world’s weapons of total destruction: the US and Russia, the Cold War rivals that brandished those weapons at each other for decades. Their arsenals are smaller in number now, but Russia still has 7,000 warheads, and the US has 6,800.

US leaders of both mainstream parties claim their threats toward North Korea are out of concern for regional and international security, but the US government’s history as a nuclear power belies those claims.

Only the US has killed people with nuclear weapons in wartime when it obliterated the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The US government, under the command of Democrat and liberal hero John F. Kennedy, brought the world to the closest it has ever come to global nuclear war with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. On numerous occasions, false radar readings led to near-nuclear launches.

Currently, the US has about 1,400 active strategic weapons deployed in missile silos or on aircraft and submarines – remember that the sabre-rattling rhetoric about North Korea is in response to the regime’s attempt to build one working missile.

The submarine-launched missiles are probably the most dangerous – there are 920 of them on 230 vessels, with every single one “having destructive power equivalent to many Hiroshimas . . . [and] sufficient to destroy an entire country and bring on nuclear winter,” writes peace activist Mel Gurtov.

Today’s missiles carry more than one warhead. These have been given the benign-sounding name of MIRV, or Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicles. The multiple warheads give each missile vastly greater destructive power and makes missile defense nearly impossible.

Some commentators believe the world is a safer place than during the Cold War because there are fewer nuclear warheads

overall, and fewer still are active. As a result of arms control treaties, the number of quickly useable nukes has declined.

The negotiations “succeeded” because both the US and Russia realised they could maintain their power to destroy each other – yet neither government has ever been serious about eliminating all nukes, which constitute one of the most important foundations of their respective military might.

And, needless to say, the streamlined arsenals are still extremely dangerous. They are more than enough to annihilate the planet. As Hans Kristensen and Robert S. Norris wrote in an article for the Federation of American Scientists: “The number of nuclear weapons in the world has declined significantly since the Cold War: down from a peak of approximately 70,300 in 1986 to an estimated 14,900 in early-2017.”

Government officials often portray that accomplishment as a result of current arms control agreements, but the overwhelming portion of the reduction happened in the 1990s. Moreover, comparing today’s inventory with that of the 1950s is like comparing apples and oranges; today’s forces are vastly more capable. The pace of reduction has slowed significantly. Instead of planning for nuclear disarmament, the nuclear-armed states appear to plan to retain large arsenals for the indefinite future.

As this report and every serious analysis of the issue makes clear, the greatest danger comes from the two major nuclear powers, not the minor ones.

And what’s worse, the nuclear arms race continues. While the numbers of warheads have not been rising, each side is trying to increase their “quality.”

The administration of Barack Obama led the way in developing a nuclear modernisation program. The guiding principle is that if a streamlined nuclear arsenal is going to remain a credible deterrent, the weapons have to be known to be fully functional – which requires testing, updating and replacement.

One inevitable result is that the “modern-

ised” nukes become more usable. A Guardian report in 2015 pointed out that the upgrade of B61-12 nuclear weapons – at a cost of \$8-billion – included making the yield adjustable before launch and exchanging the rigid tail fin for a movable one to make it easier to guide the bombs to their targets.

Aside from the threat of making nuclear weapons more effective and therefore more likely to be used, there is the price tag. The Obama-era nuclear modernisation program inherited by Trump could unleash what Bill Clinton’s Defense Secretary William Perry called “a new nuclear arms race” – one that “will be at least as expensive as the arms race we had during the Cold War,” Perry said.

In the age of Trump, it is tempting to see the problem as one egomaniac in the White House. Trump is, of course, frightening in any number of ways, including the fact that he feels no compunction about threatening to unleash “fire, fury and, frankly, power, the likes of which this world has never seen before.”

But the roots of the nuclear arms race and the threat of total destruction go far beyond one reactionary fanatic – with Obama’s “modernisation” program being another case in point. As Mel Gurtov wrote: “There

simply is no legitimate basis for believing that the nuclear arsenal needs to be larger, more invulnerable, or more accurate and reliable.”

Yet as Americans learned long ago, for the nuclear lobby – the pro-nuclear members of Congress, the military industries that test and produce the weapons and the means of their delivery, and the various Pentagon advisory boards, laboratories, and nuclear planners – enough is never enough.

These folks can always be counted on to argue that the nuclear stockpile must be periodically revitalised to ensure readiness. And all it takes is a supposed nuclear threat – today meaning North Korea – to bolster the nuclear lobby’s case for upgrading.

Trump, Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis and Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley rail about the threat of North Korea developing a nuclear weapon – while they control enough to destroy the planet, and they engage in “war games” to prove they’ll use them.

The first step in opposing the rising threat of war over Korea is to expose the hypocrisy of the warlords of Washington. **CT**

Steve Leigh and Alan Maass wrote this article for Socialist Worker at www.socialistworker.org

All it takes is a supposed nuclear threat – today meaning North Korea – to bolster the nuclear lobby’s case for upgrading

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Israel in a numbers battle with Palestinians

Jonathan Cook details Netanyahu's new scheme to find more willing foot soldiers to join his battle to steal Palestinian land

During the 1948 war that founded a Jewish state on the ruins of the Palestinian homeland, 750,000 Palestinians were expelled in a campaign that today would be termed ethnic cleansing

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered a crushing rebuke to the perennial optimists roused to hopes of imminent peace by the visit to the Middle East last week of Donald Trump's adviser and son-in-law, Jared Kushner. At an event in the West Bank celebrating the half-centenary of Israeli occupation, Netanyahu effectively admitted that US efforts to revive the peace process would prove another charade.

There would be no dismantling of the settlements or eviction of their 600,000 inhabitants – the minimum requirement for a barely feasible Palestinian state. “We are here to stay forever,” Netanyahu reassured his settler audience. “We will deepen our roots, build, strengthen and settle.”

So where is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict heading if the two-state solution is dead? The answer: back to its origins. That will entail another desperate numbers battle against the Palestinians – with Israel preparing to create new categories of “Jews” so they can be recruited to the fray.

Demography was always at the heart of Israeli policy. During the 1948 war that founded a Jewish state on the ruins of the Palestinian homeland, 750,000 Palestinians were expelled in a campaign that today would be termed ethnic cleansing. By the end, a large native Palestinian majority had been reduced to less than a fifth of the new state's population. David Ben Gurion,

the country's founding father, was unperturbed. He expected to swamp this rump group with Jews from Europe and the Arab world. But the project foundered on two miscalculations.

First, Ben Gurion had not factored in the Palestinian minority's far higher birth rate. Despite waves of Jewish immigrants, Palestinians have held fast, at 20 per cent of Israel's citizenry. Israel has fought a rearguard battle against them ever since. Studies suggest that the only Israeli affirmative action programme for Palestinian citizens is in family planning.

Demographic scheming

Israeli demographic scheming was on show again at the end of August. An investigation by the Haaretz newspaper found that in recent years, Israel has stripped of citizenship potentially thousands of Bedouin, the country's fastest-growing population. Israel claims bureaucratic “errors” were made in registering their parents or grandparents after the state's founding.

Meanwhile, another Rubicon was crossed when an Israeli court approved revoking the citizenship of a Palestinian convicted of a lethal attack on soldiers. Human rights groups fear that, by rendering him stateless, the Israeli right has established a precedent for conditioning citizenship on “loyalty.”

Justice minister Ayelet Shaked under-

lined that very point when she warned the country's judges that they must prioritise demography and the state's Jewishness over human rights.

The second miscalculation arrived in 1967. In seizing the last fragments of historic Palestine but failing to expel most of the inhabitants, Israel made itself responsible for many hundreds of thousands of additional Palestinians, including refugees from the earlier war.

The "demographic demon," as it is often referred to in Israel, was held at bay only by bogus claims for many decades that the occupation would soon end. In 2005, Israel bought a little more breathing space by "disengaging" from the tiny Gaza enclave and its 1.5-million inhabitants.

Now, in killing hopes of Palestinian statehood, Netanyahu has made public his intention to realise the one settler-state solution. Naftali Bennett, Netanyahu's chief rival in the government, is itching to ignore international sentiment and begin annexing large parts of the West Bank.

There is a problem, however. At least half the population in Netanyahu's Greater Israel are Palestinian. And with current birth rates, Jews will soon be an indisputable minority – one ruling over a Palestinian majority. That is the context for understanding the report of a just-leaked government panel that proposes a revolutionary reimagining of who counts as a Jew and therefore qualifies to live in Israel (and the occupied territories).

Law of Return

Israel's 1950 Law of Return already casts the net wide, revising the traditional rabbinical injunction that a Jew must be born to a Jewish mother. Instead, the law entitles anyone with one Jewish grandparent to instant citizenship. That worked fine as long as Jews were fleeing persecution or economic distress. But since the arrival of a million immigrants following the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the pool of new Jews has dried up.

The United States, even in the Trump era, has proved the bigger magnet. The Jerusalem Post newspaper reported last month that up to a million Israelis may be living there. Worse for Netanyahu, it seems that at least some are included in Israeli figures to bolster its demographic claims against the Palestinians.

Recent trends show that the exodus of Israelis to the US is twice as large as the arrival of American Jews to Israel. With 150 Israeli start-ups reported in Silicon Valley alone, that tendency is not about to end.

With a pressing shortage of Jews to defeat the Palestinians demographically, the Netanyahu government is considering a desperate solution. The leaked report suggests opening the doors to a new category of "Jewish" non-Jews. According to Haaretz, potentially millions of people worldwide could qualify. The new status would apply to "crypto-Jews," whose ancestors converted from Judaism; "emerging Jewish" communities that have adopted Jewish practices; and those claiming to be descended from Jewish "lost tribes."

Though they will initially be offered only extended stays in Israel, the implication is that this will serve as a prelude to widening their entitlement to eventually include citizenship. The advantage for Israel is that most of these "Jewish" non-Jews currently live in remote, poor or war-torn parts of the world, and stand to gain from a new life in Israel – or the occupied territories.

That is the great appeal to the die-hard one-staters like Netanyahu and Bennett. They need willing foot soldiers in the battle to steal Palestinian land, trampling on internationally recognised borders and hopes of peace-making.

Will they get away with it? They may think so, especially at a time when the US administration claims it would show "bias" to commit itself to advancing a two-state solution. Trump has said the parties should work out their own solution. Netanyahu soon may have the arithmetic to do so. **CT**

The advantage for Israel is that most of these "Jewish" non-Jews currently live in remote, poor or war-torn parts of the world, and stand to gain from a new life in Israel – or the occupied territories

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Jonathan Cook
won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His web site is www.jonathancook.net

In The Picture

Photographs © John Chillingworth from *John Chillingworth: Picture Post Photographer* / Dewi Lewis Publishing



BEAUTY CONTEST IN BIRKENHEAD, October 1958: Contestants in a heat of ABC Television's nationwide beauty contest parade before the judges.

Telling stories

Celebrating the work of a giant of photojournalism

Picture Post, Britain's best known illustrated magazine, was launched almost 80 years ago, in October 1938, and ran for almost 20 years until its closure in 1957. At its peak had a circulation of just under two-million copies.

At 22, John Chillingworth was the youngest member of the team of photojournalists on the magazine, working alongside many of the magazine's much-heralded greats, including Bert Hardy, Kurt Hutton, Felix Man, Bill Brandt, Thurston Hopkins, Grace Robertson, and Leonard McCombe. Editorially, the magazine was liberal, anti-Fascist and populist, covering everything from politics, through to sport, fashion, music, theatre and film, as well as picture stories of everyday life in the UK and abroad.



YOUNG LOVE, April 1958: At the Saturday night dance in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.



Cotton Mill Workers, April 1952: As Britain's position in the international cotton manufacturing began to fail, workers in Lancashire bore the brunt of the pain. As unemployment soared, the prospects for decent working men and women were bleak.



TAKING THE TUBE, January 1951: Old ladies born in the 19th century still travelled on London Underground in the 1950s.



AMBASSADOR'S RECEPTION, March 1958: At the residence of US Ambassador, John Hay Whitney.

In The Picture

Photographs © John Chillingworth from *John Chillingworth: Picture Post Photographer* / Dewi Lewis Publishing



SANDCASTLES IN THE GUTTER, April 1954: For this child, the gutter of a Liverpool street served a substitute for a sandy beach.

Encouraged by the magazine's legendary editor Tom Hopkinson, Chillingworth learned to combine storytelling images with the written word, shooting more than 400 photo essays during his seven years with the magazine. .

In his introduction to **John Chillingworth: Picture Post Photographer**, the latest book in a mini-industry that has sprung up in recent years to celebrate Picture Post and its photographers, Matthew Butson, vice president of the Hulton Archive, tells us that much of Chillingworth's success may be attributed to his earlier 'apprenticeship' in the company's darkroom, processing

the images of the magazine's star photographers.

Learning from the masters around him, "Chillingworth would become adept at creating images that worked as visual narratives. And, with few exceptions, he would compose the image in the viewfinder – it is extraordinary when viewing his contact strips to discover the vast majority of his images are perfectly framed, requiring no cropping at all." writes Butson.

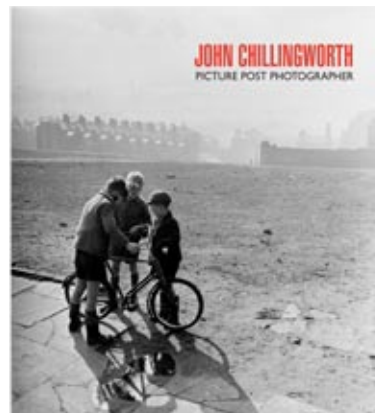
He adds, "Using a Contax II or a Rolleiflex, Chillingworth developed a technique also used by Hutton. Having composed the image, he would release the shutter, at which point the subject would instantly relax, only



THE LAST CUSTOMER, March 1952. At the end of a depressing, rainy day, the last of the Whitechapel Market traders packs up to go home.

for Chillingworth to quickly hit the button again, thus producing the desired effect – the subject seemingly totally at ease with the camera.”

Chillingworth’s images are still reproduced in publications around the world, but this book is his first monograph and features a wide range of photographs, primarily taken during his Picture Post years. The volume takes its place alongside another recent volume, **Bert Hardy’s Britain**, which is dedicated to the output of one of the men whose photographs Chillingworth processed during his years of training before he became a Picture Post photographer. **CT**



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Michael & Me

Mike Palecek takes a break from Northern Minnesota and drops in to see Michael Moore in New York City

“A man once said that the pinnacle of success is when you’ve finally lost interest, in money, compliments, and publicity.” — Todd Snider

I am an American.

And I believe.

I believe that Sasquatch is an ape, jet flyovers over the stadium were put there by God, God is umm, not sure . . . Lee Harvey Oswald killed John Kennedy, George Washington chopped down the cherry tree and something about the moon.

Not really. Not necessarily.

I believe that what Americans need though is a saying, something to summarise, to protect, to help us get through.

Italian Literary Park Ranger.

That’s not it. Those are my mind notes I keep repeating as Ruth and I walk through Central Park.

Yes, we went to New York, drove out of the woods of northern Minnesota to Minneapolis and were outa here, because it was time.

While I’m walking and gawking in Central Park I’m making notes in my head because I have no paper and it would be weird to write down shit all the time. I just keep repeating the words in my head and maybe I’ll remember. “Italian” because I’ve never heard Italian live before and I say something stupid to Ruth about Italians looking normal until you hear them talk. “Literary” because we go down Literary Way and I want my statue to be there. “Park Ranger” because there is a guy sitting in the park wearing a big UFO hat who told us where the restrooms were, and I think I can find some way to put Park Ranger into this. So, sometimes all the notes you keep in your head are stupid and when you get back to paper you just let it go. Because it’s stupid.

We Americans do think funny things, weird things.

Maybe Italians and Chinese and others do, too, but it’s harder to tell. We believe in Lake Wobegon, for one thing, or we want to, we really want to.

We have lots of sayings, funny things that we believe, in which we base whole lives in.

Anyway, it was time, time to leave Minnesota.

The Duluth Public Library could not find my Wisconsin beer box of books I had brought in and offered to the library to put into circulation. The fiction editor had turned them down and now I was there to pick up the box, but it couldn’t be found.

And it was time to leave because it was time to get off the damn computer, wow, you do know what I’m talking about? And it was time to go to a dive bar in Brooklyn. That’s what really sounded like fun to me.

We went for a walk in Central Park because it was close and it’s Central Park. And we found out that Michael Moore has a show on Broadway. We had already planned to see The Book of Mormon, but that was another night. We checked the prices and found tickets and there we were.

Michael Moore has a Broadway show and the Duluth Public Library can’t find my beer box of books. I think MM and I could have been buddies, journalists chasing down the bad guys, Michael & Me [but mostly me], but so far that has not worked out.

It was time to leave Minnesota because I was done writing, it was not working, and there was nothing else to do and maybe there is something to do in New York, probably not, but maybe.

It was time to leave Minnesota because I had read in the Duluth Reader how Garrison Keillor, who calls himself The Old Scout, believes that Lee Harvey Oswald killed John F. Kennedy. Keillor is considered by many to be the most urbane, erudite, sophisticated, educated tall person in a state of people who mostly consider themselves urbane, tall, erudite, sophisticated.

The **BIG** Read

And me, I, who am short, working relentlessly on the self-improvement programme that is destined to fail the moment I stop pedalling, while on the bike, sweating, watching the TV on the bike, also watched Keillor along with Walter Mondale talking on an erudite Minnesota television programme about how “the plane that hit the Pentagon,” and how 9/11 was basically a failure in foresight and planning.

These are not stupid men, presumably. They are too tall and wearing suits and they are on TV and people know their names – and they know full well how their bread is buttered and by whom. They also did not say boo or you betcha when their fellow Minnesotan, Paul Wellstone, was murdered for having questioned the official 9/11 story.

These elder Minnesota statesmen will not be placing in jeopardy their pre-punched tickets to the White House Camo Ball. They are already wearing their camo coats, socks, and presumably, camo underwear, ready to toast whatever rite of further passage is en vogue and get on with the rest of their lives.

And it was time because it was our 36th anniversary. Ruth and I had been to New York 11 years before with the kids, and I had been there right after I fled the seminary in Saint Paul after meeting Dan Berrigan because it was not radical enough, to join the New York City Catholic Worker, and I had been there later, on a book tour – **to download Palecek’s account of his Dream Book Book Tour (and Protest), see Page 28 of this issue** – in an elderly tan Toyota, to read at Bluestockings, on Allen Street, to absolutely nobody.

It was time to leave, at least for a week, because the MinnPost in Minneapolis and The Independent in New York had both turned down my idea to write a column to show Garrison Keillor what he could be if he were to be all he can be: The News From Moon Rock Lake, Minnesota.

I spend parts of my days searching for Sasquatch and writing books and I think you can imagine how after a long summer or winter or both, how you might feel the zeitgeist pushing down on your head and the back of your neck as you sink to the bottom.

During the stay-over in Minneapolis we walked around Uptown, by the lake, by Magers & Quinn where I had given a reading maybe ten years ago to a tiny crowd of crazy people. On the way, a black man on the corner whispers to me, “do you like poetry?”

WTF?

Well, yeah, I said, but I don’t, not really. But he showed

guts. I had no money and I just patted him on the shoulder to be encouraging.

I said to Ruth, “Wow, selling poetry on the corner.”

I looked for the perfect book for the trip but didn’t find it because it’s not there.

We did get change and I hustled back to the corner to give the hearty black man his due, a soggy five-dollar bill. Couldn’t see him, maybe down this street, this one?

And then, there he was. I knew he would be so happy.

“I usually get fifteen, but I’ll take ten.”

Oh.

If only I had the fortitude to sell my books on the corner to unsuspecting tourists, we might get to New York more often.

I have so many notes here, so many things to tell you about our trip! Like the selfies in Central Park and Times Square! There’s the Jewish family sitting right by us on the plane, so loving, happy. Wow. Headed to a wedding in Madrid and later I wonder if Barcelona is anywhere near Madrid.

On the plane . . . did you know that one copy of The Atlantic costs more than \$9 in Minneapolis airport? I don’t think I’ve ever read it. It sounds fresh, water, sea air, like that. And there’s this article that I think I might like, by Kurt Anderson, “How America Lost Its Mind.” A perfect round-up piece for a trip on the zeitgeist where you can get things all figured out and come back energised and smarter. It’s long and there’s a full-page drawing of screaming, angry protesters and UFOs and Bigfoot and Hippies, and I identify with at least some of that, but I see he’s pointing a finger and it looks like it’s, right at me. Yep.

“Before the internet, crackpots [me] were mostly isolated, and surely had a harder time remaining convinced of their alternative realities [lack of self-confidence, I get it]. Now their opinions are all over the airwaves and the web, just like actual news. Now all of the fantasies look real.”

And so, I read this while we wait for the Jewish family to board, and CNN is blaring in my one ear and it’s raining a little and I’m just looking around and noticing, people, and what they do, how we are. There’s a lot of phones. I knew that, but wow, a lot.

I’m happy, kind of, for the trip. I miss my computer, wish my novels were selling or at least being read, wish I were the Voinovich of America, but I’m all right, I’ll be okay, this will be fun. The TSA wasn’t that bad. I had dreams of shouting, “9/11 was an inside job, capture and jail George W. Bush! This is all because of a lie! Blah! Blah! Blah!”

But you don’t.

The **BIG** Read

Nobody does.

I don't really like to fly. But I'll do it.

And so, yeah, while I'm watching the Jewish family get all settled and pass around the food they have brought for the trip, no, I'm fine, thank you though, I read a little more and figure this guy in the expensive magazine is wrong or he's CIA, but that is exactly what he would expect me to think. By the time we start going, jeezuz god, hold on, are we moving? I understand, because I have to figure this out. I have to know. And I understand that just to have this \$9 Kurt Anderson talking about these things means "we" and we know who we are, don't we, are winning. When you are losing "they" don't talk about "you," at all. Not one fucking bit.

I take a breath and read about Stephen Colbert and truthiness and how Anderson is in favour and it all intertwines, the revolutionary Colbert who trolled Bush in terrible times at the White House Press Corps dinner now has his own giant show and giant Times Square exploding billboards and he is now the man.

We land, the Jewish family goes its way. We don't say goodbye, we were never really that close. Ruth and I take Lyft, something new for us, through Harlem into Manhattan and the Hampton Inn on 8th Avenue. And then Central Park, then Michael Moore tickets at the vendor a few blocks south for half-price.

And Michael Moore is just so excited about the Democrats.

I don't get it. I ran for office as a Democrat in Iowa in 2000, for the US House of Representatives, 5th District. I had no job except my paper route. I was an unpublished writer, not even self-published yet and I delivered the Sioux City Journal every morning. We had no money, no support, but I remembered John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and I thought being a Democrat could mean being for some pretty cool things, like being against war, against poverty, for the truth, all these great things. I actually won the primary and in the general election I received 65,500 votes, in an ultra-conservative district, without any help whatsoever from the Democratic Party.

Anyway.

Moore wants people to get excited about adding to their morning routine a call to Congress. WTF? A call to Congress? Didn't the Democrats just have eight fucking years? I'm repeating all these words in my head to remember until we get back to the room after two amazing stout beers at The House of Brews: buried at sea? Boston? Sandy Hook? Are you kidding me? Drones, no health care,

military bases overseas, Oswald still packaged and sold as the lynchpin of the culture. OMG, I write that, but I didn't think I would type it, but man, wow.

And I suppose we didn't go to the moon, either? You ever hear that from Uncle John the military vet at Thanksgiving Dinner when you bring up Kennedy, King, Building 7?

And you shut the fuck up because you are supposed to shut the fuck up. And so people not only my age, but my children's age and on down the line are in the midst of living entire lives based in the minutiae of what it takes to hold on to a job, a place to live, to eat, to have a good time.

But it's not really living.

We have learned how to get through this next long hour, this morning, this day, this next week, this presidential administration, another one, and now, here we sit, in the Belasco Theater watching 63-year-old Michael Moore on stage, under the watchful eyes of ushers with penlights patrolling the aisles to make darn certain this does not get on YouTube but rather preserved for Showtime or HBO or something you go past on the uptown or downtown tour bus.

Michael Moore has more in common with Donald Trump than he does with me. We would never take our Thelma & Louise road trip to save the world. I just don't see it happening. I love MM fighting for Flint and health care and getting it about the rich and the poor. But he had such a chance with Fahrenheit 9/11 to tell the whole truth and why didn't he? I think, publically, he would say that what I would call vital truths are but mere conspiracy theories, but he would be wrong. He should know that 9/11 truth, Sandy Hook truth, Boston truth, is all about peace, revolution, fighting poverty, is all about fighting Trump . . . and Obama . . . and Bush . . . and Clinton.

As for Donald Trump and me, I, I would guess we are both narcissists for no reason, not that it matters. I want my statue in Central Park. I want to be Solzhenitsyn in the US. I want to be the dissident novelist that does not exist in the United States. I want to fight the empire with my novels. That is crazy. I know that. Nobody profits from my books trapped in the Duluth public library in a cardboard Blatz box under Ms Bushey's desk. And "profits" is key. You see that in the centre of America, which is way more Times Square than Gopher Prairie.

It does not matter but that it sells. It costs something over \$100, half-price, tickets bought on day of the show at a certain place, to see Michael Moore on Broadway and

The **BIG** Read

about \$100 [one wine, two beers] to eat at the Olive Garden in Times Square.

The truth is that people are good. You see it clearly walking the sidewalks of New York. They have to be just as starved as I am for the root, the real deal, and Jim Fetzer, Jessica Reznicek, Kevin Barrett, Ruby Montoya, Sophia Smallstorm, Frank Cordaro, and James Tracy should be preaching, cavorting, singing, dancing naked in the Belasco Theater every night for the next two years.

Then you would have something.

What you have now is entertainment, truth light, with MM, who is still talking about how great is Hillary Clinton and how she was screwed out of the election by the Russians. MM must not have seen the YouTube of The Yes Men. Someone should send it to him. Then he might know a little of what the Democrats could be. That's what the Democrats almost were with Jack and Bobby Kennedy and the peace movement, the hippies. They scared the shit out of the front row people in the Belasco and the Eugene O'Neil Theater and they killed them.

Moore talks in his show about how he got a taste of that. He must have backed off because we have never really seen how good Michael Moore could be, in my opinion. He surely does know the truth. But he says nothing and they do not kill him.

And we are left to live in fantasyland, trying to figure it all out, much as the Ugandan natives attempting to understand The Book of Mormon and apply it to their lives, taking selfies with exploding billboards our background, but it's not really living. Flint and Detroit and Mosul and Fallujah still burn because we don't really want the truth.

We have elected Trump and Michael Moore and The Atlantic because that is the world we want.

I co-host a podcast, a "radio show," with Chuck Gregory on Thursday nights, The New American Dream. We've been doing that since 2011, because there should be somewhere people can go for the truth. The American-Russian novel all we need is more vodka radio hour.

The New American Dream means never having to say some question or idea is not valid. We are allowed to ask any questions that we have. There are no wrong questions.

There is no hidden black military budget, there are no UFO files Americans cannot see, no JFK documents that will not be opened during our lifetimes, no RFK murder photos destroyed by the LA police, no evidence from Ground Zero taken away before we can even look at it –

we are not the USSR of the 1960s – this is supposed to be America. That is our dream, to become America, The New America, the real hope of the world.

We have a dream of bringing the United States politicians, journalists and generals who have brought about this long 13-year war and debacle to trial – and put on TV just like OJ – every afternoon – so every American can watch . . . just like the McCarthy Hearings and the JFK funeral procession.

What we need is a New American Dream. Not of new homes and toasters and microwaves, but of becoming the type of country we always thought we were.

Right now we live on lies. We subsist on lies, but it's not really living.

911 was an inside job. They all know that.

What we need in America is a Truth Commission like they had in South Africa to heal their broken country. We need to put certain people on the stand and we need to be allowed to ask questions.

Our country is surely broken as well.

The troops are not protecting us. That is someone's spin on the day's news – somebody's advertising slogan – someone else's sermon.

The troops serve the empire. They are not heroes. They kill and plunder for the empire. American bases overseas serve nobody but the empire's. The heroes in our country are the protesters, the ones who go face to face with the empire, those in the Plowshares Movement, for one example.

You have to know that Donald Trump knows the whole truth about the 9/11 attacks. He is complicit. He has lied. He has continued the wars everywhere based on a lie. And he knows he is lying.

Trump lies right to our faces on national television just as Barack Obama did when he said that Osama bin Laden had been killed . . . and buried at sea. . . . Osama bin Laden was buried at sea . . . and Jessica Lynch was rescued heroically, the USA does not torture, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, George Bush won the 2000 election, see, there is a plane there in that hole in Shanksville, it went all the way into that hole and no, there is no blood and no bodies and no luggage scattered . . . or plane parts . . . and Osama bin Laden? . . . He was buried at sea. . . .

Remember the anthrax letters, which said "Are You Afraid?" Those were not written with a rock and chisel like Fred Flintstone from the recesses of some cave in Afghanistan. Those letters came from persons within our own government.

The **BIG** Read

Like a horror movie and the killer is in the same house with us.

These killers are right here, with us and “they” want us to be afraid.

We cannot be afraid.

Michael Moore is not a real dissident. MM has a Broadway Show. He is a millionaire. He once perhaps put his life on the line to change the world.

Perhaps he was taken upside down by his ankles to the ledge of a Manhattan skyscraper and shown how far down is down.

Maybe he was taken away to a room such as Bill Hicks describes where he saw a video of the Kennedy motorcade in Dallas from a view nobody has seen before. Any questions, Michael? “Only what my next film will be about.”

Maybe he stepped back from the edge, understandably, but we are the losers.

There are real dissidents among us, but they are shot in the head on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal towpath or sent plunging into the Minnesota taiga or shoved into Black Marias, or never heard from at all.

They have spent years at the kitchen table trying to put together this 3,000-piece puzzle. They die and others take their place. They exist. They publish books, not with contracts or Times Square luncheons but with their own money and they sell them on the street corner like poets who have spent the morning upstairs writing, then come down to pass these smudged sheets around, these little bits of paper, “Here’s something.”

The heart beats. The wrist still holding the pen shows a pulse, there is hope.

Anyone with a line to your show at four o’clock in the afternoon that goes around the corner and an exploding billboard . . . these are not the people to run toward for the truth.

Run away.

Ruth is a good person. When we were in Central Park I watched her give a \$20 tip to a guitarist playing “What A Wonderful World.” She whispered, “that’s my favourite song,” as she teared up. And so as we look through the Barnes & Noble on 5th Avenue she has hopes of finding something good, and she does. I walk around, dismayed, doubtful. I see George W. Bush’s book, the one with the paintings of the soldiers he sent to die because there were no weapons of mass destruction and because there were no hijackers, no planes, and Matt Lauer, Tom Brokaw, Dick

Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rove, Powell, Silverstein, Giuliani, they all know that, and so there is this book of paintings of these guys, because George W. Bush can’t say anything. I walk out with nothing.

On the last days we take the tour, the bus tour, downtown, uptown, Brooklyn. The tour guides are amazing. They might be the last bastion of free speech in the United States. One Malaysian tour guide calls Joan Rivers the bravest woman in America. I just love it, riding around and seeing it all. I even know now why it’s called The Big Apple and I know what SoHo means . . . and . . . that’s it. If I lived here I would want to know everybody, every bar, every deli, coffee shop, there is just so much here. I might want to, at first, but it wouldn’t happen, things happen.

We ride along the edge of the Lower East Side and neither of us talks about those days when I was down here . . . too hard, too damn hard.

There’s just everything in NYC, just everything, riches and poverty, good, bad, and when you hear the tales of the historical people who made big things happen, well things can get in your head like why not me? But . . . there’s also the monks in Central Park trying to sell beads . . . nobody is ever gonna know who they were. Wouldn’t you rather be a nobody? Or not. A penthouse would be nice. The tour bus guides tell us how much they cost. Okay . . . wouldn’t you rather be a nobody, just someone who is a good person who just tries to do the right thing . . . maybe somebody with a lost box of books?

The real heroes, aren’t they the ones who plug away?

I still wouldn’t mind a statue though. Maybe a nobody with a statue.

Or maybe the writer of a Broadway Play: The Capture & Trial of George W. Bush, or The Book Of America.

Naaah, gedoutaheere.

A guy with a cart, who sells bagels and pretzels all day long in the hot sun and goes home to his family in Queens.

And then they make a TV Show about him and his picture is in Times Square and he is me and . . .!

We stop near Ground Zero, where George W. Bush is a God.

We also pass by the fire house on Eighth Avenue, Engine 54, Ladder 4, Battalion 9. And the tour guide points out that a truck from there went to the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and did not come back. And I think to myself that they died because of the lies of George W. Bush, but nobody ever says that. Wouldn’t their families or

The **BIG** Read

Michael Moore or Kurt Anderson want to know the truth about that? Why is it good that their lives and deaths continue to be shrouded in this monstrous lie?

And now it's time to go back, back to northern Minnesota, not really north-north, but north enough. Back to pick up my recorder in the woods and then listen to 72 hours of wind and rustling and maybe Bigfoot whispering, "How 'bout some poetry?" Back to a job I love, back to put out the next novel and the next and write the script for The New American Dream Radio Show, and time to head into town again, to the Duluth Public Library.

Time to write something and send it out again, watch it come back again.

Try again.

I'm pretty sure the firefighters of Ladder 9 didn't give up, even though the whole world was tumbling down around them.

On the plane ride home the eclipse is kind of a non-event. I'm watching School Of Rock. In the meantime I have to go twice, two bowls of oatmeal this morning, too many, but I find out that the restroom on this plane is comfortable and private. You can really let loose, you don't hear much in there and nobody hears you, either, just sayin'. When I came out the second time one of the flight attendants, a large, young black man is standing there. The plane is rocking. It was a bumpy flight and raining in Minneapolis when we landed, anyway, the captain was also talking to the passengers and I didn't know what was really going on. The black guy and I locked eyes and for a moment neither of us knew what was happening. Then he breaks the lock and smiles and says, "Man, you and me, we..." And I went to my seat.

So what happened there was that for one moment the black guy did not know if I was a terrorist or not and I did not know what was happening on the plane because I had been in the restroom and the captain was talking on the intercom and the plane was rocking.

And that is life.

In America, in one split moment.

And to me, it should not be that way.

(Also I will tell you that when we were getting our bags down and taking forever to get off the plane I saw that one other person was also watching School of Rock and it was a girl probably in elementary school, so, yeah, at least one other person on that plane knows what the real truth is.)

"Well, it's been another long week in Moon Rock Lake,

Minnesota, my hometown, at the end of the empire.

"There is the park with the band shell and the ice cream and the blankets on the big lawn... and children listening from the limbs of the giant oak tree named Ol' Hickory by the cannon and the swimming hole. We hear the grain dryers humming 24/7 and Mrs. Beazley once again chasing the Kramer kids out of her raspberry bushes.

We don't really live in America.

We live in the land of George W. Bush.

It is the world he created, this numbskull, ne'er-do-well president with the forever smirk etched in his face. Bill Clinton paved the way and pointed toward him, putting things in place, and Barack Obama covered his back, nothing gonna touch him, and now Trump Land. But there is no doubt that IT, American History, as written in the middle school history books and carved into the stone in every graveyard and written by finger in all the new concrete in town, has pointed to this, this takeover of the American mind and culture, and it came to fruition with George the idiot.

G.W.B.

G.O.D.

God.

God Bush.

And what we need is a saying.

What do we say all day to each other? Excuse me, thank you, have a good day. You know when you visit New York City you see how good the world is and how good people are. How can we be on the edge of nuclear war? It's because the terror is made up. It's not real. It profits someone. Someone makes money.

We want to know certain things. We want the truth. We really do. Americans have an inquisitive nature that is built into our culture. Who put the bop in the bop she bop she bop, who put the ram in the ramma lamma ding dong?

If we are to pull out of this collective nosedive to escape this total eclipse of the sun by the image of George W. Bush we just need a saying.

Whatever – actually – fyi... those won't do it.

There is an ewok standing on the edge of the Starship America as it hovers over Manhattan and the ewok is holding a frog in both hands, and there is an eclipse coming, and the Yankees lost four in a row in Boston over the weekend, and an old lost couple wearing YouBetcha hats drinking pitchers in a dive bar in Brooklyn. It is the story of The Book Of America.

Hasa diga George Boosh ...

Just keep saying it, to yourself, to each other. Over and

The **BIG** Read

over and you will pull the Starship America out of the nose
dive into the ground.

You can do it.

Do it every morning.

... And as our plane leaves Minnesota, pulls away from
Mrs. Beazley's raspberries, headed to New York City, the
plane is diverted by two tall, erudite, elderly Minnesotan
men, merely by good grammar and proper syntax, to
Washington, DC, where they have tickets for The White
House Camo Ball, and everyone, no, not everyone, is in-
vited, but when they get back they tell us all about it, in
grave, stentorian, erudite Minnesota voices:

"... In the Parallelogram Office we find Pres'dent Cos-
mo Nutt at his Big Desk drawing on his big yellow legal
pad ... working on some last-minute dollar signs, boobs
and tanks before he must go down to The Camo Ball.

In The Big Hall ... we find all the guests dancing around
a cherry tree decorated with copies of The 9/11 Commis-
sion Report and The Warren Commission Report ... in a

conga line ... and bowing to the cherry tree ... to the beat
of the band ... The Good Americans ... to be followed at
midnight by the Baby Boomer Rap Group ... Rage Against
The Mujahadeen.

The party guests drink camo wine, all dressed in formal
camo, circle the cherry tree, turning to bow at the chorus,
to the beat of The Good Americans new hit song ... "Dance
Like An American ..."

And that's the news from Moon Rock Lake, Minnesota,
where all the police and soldiers are thugs, all the Demo-
crats and journalists are cowards, and all the Homeland
Security COINTELPRO lone gunmen are about average. **CT**

*Mike Palecek is an American writer, a former small-town
newspaper reporter in Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota. He is
a former federal prisoner for peace. His most recent novel
is *Crusher vs. The Empire*, by CWG Press, the first book in
the *Geronimo's Revenge* trilogy. The second, *Crusher In
Wonderland*, will be released in the fall.*

"Terse and funny and dry as a dead Iowa corn snake baking in the sun. Palecek delivers a quick, deadpan slap to reactionary,
mindless post-9/11 America. The sting is delightful." — MARK MORFORD, *San Francisco Chronicle*

IF you want to know the **TRUTH** about **AMERICA**

you **MUST** read your **PALECEK** novels. [CWG PRESS]



(Because he's got information, man)

"Mike Palecek reminds me of Socrates the gadfly who asked
unwelcome questions, Diogenes with his lantern looking in vain for
an honest man, Chekhov the man with the hammer challenging the
complacent family to share their meal, Kerouac the ever on the move,
somewhat hysterical searcher, and he reminds me of many Americans
who as children were so blasted with propaganda that they're
devoting the rest of their lives to challenging the lies and all who tell
them. In this land where babies are brought by storks and buildings
collapse due to unpatriotic bricks, we need the gad y because no
leader, preacher, guru, or saint will wake us up, though the Doomsday
Clock is ticking close to twelve."

— DAVID RAY, American Poet

"I've read JFK assassination fiction by Don DeLillo and
Norman Mailer, and can tell you that this new novel (*Johnny
Moon*) not only is Mike's best book yet, it's much better than
DeLillo's and Mailer's efforts to do justice to the most
important event in US history."

— Dr. Kevin Barrett



Mike Palecek writes
with passion, wit,
and always with a
strong social
conscience.

— HOWARD
ZINN

When disaster coverage becomes rescue porn

There's an endless appetite for rescue scenes, but little emphasis on what caused the Houston tragedy, and what could have been done to prevent it, writes **Rick Salutin**

It's probably been hard living through the floods of recent weeks and not thinking about Noah and his ark, if you're in Texas, anyway. We tend to overlook how different the core cultures in the US are from Canada since we look and talk so similarly. But evangelical Christianity, for instance, makes it another cosmos.

Texas is the heart of the Bible Belt (Abilene is its "buckle"). It's where rednecks come from, though in Texas they're called crackers. Same difference.

Did it strike you oddly that so often in the coverage, politicians and journalists say, "We're praying for you," or "Send us your prayers"? The staid, secular New York Times reported that a three-year-old, clutching her mom's lifeless body in the floodwaters, said: "Mama was saying her prayers." Yes, of course she was.

Almost everything elides into or out of that religious model, and Noah's the guy who was warned a mighty flood was on the way so he'd better build an ark. In this case it wasn't only Noah who got the



Matt Carpenter: \$10,000 per home run.

warning, though not from God but from an endless series of scientific panels and predictions, it was everyone. This was a nation of Noahs, well-informed in advance, yet nobody built an ark!

I've never really understood the appetite for disaster journalism. It's so unlike the news, it's more like the eternals. It doesn't develop surprisingly; it unfolds, or is revealed, inevitably: weather, nature. "Happening now: new parts of Texas are submerged. We have pictures . . ." They can't get enough, and the supply is endless.

So the emphasis isn't on the event and its cause; it's on the after-

math and the interminable rescues, slipping often toward rescue porn. It seems heroic, but is essentially passive and reactive. It harks back to Noah, the original flood rescuer, with no emphasis on making rescues unnecessary in the future. At least God promised Noah, via the rainbow sign, that he wouldn't do it again, by flood anyway. He never mentioned global warming.

There's been a Dunkirk quality to some rescues, tending occasionally to comedy: the "Cajun boys," who came down from Louisiana looking desperately for someone to rescue, but all the victims declined. Dejected, they wound up donating blood. It had the quality of Mark Twain's *Private History of a Campaign that Failed*, on how he joined the Civil War. But the British, not the US, press reported it.

You're allowed to behave altruistically as long as it's too late to do anything preventative and you don't arrive too early. There's something passive and pious about it: don't interfere with the divine plan, but feel good if you can. Ballplayer Matt Carpenter said he'd give \$10,000 for every home run he hit till the end of the season. If you're in need but he strikes out, maybe that's in the plan, too.

The drama is all in riding out to the rescue of victims who've been staggered by the villain's blow, some of whom are saved, though many aren't. There's no effort to ride against the foe him/itself, who's free to strike again and again. If Noah

had been a truly righteous man, as the Bible says, he'd have done what Abraham did when God proclaimed the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed: stand his ground and argue against the sentence till God backed down. That makes Texans (or Americans) the equivalent of Noah, the mediocre hero, versus Abraham, the (as Kierkegaard said) knight of faith: active, not acquiescent.

By pure chance (a term normally anathema to both science and religion), Randy Newman just released his first album in years, *Dark Matter*, with a set piece called *The Great Debate*, between science and religion on puzzlers such as dark matter and evolution. It culminates in: "Alright, two-nothing [for religion]/ Next question, global warming/

Is it? And if so, what?"

Newman is also, by chance, the great outsider who's chronicled the southern mentality ("We're rednecks, rednecks, we don't know our ass from a hole in the ground") along with the Louisiana flood of 1927, which he got so right that it became a virtual state anthem after hurricane Katrina. He uniquely both distances himself from those people and manages to empathise; most of us just watch and gawk. He embodies a paradoxical combination of contempt and compassion, hard as hell to achieve. It isn't easy being human (or Newman). **CT**

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Rick Salutin is a Toronto-based activist and author. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star newspaper.

the USA dropped 635,000 tonnes of bombs on North Korea including 35,000 tonnes of napalm. The US killed an estimated 20 percent of the North Korean population. For comparison, approximately two percent of the UK population was killed during World War II.

That this massive destruction of North Korea resulted in a xenophobic, American-hating state with an obsession with developing powerful weapons systems to ensure national survival, is not exactly surprising. The western media treat the existence of the Kim Jong-un regime as an inexplicable and eccentric manifestation of evil. In fact, it is caused. Unless those causes are addressed the situation can never be resolved. Has any western politician ever referenced the history I have just given in discussing North Korea?

This has so often been my despair. My book, *The Catholic Orangemen of Togo*, recounts my frustration whilst Deputy Head of the FCO's Africa Department, at failing to get the Blair government to pay attention to the massive historical and continuing grievances that underlay the horrific violence in Sierra Leone. Politicians prefer a simplistic world of enemies who are "evil" for no reason. Newspaper editors prefer it even more. It justifies war. The truth is always a great deal more complicated. **CT**

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Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. His website is www.craigmurray.org.uk

Why we should cheer the North Korean bomb

"The truth is always a great deal more complicated . . ."
Craig Murray on the madness of nuclear deterrence

If the theory of nuclear deterrence holds true – and it is the only argument the supporters of WMD have got – then we should all be cheering the North Korean bomb. The logic of nuclear deterrence is that it is much better that every state has nuclear weapons, because then we can all deter each other. It is demonstrably true that possession of nuclear weapons is not a deterrent to other nations acquiring them. But it is supposed to deter other

nations from using them. In which case, surely the more the merrier, so we can all deter each other.

The madness of the argument is self-evident. Britain is borrowing hundreds of billions it cannot afford for Trident, yet in all the reams of analysis of what to do about North Korea, Trident never gets a mention. It is a system entirely useless even in the one situation in which it was supposed to be effective.

How did we get here? In the 1950s

How lying creates the illusion of winning

Winning in this society has become a meta-political illusion, a dream world, writes **Emanuele Corso**

I recently read a long essay in the New York Times Sunday magazine about a young lady, Noura Jackson, who spent nine years in jail because of prosecutorial bad behaviour. In this woman's case, exculpatory evidence was withheld at trial and from the defense. When that evidence was uncovered and revealed the woman was released. Ultimately, the prosecutor and her staff were exonerated. Imagine yourself with nine years of your life unjustly spent behind bars and the people who deliberately perpetrated this outrage got off free. Law and order? Justice? I don't think so. It is, in fact, more like rewarding pathological lying.

The ethos that caused this young lady to lose those nine years of her life is pervasive in both criminal and civil courts. The base cause of callous disregard for justice is, as I see it, the national American fixation with winning at all costs and truth be damned. In fact, the compulsion to win seems to have infected the entirety of our society with damaging effects to trust and civility.

In civil cases, incentive is provided by insurance companies who pay lawyers to beat back claims to "win" regardless of facts, regardless of damage or injury.

It isn't only a matter of insurance company lawyers pursuing claimants but also plaintiffs' lawyers who

sue businesses for claimed injuries to person or property under questionable circumstances and find sympathetic juries to award damages. In both instances what we have is an assault on truth and the social contract by lawyers. This aberration and negation of justice will continue for as long as lawyers are paid to "win." They "win" and society loses.

The American ethos of relentless competition and winning is impressed on children practically from the day they are born, as parents compare birth weights, the first time on the potty, and cheer passionately at little league ball games. Cooperation is regarded as "Socialist" and it is well on its way to being declared unAmerican.

Our reigning president constantly touts himself as a "winner" because he knows the idea resonates with his base. According to him, everything he touches "wins" and his fans hang on every utterance, basking in his success and wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, becoming vicarious "winners" themselves. This "winning" administration is working with the Republicans in Congress to make cuts to education, health care, social security, food stamps, Medicaid, disability benefits, unemployment benefits, the National Institutes of

Health, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Science Foundation, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; the list is long and, if they are successful, the inflicted pain and social disruption will be widespread. Yes, indeed. Step right up folks – everyone's going to be a "winner."

Once those cuts to government programmes are in place and the savings awarded to billionaires as tax breaks what will be left for those social programs the general public depends on so much?

People will be "great" and simultaneously diminished. The winners will be losers. The cutting sword cuts both ways. There is a pathology to this. In fact this pathology is the working definition of sociopathy: "... a disorder manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behaviour and a lack of conscience." The populist "will of the people" has become the 21st-century equivalent of phlogiston, the 17th-century magical ingredient, making everything add up regardless of "facts." Who needs facts, who needs truth if you're a "winner?"

In the face of what is being said and promised by our new president and what is actually taking place we must wonder about pathological lying and why people who are most injured by those lies vote for the liars. These people are voting against their own best interests; they are living in some kind of alternate universe fuelled by resentment and anger.

I read an interview recorded at a rally with an enthusiastic Trump supporter and it went as follows: "I'm distrustful of most politicians, usually. They say almost anything.

At least this administration is doing something. Whether it's too fast, or outside of already in-place procedures, I really don't know." When asked to name an example of something that is "being done," the happy voter was at a loss; he couldn't name one thing. In spite of, or maybe because of, all this, America is, at last, "winning" and on its way to regaining its lost "greatness." Winning in this society has become a meta-political illusion, a dream world, that rationalises political and lawyerly anti-social behaviour as "greatness." It's a head scratcher all right. It's a con game and our tat-

tered social contract is being taken to the cleaners. **CT**

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Emanuele Corso's essays on politics, education, and the social contract have been published at NM Politics, Light of New Mexico, Grassroots Press, World News Trust, Nation of Change, and his own site – www.siteseven.net. He taught Schools and Society and school reform at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he took his PhD and three master's degrees. He is a veteran of the US Air Force's Strategic Air Command, where he served as a Combat crew officer during the Cuban missile crisis.

Corporate tax cuts boost CEO pay, not jobs

The Institute for Policy Studies 'Executive Excess' report offers a first-ever look at the jobs record of US firms that pay taxes near the rates the Trump White House favours. Sarah Anderson and **Sam Pizzigati** report

House Speaker Paul Ryan is proposing to cut the statutory federal corporate tax rate from 35 to 20 percent. President Trump wants to slash the rate even further, to just 15 percent. Their core argument? Lowering the tax burden will lead to more and better jobs.

To investigate this claim, we set out to analyse the job-creating performance of the 92 publicly held American corporations that reported a US profit every year from 2008 through 2015 and paid less than 20 percent of these earnings in federal corporate income tax.

These 92 corporations offer an ideal test for the proposition that lower tax rates encourage corporations to create jobs. By exploiting loopholes in the existing federal tax code, all these firms have reduced their tax rates to the level that Speaker Ryan and President Trump claim will stimulate job creation. Did these reduced tax rates actually lead to greater employment within the 92 firms? We crunched data available from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy to find the answer.

Our findings appear in the just-

published 24th edition of the annual Institute for Policy Studies Executive Excess report. And what exactly did we find?

Tax breaks did not spur job creation.

- America's 92 most consistently profitable tax-dodging firms registered median job growth of negative one percent between 2008 and 2016. The job growth rate over those same years among US private sector firms as a whole: six percent.

- More than half of the 92 tax-avoiders, 48 firms in all, eliminated jobs between 2008 and 2016, downsizing by a combined total of 483,000 positions.

Tax-dodging corporations paid their CEOs more than other big firms.

- Average CEO pay among the 92 firms rose 18 percent, to \$13.4-million in real terms, between 2008 and 2016, compared to a 13 percent increase among S&P 500 CEOs. US private sector worker pay increased by only four percent during this period.

- CEOs at the 48 job-slashing companies within our 92-firm sample pocketed even larger paychecks. In 2016 they grabbed \$14.9-million on average, 14 percent more than the \$13.1-million for typical S&P 500 CEOs.

Job-cutting firms spent tax savings on buybacks, which inflated CEO pay.

- Many of the firms in our tax-dodging sample funnelled their tax savings into stock buybacks, a financial manoeuvre that inflates the value of executive stock-based pay. On average, the top 10 job-cutters in our sample each spent \$45-billion over the last nine years repur-

Insights

chasing their own stock, six times as much as the S&P 500 corporate average.

Several specific major corporations jump out from our analysis. ExxonMobil, for instance, emerges as particularly poor corporate “citizen.” The oil giant paid an effective tax rate of only 13.6 percent during the 2008-2015 period, at the same time cutting more than a third of its global workforce (the company does not reveal US jobs data).

After pumping nearly \$146-billion into stock buybacks, Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson, now the US secretary of state, took home \$27.4-million in total compensation in 2016, 22 percent more than he collected in 2008.

But ExxonMobil hardly stands alone. AT&T actually emerges as the top job-cutter among the tax-dodging corporations we analysed. The telecommunications giant managed to get away with an effective tax rate of just 8.1 percent over the 2008-2015 period, while cutting more jobs than any other firm in our sample.

After accounting for acquisitions and spinoffs, AT&T had nearly 80,000 fewer employees in 2016 than in 2008. Instead of making job-preserving investments, the firm shovelled profits into stock buybacks (\$34-billion over the past nine years) and massive CEO paychecks. AT&T chief Randall

Stephenson pulled in \$28.4-million in 2016, more than double his 2008 payout.

General Electric, meanwhile, stashed enough corporate earnings in overseas tax havens to achieve a negative effective tax rate during the 2008-2015 period. How can a tax rate be negative? GE received more dollars back from Uncle Sam than it paid into federal coffers. How did GE repay the taxpayers of America for their generosity? The company spent \$42-billion repurchasing its own stock, a neat move that helped boost CEO Jeffrey Immelt’s pay to nearly \$18-million in 2016.

What about jobs at GE? The company’s employee count has dropped by about 14,700 over the past nine years. CEOs of large American corporations have for far too long been rigging the rules to enrich themselves at the expense of taxpayers, workers, and communities. America needs a serious unrigging. In this year’s Executive Excess report, as in previous editions, we’ve included a “scorecard” of CEO pay reforms that would help end the job-killing games that US corporate executives play.

Our nation also desperately needs a tax reform debate that dispenses with the fantastical notion that corporate tax cuts will automatically create good jobs for American workers. Policy mak-

ers should be focussing instead on ensuring that corporate America pays its fair share of the cost of job-creating public investments in infrastructure and other urgent needs.

A solid first step would be to eliminate loopholes that grant preferential treatment of foreign profits. US corporations should have to pay what they owe on their current offshore holdings and not be allowed to defer these payments indefinitely. By continuing to allow offshore tax sheltering, policy makers are shifting the tax burden onto ordinary Americans and creating a disincentive for job creation in the United States.

Beyond closing loopholes, we need new innovative policies – a tax on Wall Street speculation, for instance – that would help generate much-needed revenue for investments in real jobs. Americans for Tax Fairness is now offering online an array of promising ideas on how to reform tax rules to help make them work for all of us, not just big companies and their CEOs. **CT**

Sarah Anderson directs the Global Economy Project and co-edits *Inequality.org* at the Institute for Policy Studies. Follow her at [@Anderson_IPS](#). Sam Pizzigati, an IPS associate fellow, also co-edits *Inequality.org*. Follow him at [@Too_Much_Online](#).

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Trudeau's pal in Rwanda is a ruthless dictator

Why is the Canadian government supporting Africa's most ruthless dictator? asks **Yves Engler**

After amending the constitution to be able to run indefinitely Paul Kagame recently won 98.63 per cent of votes in Rwanda's presidential election. In response, Canada's High Commissioner Sara Hradecky tweeted "Congratulations to Rwandans for voting in peaceful presidential election" and "Canada congratulates Paul Kagame on his inauguration today as President of Rwanda." The latter tweet was picked up by the state propaganda organ *New Times* in a story titled "Heads of State, diplomats laud Kagame's 'visionary leadership'."

If garnering 99 per cent of the vote wasn't a clue that Kagame is a dictator, the High Commissioner could've taken a look at Canada's 'paper of record,' whose Africa bureau chief has shined a critical light on Rwanda in recent years. At the start of 2016 *The Globe and Mail* reported on two new books describing the totalitarian nature of the regime.

"Village informers," wrote South Africa-based Geoffrey York. "Re-education camps. Networks of spies on the streets. Routine surveillance of the entire population. The crushing of the independent media and all political opposition. A ruler who changes the constitution to extend his power after ruling for two dec-

ades. It sounds like North Korea, or the totalitarian days of China under Mao. But this is the African nation of Rwanda — a long-time favourite of Western governments and a major beneficiary of millions of dollars in Canadian government support."

In 2014 York wrote an investigation headlined "Inside the plots to kill Rwanda's dissidents," which provided compelling evidence that the regime had extended its assassination program outside of east Africa, killing (or attempting to) a number of its former top officials who were living in South Africa. Since the initial investigation York has also reported on Rwandan dissidents who've had to flee Belgium for their safety while the *Toronto Star* revealed five individuals in Canada fearful of the regime's killers.

On top of international assassinations and domestic repression, Kagame has unleashed mayhem in the Congo. In 1996 Rwandan forces marched 1,500 km to topple the regime in Kinshasa and then re-invaded after the Congolese government it installed expelled Rwandan troops. This led to an eight-country war between 1998 and 2003, which left millions dead. Rwandan proxies have repeatedly re-invaded the mineral rich eastern Congo. In 2012 *Toronto's Globe and Mail* described

how "Rwandan sponsored" M23 rebels "hold power by terror and violence" there.

The Rwandan government's domestic repression and violence in the Congo is well documented. Yet I couldn't find a single tweet or comment by Hradecky critical of Kagame since she became High Commissioner in January. Yet she found time to retweet Kagame's International Women's Day message that "Realizing women's full aspirations is inextricably linked to achieving whole nation's potential."

Re-tweeting a tyrant's message or applauding spurious elections are clear forms of support for the "butcher of Africa's Great Lakes." But, Hradecky has offered less obvious backing to the regime.

On July 4 Hradecky tweeted "From the Canadian High Commission, we wish Rwandans a Happy Liberation Day!," which was picked up by the *New Times* in a story titled "Messages of solidarity as Rwanda marks Liberation Day."

The Ugandan-sponsored Rwandan Patriotic Front officially captured Kigali on July 4, 1994. Trained at a US military base in Kansas, Kagame's forces apparently waited to take the capital so their Liberation Day could coincide with their US backers' Independence Day, a public relations move that continues to pay dividends as demonstrated by a July NPR story titled "In Rwanda, July 4 Isn't Independence Day — It's Liberation Day."

Four years after 3,000 Ugandan troops "deserted" to invade their smaller neighbour the force of mostly exiled Tutsi took Kigali. Today, Rwanda continues to be ruled by largely English-speaking individ-

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uals who often are descended from those who had authority in a monarchy overthrown during the 1959–61 struggle against Belgian rule. The Guardian recently pointed to “the Tutsi elite who dominate politics and business” and the The Economist detailed the “The Rwandan Patriotic Front’s business empire” in the country.

Underpinning the “liberation” story is a highly simplistic, if not counterfactual, account of the 1994 genocide. Widely hailed as the person who ended the killings, Kagame is probably the individual most responsible for the mass slaughter. His RPF invaded Rwanda from Uganda, engaged in a great deal of killing and blew up the presidential plane, an event that unleashed the

genocidal violence.

As Hradecky should know, last year The Globe and Mail described two secret reports documenting Kagame’s “direct involvement in the 1994 missile attack that killed former president Juvénal Habyarimana, leading to the genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people died.”

Echoing Kigali’s narrative, Hradecky published a half dozen tweets (or retweets) in April commemorating the Genocide. “Canada stands with Rwanda to commemorate the victims of Genocide,” read one. Hradecky also retweeted a Government of Rwanda statement: “Today marks the beginning of the 23rd Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.”

Promoting simplistic commentary on the subject effectively strengthens a regime that derives much of its legitimacy from purportedly stopping the genocide.

From commemorating Liberation Day to applauding questionable elections, Canada’s High Commissioner has provided various forms of ideological support to Africa’s most ruthless dictator. That should embarrass everyone who wants this country to be a force for good in the world. **CT**

*Yves Engler is a Montreal-based activist and author. He has published eight books, the most recent being *Canada in Africa – 300 Years of Aid and Exploitation*. His web site is www.yvesengler.com*

HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



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