

DEAD, WHITE AND BLUE | BARBARA EHRENREICH
MERLE TRAVIS & THE HANGING JUDGE | DELL FRANKLIN
STORM OF IGNORANCE | GEORGE MONBIOT

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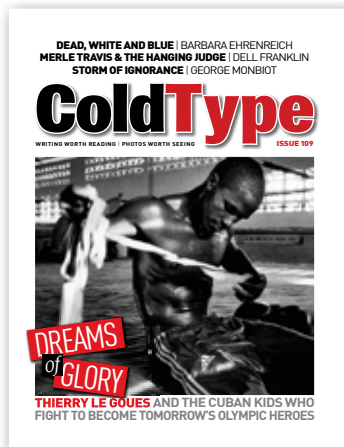
WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 109



DREAMS
of
GLORY

THIERRY LE GOUES AND THE CUBAN KIDS WHO
FIGHT TO BECOME TOMORROW'S OLYMPIC HEROES



Cover:

*Photo by Thierry Le Goues,
from the book, Havana Fight Club
(see Pages 16-21)*

ColdType

Issue 109 / Mid-December 2015

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Does fear lead to fascism?

John W. Whitehead on a culture of fear and the epigenetics of terror



This plague on the US is a potent mix of fear coupled with unhealthy doses of paranoia and intolerance

On the job: FBI Director James Comey and Attorney General Loretta Lynch speak to reporters about the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California.

“No one can terrorize a whole nation, unless we are all his accomplices.” – Edward R. Murrow, broadcast journalist

America is in the midst of an epidemic of historic proportions. The contagion is turning communities into battlegrounds and setting Americans one against the other. Normally mild-mannered individuals caught up in the throes of this disease have been transformed into belligerent zealots, while

others inclined to pacifism have taken to stockpiling weapons and practising defensive drills.

This plague on the United States – one that has been spreading like wildfire – is a potent mix of fear coupled with unhealthy doses of paranoia and intolerance, tragic hallmarks of the post-9/11 America in which we live.

Everywhere you turn, those on both the left- and right-wing are fomenting distrust and division. You can't escape it.

FRIGHTENED NATION

You are 17,600 times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack. You are 11,000 times more likely to die from an airplane accident than from a terrorist plot involving an airplane

We're being fed a constant diet of fear: fear of terrorists, fear of illegal immigrants, fear of people who are too religious, fear of people who are not religious enough, fear of Muslims, fear of extremists, fear of the government, fear of those who fear the government. The list goes on and on.

The strategy is simple, but effective: The best way to control a populace is through fear and discord.

Fear makes people stupid. Confound them, distract them with mindless news chatter and entertainment, pit them against one another by turning minor disagreements into major skirmishes, and tie them up in knots over matters lacking in national significance.

Most important, divide the people into factions, persuade them to see each other as the enemy, and keep them screaming at each other so that they drown out all other sounds. In this way, they will never reach consensus about anything, and will be too distracted to notice the police state closing in on them until the final crushing curtain falls. This is how free people enslave themselves and allow tyrants to prevail.

This Machiavellian scheme has so ensnared the nation that few Americans even realize they are being manipulated into adopting an us-against-them mindset. Instead, fueled by fear and loathing for phantom opponents, they agree to pour millions of dollars and resources into political elections, militarized police, spy technology and endless wars, hoping for a guarantee of safety that never comes.

All the while, those in power – bought and paid for by lobbyists and corporations – move their costly agendas forward, while “we-the-suckers” get saddled with the tax bills and subjected to pat downs, police raids and round-the-clock surveillance.

Turn on the TV or flip open a newspaper on any day, and you will find yourself accosted by reports of government corruption, corporate malfeasance, militarized police and marauding SWAT teams.

America has already entered a new phase, in which children are arrested in schools, military veterans are forcibly detained by government agents because of the content of their Facebook posts, and law-abiding Americans are having their movements tracked, their financial transactions documented and their communications monitored.

These threats are not to be underestimated. But even more dangerous than these violations of our basic rights is the language in which they are couched: the language of fear. It is a language spoken effectively by politicians on both sides of the aisle, shouted by media pundits from their cable TV pulpits, marketed by corporations, and codified into bureaucratic laws that do little to make our lives safer or more secure.

Fear, as history shows, is the method most often used by politicians to increase the power of government. Even while President Obama insists that “freedom is more powerful than fear,” the tactics of his administration continue to rely on fear of another terrorist attack in order to further advance the agenda of the military/security industrial complex.

Fearful country

An atmosphere of fear permeates modern America. However, with crime at a 40-year low, is such fear of terrorism rational? Even in the wake of the shootings in San Bernardino and Paris, statistics show that you are 17,600 times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack. You are 11,000 times more likely to die from an airplane accident than from a terrorist plot involving an airplane. You are 1,048 times more likely to die from a car accident than a terrorist attack. You are 404 times more likely to die in a fall than from a terrorist attack. You are 12 times more likely to die from accidental suffocating in bed than from a terrorist attack. And you are nine more times likely to choke to death on your own vomit than die in a terrorist attack.

Indeed, those living in the American police state are eight times more likely to be killed by a police officer than by a terrorist. Thus, the government's endless jabbering about terrorism amounts to little more than propaganda – the propaganda of fear, a tactic used to terrorize, cower and control the population.

So far, these tactics are working. The 9/11 attacks, the Paris attacks, and now the San Bernardino shooting have succeeded in reducing American people to what commentator Dan Sanchez refers to as “herd-minded hundreds of millions [who] will stampede to the State for security, bleating to please, please be shorn of their remaining liberties.”

Sanchez continues: “I am not terrified of the terrorists; i.e., I am not, myself, terrorized. Rather, I am terrified of the terrorized – terrified of the bovine masses who are so easily manipulated by terrorists, governments, and the terror-amplifying media into allowing our country to slip toward totalitarianism and total war...”

“I do not irrationally and disproportionately fear Muslim bomb-wielding jihadists or white, gun-toting nutcases. But I rationally and proportionately fear those who do, and I fear the regimes such terror empowers. History demonstrates that governments are capable of mass murder and enslavement far beyond what rogue militants can muster. Industrial-scale terrorists are the ones who wear ties, chevrons, and badges. But such terrorists are a powerless few without the supine acquiescence of the terrorized many. There is nothing to fear but the fearful themselves...”

“Stop swallowing the overblown scare-mongering of the government and its corporate media cronies. Stop letting them use hysteria over small menaces to drive you into the arms of tyranny, which is the greatest menace of all.”

As history makes clear, fear leads to fascist, totalitarian regimes. It's a simple enough formula. National crises, reported

terrorist attacks, and sporadic shootings leave us in a constant state of fear. Fear prevents us from thinking. The emotional panic that accompanies fear actually shuts down the prefrontal cortex or the rational thinking part of our brains. In other words, when we are consumed by fear, we stop thinking.

Easily controlled

A populace that stops thinking for itself is a populace that is easily led, easily manipulated and easily controlled.

As I document in my book, *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the following are a few of the necessary ingredients for a fascist state:

1. The government is managed by a powerful leader (even if he or she assumes office by way of the electoral process). This is the fascist leadership principle (or father figure).
2. The government assumes it is not restrained in its power. This is authoritarianism, which eventually evolves into totalitarianism.
3. The government ostensibly operates under a capitalist system while being undergirded by an immense bureaucracy.
4. The government, through its politicians, emits powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism.
5. The government has an obsession with national security while constantly invoking terrifying internal and external enemies.
6. The government establishes a domestic and invasive surveillance system and develops a paramilitary force that is not answerable to the citizenry.
7. The government and its various agencies (federal, state, and local) develop an obsession with crime and punishment. This is overcriminalization.
8. The government becomes increasingly centralized while aligning closely with corporate powers to control all aspects of the country's social, economic, military, and governmental structures.

Those living in America are eight times more likely to be killed by a police officer than by a terrorist

FRIGHTENED NATION

Not only does fear grease the wheels of the transition to fascism by cultivating fearful, controlled, pacified, cowed citizens, but it also embeds itself in our DNA

9. The government uses militarism as a centre point of its economic and taxing structure.

10. The government is increasingly imperialistic in order to maintain the military-industrial corporate forces.

The parallels to modern America are impossible to ignore.

“Every industry is regulated. Every profession is classified and organized,” writes Jeffrey Tucker. “Every good or service is taxed. Endless debt accumulation is preserved. Immense doesn’t begin to describe the bureaucracy. Military preparedness never stops, and war with some evil foreign foe remains a daily prospect.”

For the final hammer of fascism to fall, it will require the most crucial ingredient: The majority of the people will have to agree that it’s not only expedient but necessary. In times of “crisis,” expediency is upheld as the central principle – that is, in order to keep us safe and secure, the government must militarize the police, strip us of basic constitutional rights and criminalize virtually every form of behavior.

Not only does fear grease the wheels of the transition to fascism by cultivating fearful, controlled, pacified, cowed citizens, but it also embeds itself in our very DNA so that we pass on our fear and compliance to our offspring.

It’s called epigenetic inheritance, the transmission through DNA of traumatic experiences. For example, neuroscientists observed how quickly fear can travel through generations of mouse DNA. As the Washington Post reports: “In the experiment, researchers taught male mice to fear the smell of cherry blossoms by associating the scent with mild foot shocks. Two weeks later, they bred with females. The resulting pups were raised to adulthood having never been exposed to the smell. But when the critters caught a whiff of it for the first time, they suddenly became anxious and fearful. They were even born with more cherry-blos-

som-detecting neurons in their noses and more brain space devoted to cherry-blossom-smelling.”

The conclusion? “A newborn mouse, seemingly innocent to the workings of the world, may actually harbor generations’ worth of information passed down by its ancestors.”

Now consider the ramifications of inherited generations of fears and experiences on human beings. As the Post reports, “Studies on humans suggest that children and grandchildren may have felt the epigenetic impact of such traumatic events such as famine, the Holocaust and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.”

In other words, fear, trauma and compliance can be passed down through the generations.

Fear has been a critical tool in past fascist regimes, and it now operates in our contemporary world – all of which raises fundamental questions about us as human beings and what we will give up in order to perpetuate the illusions of safety and security.

In the words of psychologist Erich Fromm: “[C]an human nature be changed in such a way that man will forget his longing for freedom, for dignity, for integrity, for love – that is to say, can man forget he is human? Or does human nature have a dynamism that will react to the violation of these basic human needs by attempting to change an inhuman society into a human one?”

We are at a critical crossroads in American history, and we have a choice: freedom or fascism. Let’s hope the American people make the right choice while we still have the freedom to choose. **CT**

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John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest book, Battlefield America: The War on the American People, is available at <http://amazon.com>

Storm of ignorance

Censoring official advice, stripping the hills and rivers, the UK government ensures that 'natural' disasters will keep recurring, writes **George Monbiot**

It's as if it had come to remind us of what's at stake. While the climate negotiations in Paris trudged their dreary road, Storm Desmond took a great boot to our backsides. But still we fail to make the connection. The news records the spectacle and ignores the implications.

Rainfall on this scale used to be described as a one-in-100-year, or 200-year, or 1,000-year event. But in Cumbria, where 30 centimetres of rain fell in 24 hours early this month, this is the third such catastrophe since 2005. Exceptional events are, perhaps, no longer exceptional.

If so, we should scarcely be surprised. More heat means more energy in the system, and more moisture in the atmosphere. An analysis by scientists at the Met Office, published last month, found that global warming raised the odds – by a factor of seven – that a string of storms of the kind the UK suffered two winters ago would result in exceptionally wet weather.

Just as remarkable is the collective lack of interest in what happens when rain hits the ground. The government boasts that “we are spending £3.2-billion in flood management and defences over the course of this parliament – half a billion pounds more than in the previous parliament.” But almost all the money devoted to freshwater flood relief is being spent at the bottom of river catchments. This means wait-

ing until the wall of water arrives before seeking to contain it – a perfect formula for disappointment.

A rational policy would aim to prevent the flood from gathering in the first place. It would address the problem, literally and metaphorically, upstream. A study in mid-Wales suggests that rainwater's infiltration rate into the soil is 67 times higher under trees than under sheep pasture. Rain that percolates into the soil is released more slowly than rain that flashes over the surface. But Cumbria's hills are almost entirely treeless, and taxpayers, through the subsidy regime, pay farmers to keep them that way.

Rivers that have been dredged and canalized to protect farmland rush the water instead into the nearest town. Engineering works of this kind were removed a few years ago from the River Liza in Ennerdale. It was allowed to braid, meander and accumulate logs and stones. When the last great storm hit Cumbria in 2009, the Liza remained clear and fordable the following day, while other rivers roared into furious spate. The Liza's obstructions held the water back, filtered it and released it slowly. Had all the rivers of Cumbria been rewilded in this way, there might have been no floods, then or now.

During the last deluge, in the winter of 2013-2014, the government's Environment

Rivers that have been dredged and canalized to protect farmland rush the water instead into the nearest town

SAME AGAIN

Once water is in the rivers, it has to go somewhere. If you don't hold it back in the fields, it will bowl up instead in people's homes

Agency published a presentation called River Dredging and Flood Defence. It remarked that "Dredging of river channels does NOT prevent flooding during extreme river flows." Dredging, it noted, makes rivers more dangerous, destabilizes bridges, banks and weirs, and requires endless expense to maintain.

All copies of this presentation have now been deleted from the web. It is not hard to see why. In June, 2014, in pursuit of its primary mission – appeasing the farming industry – the environment department proposed to deregulate dredging, allowing landowners to strip the structure and wildlife habitat out of ditches and rivers. It will also permit them, with minimal oversight, to extract gravel from the riverbed and to build culverts. There could be no better formula for disaster downstream. Once water is in the rivers, it has to go somewhere. If you don't hold it back in the fields, it will bowl up instead in people's homes.

MPs on wrong side

But no one in power seems interested in the causes; all focus is on the outcomes. For the past three years, Cumbria's two most prominent MPs, Rory Stewart, now a minister at the environment department, and Tim Farron, leader of the Lib Dems, have denounced those who call for the better management of watersheds to prevent flooding. In 2013, Rory Stewart blasted the National Trust, because it "allows water to ruin the lowland pastures of their small tenant farms, apparently on the advice of the Environment Agency." In 2014, he mocked the RSPB and the water company United Utilities for managing their land "in a way that 'increased biodiversity, decreased flooding, increased carbon capture.'"

In 2013, Tim Farron pronounced himself "delighted that Natural England are readjusting their approach to the Uplands, with the recent dropping of their Uplands vision." This vision (called Vital Uplands)

proposed that there should be more vegetation in the hills to reduce "the risk of downstream flooding." It noted, "Intensive grazing can cause soil erosion and compaction, and prevent regeneration of scrub and trees, thus speeding water runoff." The report was publicly denounced by the head of the government body that had commissioned it, Natural England, who happened to make his living as a farmer. Once again, the online version was deleted and the hard copies were pulped. Is this how democracies behave?

Wringing hands and clothes

Now Messrs Stewart and Farron wring their hands and wring out their clothes, lamenting this inexplicable act of God. On Saturday, Tim Farron was trapped in the floodwaters while driving his car, and had to be rescued. The car, apparently, is a write-off. There is relief that he and his four children came to no harm. Still, parables have been told about men like him.

Meanwhile, the talks in Paris have become a festival of empty gestures. The pledges governments have brought fall short of those required to prevent disasters on a much greater scale, and even they are broken as they are made. By pursuing a new dash for gas, while closing down its carbon capture and storage, renewable power and energy efficiency programmes, David Cameron's government makes a mockery of its promises. Worse still, the collective refusal even to discuss keeping fossil fuels in the ground condemns the talks to futility.

Nothing is learned, crucial discussions are avoided or buried. We are drowning in ignorance – ignorance manufactured by an illiterate media and a hostile government. Every time disaster strikes, we respond with bewilderment. Our understanding of what confronts us seems scarcely to have advanced since we responded to catastrophe by burning old women. **CT**

*George Monbiot's book, **Feral**, was recently released in paperback format. This article was originally published in the Guardian newspaper.*

Merle Davis and the hanging judge

The war hero just wanted to drink, but his neighbours were determined to save him from his sins. **Dell Franklin** was caught in the middle

Early on in my time as a cabbie in San Luis Obispo, California, I was warned about Merle Davis, who drank in McCarthy's, the oldest bar in town, along with a crew of weathered ranch and farm hands and railroad men and scabrous retirees. Merle was a local legend – decorated war hero as a teenager, owned a ranch out in the California Valley, rodeo guy, champion hunter, notorious roughneck and redneck who went on three-week benders sandwiched between two-month periods of working hard and drying out on his ranch.

When I entered McCarthy's around noon I recognized Merle immediately – muscular, in his 60s, in boots, soiled jeans, filthy western shirt, surrounded by the morning crew who'd started

out at six and were going strong. I tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned, eyes bloodshot and glazed, in the throes of the last couple of days of his binge, smelling rancid.

"Who the hell are you?" he growled, while his compatriots looked on, amused, anticipating a confrontation. "You look like shit."

"I'm the new cabby."

He shifted around on his stool to half face me. "You some kinda dirty hippie

with that goddam beard?" He tried to grab at it, but I moved my face away.

"Look, I'm a busy man. I'm in a hurry. I can't waste my time fooling around."

"Jes' hold yer horses, boy. I got to finish my drink. Mind if I finish my drink, hippie?"

I gazed into his terrible eyes. "You just finish that drink, mister, and finish it now."

"Hold onto yer pants, by God," he whined, sipping at a full screwdriver, sizing me up with those eyes. "I got a right to finish my goddam drink, hippie."

I stepped closer and gave him a look I'd learned from my dad that often terrified people.

"All right, goddammit, all right," he said, taken aback.

As I hovered over him, he drained his drink while his surprised coterie of admirers and appraised me, not realizing I'd spent years bartending in tough street bars.

Merle got up and followed me to the cab and sat in the front seat. He was close to dead to the world. He told me where he wanted to go – an affluent '60s neighbourhood, a couple of miles from the main downtown grid. All the homes had well-tended lawns and gardens, except

I recognized Merle immediately – muscular, in his 60s, in boots, soiled jeans, filthy western shirt, surrounded by the morning crew who'd started out at six and were going strong



ON THE ROAD

His unlived-in home was full of rodeo trophies, animal heads, a large gun rack, and photos of his wife and family, beside a glassed-in row of ribbons and war medals, including the Silver Star and Purple Heart

Merle's, which was faded with dead bushes and scattered with half-a-dozen folded newspapers. The whole time I drove, he listed and mumbled, occasionally fixing his foggy gaze on me. He stunk of booze, dried sweat, and urine.

When I pulled into his driveway, he said, "Yah don't like me, do yah?"

"Well," I said, "It seems you don't care whether I do or not, but if you do, well, we'll be just fine."

He handed me a 10 for a \$7 fare and told me to keep the change, a shock, because he was a notorious tight-wad. When he got out of the cab, he teetered momentarily, then staggered to the door.

Later that day I picked him up at his house and drove him to McCarthy's, then picked him up at McCarthy's and drove him home. I repeated the process again, stopping at McDonald's upon his request to pick up a burger, fries and chocolate shake for him. I gave him his change.

"I gotta eat," he said miserably. "But I got no appetite."

From that day on he began requesting me to pick him up because he didn't like Will, who was a recovering alcoholic/born-again Christian, always preaching to him, and Harley was too much of a clean-freak. Both wanted no part of Merle because his chintzy \$1 tips weren't worth the abuse they absorbed. Twice a week I began going into his house to help clean up the fly-laden food wrappers and Styrofoam coffee cups. I stuffed all his unopened newspapers into the trash and hauled it to the curb. His unlived-in home was full of rodeo trophies, animal heads, a large gun rack, and photos of his wife and family, beside a glassed-in row of ribbons and war medals, including the Silver Star and Purple Heart.

I took him from the bar to the convalescent home where his wife, whom he'd known since grammar school, lay like a

vegetable after a massive stroke. He asked me to go inside with him for moral support while he held her hand. Afterwards, in the cab, he broke down and wept. I patted his shoulder. By the time I dropped him off at McCarthy's, he'd pulled himself together, gazed at me with the most sorrowful eyes I'd ever seen and explained, "I only loved one gal my whole life, and now she don't know me. I always been a drinker, but now I can't take it, seein' her this way, so I just drink. I don't know any other way. Thanks for comin' in with me. Yer a good guy, yah know that?"

"Don't get carried away, Merle."

"Okay. Sorry."

This routine continued for more than a year and a half. I wondered how he survived such brutal binges, especially because he divulged to me that he didn't give a shit if he lived or died, but would sooner get buried beside his wife and get it over with. He mentioned having a daughter, a cowgirl living with her husband on a ranch inland from Santa Barbara. She wanted Merle to sell his home and ranch and move in with her, but he refused. At the beginning of his three-week binges, his recovery was amazing – he looked robust, clear-eyed. By the third week of binging he was stooped, withered, an emaciated ruin. Nobody in McCarthy's understood how he was alive. He started out buying rounds for everybody, but by the third week his sojourns in the bar were shortened as bartenders called frantically to get him out, because his behaviour became that of a belligerent madman, driving out even the most durable regulars.

On one of those days, as I dropped him off in the driveway of his home, a white-haired couple, the wife resembling Barbara Bush, strode up to my cab. When Merle spotted them, he scurried up to his doorway and disappeared like a truant

school boy.

The man said, “Do you realize Merle Davis is an alcoholic?”

“I’m aware of it, sir.”

The wife stepped forward. “Do you think you are doing that poor man any good, taking him to that dreadful bar?”

“It’s not up to me to pass judgment on my customers, Ma’am.”

“You are contributing to his self-destruction,” added the man, who Merle told me later, was a notorious retired hanging judge feared by defense lawyers and criminals, especially longhairs caught with a marijuana cigarette.

“I’m a cab driver, sir, a bottom feeder, trying to eke out a living. Merle is a good customer. I look out for him as well as I can under the circumstances...”

“You certainly are NOT!” snapped the Barbara Bush lookalike. “If you had any sense of decency, any conscience at all, you would take the man to the alcohol rehabilitation clinic at French Hospital, and not take advantage of him to feather your own nest.”

“Like a vulture,” added the judge. “Feeding off a helpless man who just lost his wife and happens to be wealthy. Shame on you.”

“This conversation is over,” I said, pulling out.

The next day, my cab dispatcher ignored the judge’s threats, and the couple stood glowering at me from their front porch as I transported a staggering, feeble Merle back and forth from the bar in shorter and shorter intervals.

“That hanging judge and his fishwife want me to take you to the French Hospital,” I informed Merle, “so you can get rehabilitated.”

He winced as if I’d slapped him in the face. “NO! No, no, no, don’t do that. You can’t...”

“They’re on my ass, worried you’re

drinking yourself to death, and blaming it on me.”

“Go ahead and tell ‘em I’m tryna drink myself to death, for shit’s sake.”

“They won’t understand. They’re pushing hard for me to take you to French Hospital. They’re making my life miserable, Merle.”

“Please don’t take me there,” he pleaded. As we started to pull away, they were at my door again. “I demand you take Merle to French Hospital,” snapped the fish-wife. “We WILL report you.”

“Report me to whom?”

“You are abetting a crime,” claimed the judge. “How low must you stoop to make a lousy buck? You are a parasite feeding off a sick and dying man.”

I began to back up, but they stayed with me. Merle, squinting up at the judge and Barbara Bush with his slaughtered eyes, began pleading. “One more,” he whined. “That’s all I want, judge, one more drink.”

“He wants one more drink,” I told them. “Then I’ll take him straight to French Hospital.”

They backed off as I squealed out into the street and peeled away. Merle gripped my arm vise-like, a panicky grip. “Yer not takin’ me to French Hospital, are yah?”

“I got to. That hanging judge wants to put me in jail, Merle.”

“No, no, no...” He tried to open the door and jump out of the cab. I grabbed his arm, pulled him back. “Settle down, for Christ’s sake. I was just kidding. I’d never take you anywhere but where you wanna go, even if you are a goddam Republican redneck.”

He sagged back. “Thanks, pal.” He sighed. “Hell, all I want is one more drink. What’s wrong with those people?”

“They’re the enemy, Merle. I’m not.”

I dropped him off at McCarthy’s. Twenty minutes later they called me back. Merle fell into the cab. When I dropped

My cab dispatcher ignored the judge’s threats, and the couple stood glowering at me from their front porch as I transported a staggering, feeble Merle back and forth from the bar in shorter and shorter intervals

ON THE ROAD

The judge and Barbara were on the lawn, trying to corral Merle, who was fighting them off, careening around blindly, a wreck

him off, the judge and wife were on the front porch of their home directly across the street. I drove off. Their heads were together in serious discussion as I peeled away, honking my horn to further aggravate them. In my rear view mirror I saw Merle fall through his front door without closing it.

Fifteen minutes later our dispatcher sent me back for Merle. “Can’t somebody else pick him up?” I pleaded. “There’s a hanging judge across the street wants to put me in jail for contributing to Merle’s demise.”

“He wants you and only you. You’re stuck with him. Go.”

When I arrived Merle was on the front lawn tussling with a young woman whom I recognized from pictures in his home as the daughter. She was a big, strapping girl. A huge, dirt-encrusted pickup was parked on the street. The judge and Barbara were on the lawn, too, trying to corral Merle, who was fighting them off, careening around blindly, a wreck. I pulled into the driveway. I rolled down the side window when Merle spotted my cab, and shouted at me frantically and waved his arms like a man who’d been lost in the woods for a week.

“Get me outa here!” he bellowed, face purple. “Help me!”

I shook my head.

“I just want one more drink!” he pleaded with his daughter, who had him around the waist from behind, while Merle pulled her toward my cab, like a plow-horse. Then she surged, and he started backwards as the judge and wife circled.

Merle reached into the pocket of his stained, rancid western shirt and withdrew his wad. “Twenty bucks if you get me outa here!”

I shook my head.

He waved the bulging wad maniacally. “Forty bucks! Please! Fifty! For God’s Sake, get me outa here!”

I sprang from my cab and was immediately involved in the fray. The hawk-beaked couple tried to head me off, but then quickly moved out of my way. I took hold of Merle, and engaged in a tug-of-war with the cowgirl, Merle being the unwilling rope. She was strong. As I began to get the upper hand, she surged. I allowed her the momentum while holding Merle’s shirt, which ripped, sending her sprawling. I quickly hustled Merle into the front seat, jumped into the still-running cab and screeched out of the driveway while they all ran toward me. I peeled away, my hand on the horn all the way down the street and around the corner to show everyone in this enemy neighbourhood who was in charge.

“Goddam,” Merle wheezed, panting like a dog. “Why can’t a guy get a drink around here, huh? All I want is one more.”

“I dunno, Merle, but I ain’t comin’ back to that hornet’s nest. That daughter of yours is a bull. You better finish up at McCarthy’s and get back to your ranch before that crew puts you in French Hospital and me in jail.”

“Guess I’ll go back tomorrow,” he conceded. He patted my knee. “Thanks, pal. Yer a good guy.”

“Let’s not get carried away now.”

“Okay. Sorry.”

When we pulled up to McCarthy’s there was a gleam in his diluted eyes and a triumphant smirk on his ravaged mug. He peeled off a 50 from his thick wad and placed it in my shirt pocket. Then he painfully extricated himself from the cab and bent down to stick his face in the window.

“Yah goddam hippie,” he snorted, and weaved into McCarthy’s. **CT**

Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at <http://dellfranklin.com>

Dead, white and blue

Barbara Ehrenreich looks at the striking death rate of America's white working class

The white working class, which usually inspires liberal concern only for its paradoxical, Republican-leaning voting habits, has recently become newsworthy for something else: According to economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton, the winner of the latest Nobel Prize in economics, its members in the 45- to 54-year-old age group are dying at an immoderate rate. While the lifespan of affluent whites continues to lengthen, the lifespan of poor whites has been shrinking. As a result, in just the last four years, the gap between poor white men and wealthier ones has widened by up to four years. The New York Times summed up the Deaton and Case study with this headline, "Income Gap, Meet the Longevity Gap."

This was not supposed to happen. For almost a century, the comforting American narrative was that better nutrition and medical care would guarantee longer lives for all. So the great blue-collar die-off has come out of the blue and is, as the Wall Street Journal says, "startling."

It was especially not supposed to happen to whites, who, in relation to people of colour, have long had the advantage of higher earnings, better access to health care, safer neighbourhoods, and, of course, freedom from the daily insults and harms inflicted on the darker-skinned. There has also been a major racial gap in longevity –

5.3 years between white and black men and 3.8 years between white and black women – though, hardly noticed, it has been narrowing for the last two decades. Only whites, however, are now dying off in unexpectedly large numbers in middle age, their excess deaths accounted for by suicide, alcoholism, and drug (usually opiate) addiction.

There are some practical reasons why whites are likely to be more efficient than blacks at killing themselves. For one thing, they are more likely to be gun-owners, and white men favour gunshots as a means of suicide. For another, doctors, undoubtedly acting in part on stereotypes of non-whites as drug addicts, are more likely to prescribe powerful opiate painkillers to whites than to people of colour. I've been offered enough oxycodone prescriptions over the years to stock a small illegal business.

Manual labour – from waitressing to construction work – tends to wear the body down quickly, from knees to back and rotator cuffs, and when Tylenol fails, the doctor may opt for an opiate just to get you through the day.

The wages of despair

But something more profound is going on here, too. As New York Times columnist Paul Krugman puts it, the "diseases" leading to excess white working class deaths are those of "despair," and some of the obvious

I've been offered enough oxycodone prescriptions over the years to stock a small illegal business

CHANGING SOCIETY

It's not easy to maintain the usual sense of white superiority when parts of the media are squeezing laughs from the contrast between savvy blacks and rural white bumpkins

causes are economic. In the last few decades, things have not been going well for working class people of any colour.

I grew up in an America where a man with a strong back – and better yet, a strong union – could reasonably expect to support a family on his own without a college degree. In 2015, those jobs are long gone, leaving only the kind of work once relegated to women and people of colour available in areas such as retail, landscaping, and delivery-truck driving. This means that those in the bottom 20 percent of white income distribution face material circumstances like those long familiar to poor blacks, including erratic employment and crowded, hazardous living spaces.

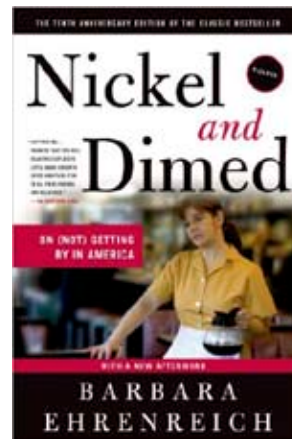
White privilege was never, however, simply a matter of economic advantage. As the great African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1935, “It must be remembered that the white group of labourers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage.”

Some of the elements of this invisible wage sound almost quaint today, like Du Bois’s assertion that white working class people were “admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools.” Today, there are few public spaces that are not open, at least legally, to blacks, while the “best” schools are reserved for the affluent – mostly white and Asian American, along with a sprinkling of other people of colour to provide the fairy dust of “diversity.” While whites have lost ground economically, blacks have made gains, at least in the de jure sense. As a result, the “psychological wage” awarded to white people has been shrinking.

For most of American history, government could be counted on to maintain white power and privilege by enforcing slavery and later segregation. When the federal government finally weighed in on the side of desegregation, working class whites were left to defend their own diminishing privilege by moving rightward toward the likes of Alabama Governor (and later presidential candidate) George Wallace and his many white pseudo-populist successors down to Donald Trump.

At the same time, the day-to-day task of upholding white power devolved from the federal government to the state and then local level, specifically to local police forces, which, as we know, have taken it up with such enthusiasm as to become both a national and international scandal. The Guardian newspaper, for instance, now keeps a running tally of the number of Americans (mostly black) killed by cops (as of this moment, 1,209 for 2015), while black protest, in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement and a wave of on-campus demonstrations, has largely recaptured the moral high ground formerly occupied by the civil rights movement.

The culture, too, has been inching bit by bit toward racial equality, if not, in some limited areas, black ascendancy. If the stock image of the early 20th century “Negro” was the minstrel, the role of rural simpleton in popular culture has been taken over in this century by the characters in Duck Dynasty and Here Comes Honey Boo Boo. At least in the entertainment world, working class whites are now regularly portrayed as moronic, while blacks are often hyper-articulate, street-smart,



**NICKEL AND DIMED
On (Not) Getting By In
America**

Barbara Ehrenreich

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and sometimes as wealthy as Kanye West. It's not easy to maintain the usual sense of white superiority when parts of the media are squeezing laughs from the contrast between savvy blacks and rural white bumpkins, as in the Tina Fey comedy, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. White, presumably upper-middle class, people generally conceive of these characters and plot lines, which, to a child of white working class parents like myself, sting with condescension.

Of course, there was also the election of the first black president. White, native-born Americans began to talk of "taking our country back." The more affluent ones formed the Tea Party; less affluent ones often contented themselves with affixing Confederate flag decals to their trucks.

On the American downward slope

All of this means that the maintenance of white privilege, especially among the least privileged whites, has become more difficult and so, for some, more urgent than ever. Poor whites always had the comfort of knowing that someone was worse off and more despised than they were; racial subjugation was the ground under their feet, the rock they stood upon, even when their own situation was deteriorating.

If the government, especially at the federal level, is no longer as reliable an enforcer of white privilege, then it's grassroots initiatives by individuals and small groups that are helping to fill the gap – perpetrating the micro-aggressions that roil college campuses, the racial slurs yelled from pickup trucks, or, at a deadly extreme, the shooting up of a black church renowned for its efforts in the civil rights era. Dylann Roof, the Charleston killer who did just that, was a jobless high school dropout and reportedly a heavy user of alcohol and opiates. Even without a death sentence hanging over him, Roof was surely headed toward an early demise.

Acts of racial aggression may provide their

white perpetrators with a fleeting sense of triumph, but they also take a special kind of effort. It takes effort, for instance, to target a black runner and swerve over to insult her from your truck; it takes such effort – and a strong stomach – to paint a racial slur in excrement on a dormitory bathroom wall. College students may do such things in part out of a sense of economic vulnerability – the knowledge that as soon as school is over, their college-debt payments will come due. No matter the effort expended, however, it is especially hard to maintain a feeling of racial superiority while struggling to hold onto one's own place near the bottom of an undependable economy.

While there is no medical evidence that racism is toxic to those who express it – after all, generations of wealthy slave owners survived quite nicely – the combination of downward mobility and racial resentment may be a potent invitation to the kind of despair that leads to suicide in one form or another, whether by gunshots or drugs. You can't break a glass ceiling if you're standing on ice.

It's easy for the liberal intelligentsia to feel righteous in their disgust for lower-class white racism, but the college-educated elite that produces the intelligentsia is in trouble, too, with diminishing prospects and an ever-slipperier slope for the young. Whole professions have fallen on hard times, from college teaching to journalism and the law. One of the worst mistakes this relative elite could make is to try to pump up its own pride by hating on those – of any colour or ethnicity – who are falling even faster. **CT**

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*Barbara Ehrenreich is founding editor of the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, is the author of *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (now in a 10th anniversary edition with a new afterword) and most recently the autobiographical *Living with a Wild God: A Nonbeliever's Search for the Truth about Everything*. This essay originally appeared at <http://tomdispatch.org>*

It's easy for the liberal intelligentsia to feel righteous in their disgust for lower-class white racism, but the college-educated elite that produces the intelligentsia is in trouble, too, with diminishing prospects and an ever-slipperier slope for the young

DREAMS of GLORY

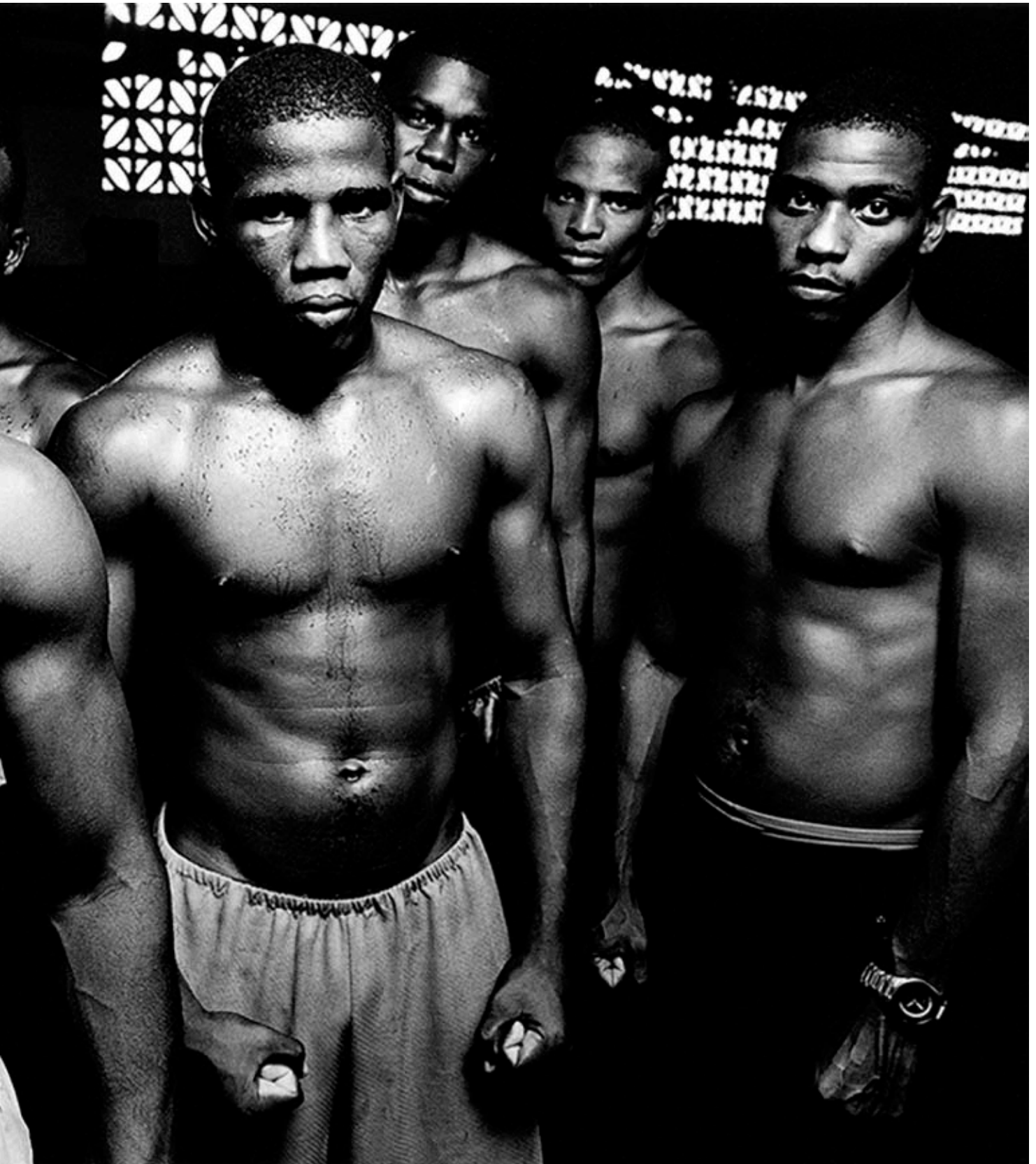
THIERRY LE GOUES MEETS THE CUBAN KIDS WHO ARE FIGHTING TO BECOME TOMORROW'S OLYMPIC HEROES

Boxing is the most popular sport in Cuba: Its national team holds more Olympic medals than any other country. State-promoted since the revolution, amateur boxing's potential for fame and relative wealth makes it a beacon for impoverished youth yearning for a better life.

French photographer Thierry Le Goues spent eight years travelling across the island documenting amateur boxing schools for his lavish new book, **Havana Boxing Club**. He visited the complex network of training facilities that proliferate in the country, following the rise and fall of countless wannabe-champions.

The resulting images – some of which we feature on the following pages – show boys and young men struggling, sweating, and fighting to overcome everything thrown at them – inside the ring and out. Le Goues's rich black and white photographs illustrate the rigours of the training camps, the no-holds-barred struggles in boxing rings erected in the streets of small villages that, the young fighters hope, will lead to success on the international stage. **CT**



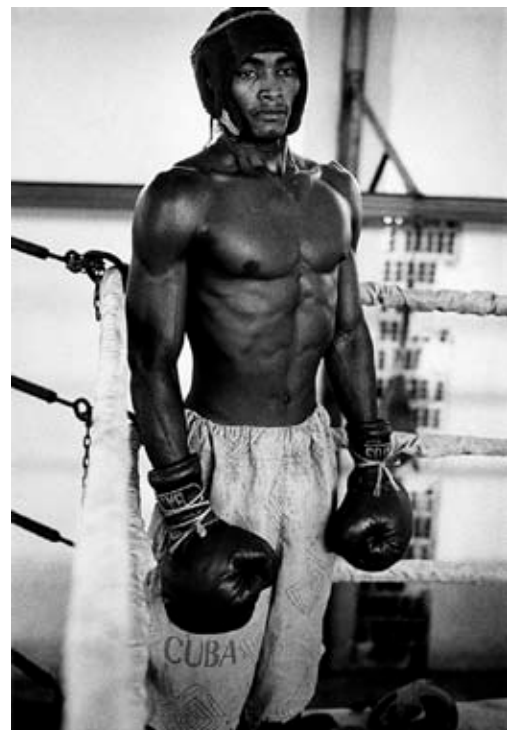
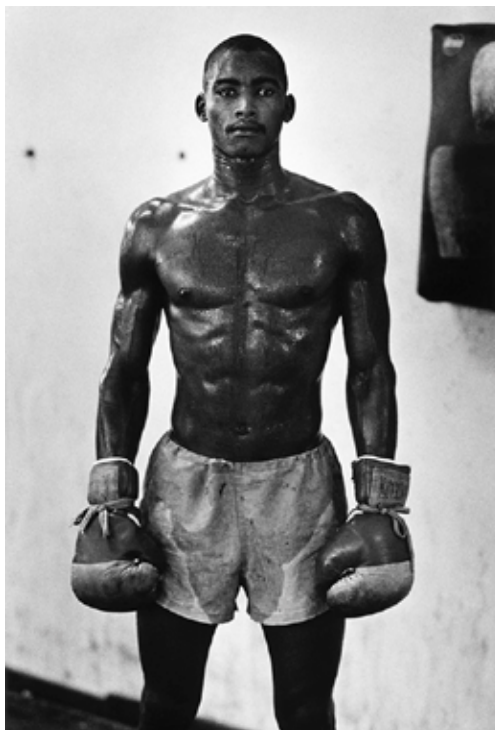


IN THE PICTURE



THE PHOTOGRAPHER

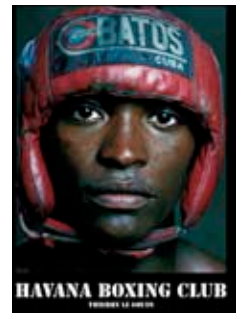
Thierry Le Goues was born in Brest, France, in 1964 and lives in Paris. Le Goues began his career as a fashion photographer in 1986 working for Conde Nast. His fashion, documentary, and editorial photography has appeared in many publications around the world. Le Goues is also the author of *Soul and Popular* (both published by powerHouse Books).



IN THE PICTURE



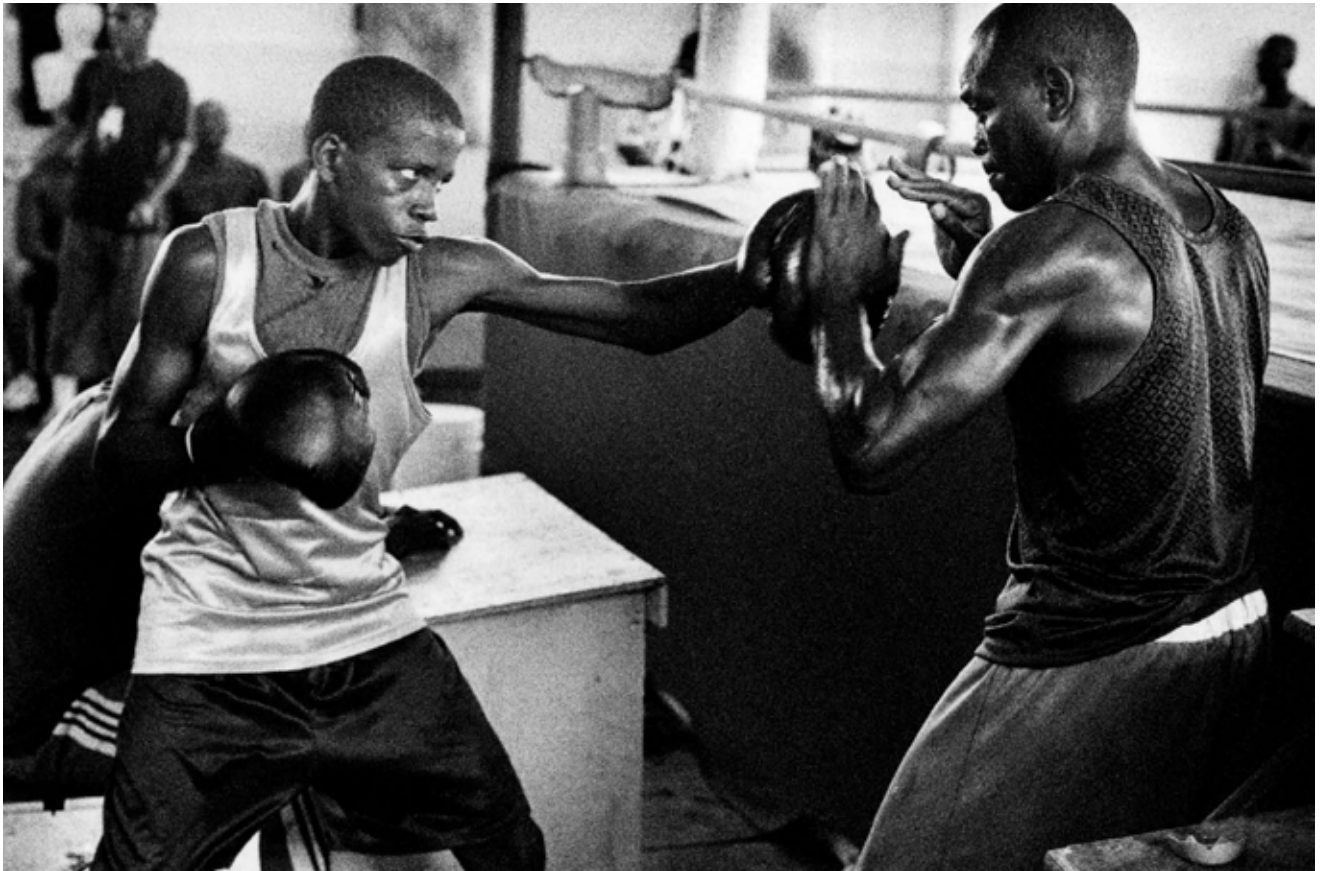
THE BOOK



**HAVANA
BOXING CLUB**

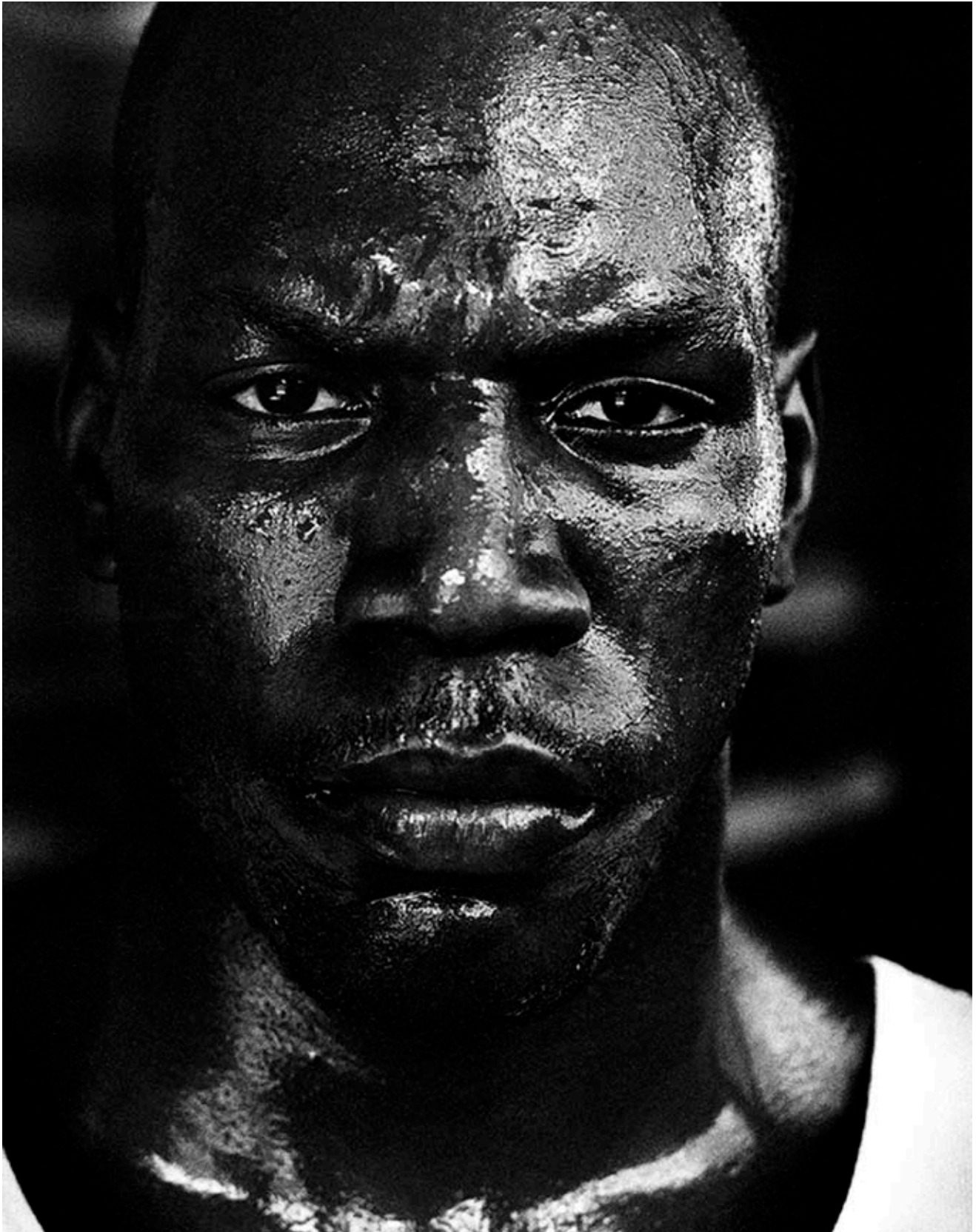
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IN THE PICTURE



Photographs
from Havana
Boxing Club, by
Thierry Le Goues





Shocked by Trump? Just look at Churchill

Think modern politicians are crazy? Just cast your eyes back a few years, and you'll find things haven't changed, writes **Barry Lando**

The right-wing Daily Mail, which had supported the fascists in the 1930s, led a campaign to have all aliens in Britain interned

We're outraged by Donald Trump's demanding databases and I.D. cards to protect America from the super-hyped threat of Syrian refugees. We're ashamed by the memory of Roosevelt's interning more than 100,000 Japanese American residents and citizens during the Second World War. But Winston Churchill went even farther. He ordered the internment of tens of thousands of Jewish refugees in England, labeling them dangerous enemy aliens.

It's a "distant mirror" to the mounting hysteria in the United States today.

Nationals from Germany and Austria who were living in England when the Second World War broke out, had already been assigned to different groupings based on their apparent threat to the UK. Category A were the "high security risks." All 600 of them were immediately interned. Those deemed "no-security risk" in Class C, included 55,000 refugees from Nazi oppression. The great majority of them were Jewish. They were left free – at first.

But then, in the spring of 1940, with the fall of France, the fear of a German invasion, the entry of Italy into the war, there was an outbreak of spy fever in England, a demand that more be done about the thousands of "dangerous aliens" living there. Unwilling to consider which of those foreigners might actually be dangerous, Churchill commanded, "Collar them all."

Brushed aside were objections that huge numbers of those ordered interned were Jews who had fled for their lives from the Nazis. The irrational fear was that they might still somehow become a dangerous Fifth Column – they could be blackmailed to engage in espionage or whatever.

The frenzy was fed by the groundless alarms of MI5, Britain's domestic intelligence service. They were amplified by a totally irresponsible media. The right-wing Daily Mail, which had supported the fascists in the 1930s, led a campaign to have all aliens in Britain interned. Some employers began to fire all foreigners. Other workers were sacked just because they had foreign ancestors. There were calls to deport all of them. In that case, some calmer souls tried to



"Collar them all" – Winston Churchill.

Photo: Wikipedia.

point out, the British Royal Family should be deported as well, because their ancestors had originally come from Germany.

Pleas for more nuanced rational measures were ignored in the madness.

Whether Jewish or not, all men between 16 and 60 from Austria, Germany and Italy were to be interned.

One young sixteen-year-old Jew from Austria, Fred Stern, recounted how he was interrogated, his belongings searched. His Austrian passport was stamped with a symbol denoting he was a Jew. "Israel" was also written after his name. The police impounded it.

Their suspicions were confirmed when they discovered a Morse code set Stern had used as a boy scout in Vienna. That set was confiscated, along with a map of Switzerland on which Stern had marked the route taken by the bus during his vacation there with the scouts.

Conditions in the internment camps were often appalling, the prisoners at first held in tents without mattresses. Some had proper toilets facilities. Others had buckets or pits.

The majority were interned on the bleak Isle of Man off the coast of Scotland. In one of the camps, more than 80 percent of those interned were Jewish. Wives were separated from their husbands. Internees were also forbidden to have newspapers, to listen to the radio, or to receive letters. Many were prevented from finding out what had happened to family members trapped in Nazi Europe. Several refugees who had fled to England to avoid persecution committed suicide in these camps.

To relieve the pressure on England, more than 7,000 of the internees were deported to Canada and Australia. One of the passenger liners transporting them, the *Andorra Star*, was sunk by a German Uboat. More than 700 persons drowned, most of them internees. Others carried in an overcrowded ship to Australia later wrote of the dreadful conditions on the two-month trip; many had their belongings thrown overboard or

stolen by their British military guard.

Even in far off Canada and Australia, they were still treated as a dangerous threat, dispatched to hastily prepared camps, guarded by armed soldiers, surrounded by barbed-wire. They were allowed two censored letters a week, "Prisoner of War" embossed on the envelopes

There were 26 camps in Canada, including the horrific Camp I in Ile-aux-Noix, Quebec, where Austrian and German Jews who thought they had escaped Nazism by fleeing to Britain during the 1930s found themselves interred in camps with the same Nazis they had escaped.

One internee wrote that at another Canadian camp, "We were welcomed by German PoWs singing the Horst Wessel Song. It was most grueling to hear the words 'Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt' (When Jewish blood sprays from the knife)."

Rampant anti-Semitism in England and Canada also played a role in internment policies. Canada's immigration minister at the time, Frederick Charles Blair, believed "an international Jewish conspiracy was trying to skirt Canadian immigration policies by sneaking the refugees into the country,"

Fred Stern's father escaped, but most of his family perished in the Holocaust. After more than a year, his parents in England finally managed to obtain his release and return.

Later, when the hysteria had somewhat subsided, there was an official inquiry, but the British government, remained unrepentant. The Duke of Devonshire, justified the decision to deport the refugees to Canada and Australia with the words: "It seemed desirable both to husband our resources and get rid of useless mouths and so forth." **CT**

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Barry Lando, an Emmy Award-winning former *60 Minutes* producer, is author of a new novel, *The Watchman's File*, available at Amazon, in soft cover, and as a download for Kindle.

Several refugees who had fled to England to avoid persecution committed suicide in British internment camps

Manufacturing consent for another war

David Edwards looks at the media response to Hilary Benn's acclaimed pro-war speech to the British parliament

The entire argument was a tissue of lies, hype and deception driven by several varieties of corporate greed, notably greed for Iraqi oil

Everyone laughs when dictators claim “Victory!” having secured fully 99 per cent of the vote. The deception is so naked, so obvious nobody is fooled by this supposed “national consensus.”

By contrast, when Western politics and media appear to reach a consensus on the benevolent intent of “our” leaders, on the Hitlerian qualities of “our” latest Official Enemy – when war is understood to be an unavoidable necessity by just about everyone – nobody blinks an eye. The beauty of a system like ours – controlled by propaganda rather than Big Brother-style censorship and violence – is that it looks for all the world like freedom.

The corporate media system may appear to be comprised of a huge variety of newspapers, magazines, websites, TV and radio stations. But in fact these are all corporate media, and all corporate media share similar interests and pursue similar goals in alliance with the state. What looks like consensus is most often a lie – a phoney reflection of corporate dominance and mindless groupthink. Thus the Guardian showed its allegiance when it declared that historians “will look back to read an impassioned and impressive speech.”

A Telegraph editorial agreed: The speaker gave “the country a rare reminder of what a first-class parliamentary performer

he is... The Commons brought out the very best in him.”

The Independent nodded. The speech “was the most persuasive case yet made... for war.”

And the Times: “It was a speech to admire for its willpower and its moral conviction.” The speaker had demonstrated “greatness.”

I am describing the media response to Tony Blair's, March 18, 2003, speech to parliament, on the eve of Britain's calamitous and criminal invasion of Iraq. Blair's performance was greeted with near-universal media acclaim and yet most of us knew – without even hearing or reading the speech – that the plaudits were false. How? As Seinfeld's George Costanza said: “It's one of my powers.”

We knew Blair's speech could not have shown “greatness” because we knew that his case for war – that Saddam threatened the West, that he possessed terrifying weapons, that he had links to al-Qaeda, that the West had to invade to protect itself – was nonsense. The entire argument was a tissue of lies, hype and deception driven by several varieties of corporate greed, notably greed for Iraqi oil.

Blair had written in September 2002 that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction represented “a current and serious threat to the UK national interest.” John Morrison, an



Hilary Benn in mid-speech in Britain's House of Commons. Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn looks on impassively.

adviser to the parliamentary intelligence and security committee and a former deputy chief of defence intelligence, told the BBC: "When I heard him using those words, I could almost hear the collective raspberry going up around Whitehall."

To accept that Blair's case merited a "raspberry" was to understand, was to simply know, that his speech could not be "impressive," because lies are not impressive; cold-blooded killing for profit is not impressive. And we were not about to be moved by his skill as a "parliamentary performer."

Hilary Benn's "spine-tingling" speech

This month, with Britain yet again on the brink of war – this time with Syria – the same corporate journalists and commentators in the same corporate media responded in the same way to a speech by

shadow foreign secretary, Hilary Benn.

In the Telegraph, Janet Daley declared that Benn had given "a thunderous and morally unimpeachable speech." For Col. Tim Collins in the same newspaper, the speech "will stand both as one of the great orations in our parliament and as an inspiring example." It was "spine-tingling." The title of another piece added: "The House sat silent, rapt. Then, on both sides, MPs burst into applause."

Dan Hodges wrote, also in the Telegraph: "Hilary Benn didn't just look like the leader of the opposition. He looked like the prime minister... It is about to become the House of Commons 'Where were you when Kennedy was shot' moment. Where were you sitting? Who were you with? What were you thinking?"

The Guardian's chief political correspondent, Nicholas Watt, applauded: "Benn fi-

Blair's speech could not be "impressive," because lies are not impressive; cold-blooded killing for profit is not impressive

Goldsmith voted for war on Syria, having previously voted for war on Libya and Iraq – a depressing transformation indeed for a leading environmentalist

nally emerged from the shadow of his late father, Tony, as he delivered a spellbinding speech... the speech had altered the dynamics within the party.”

Guardian comment editor, Jonathan Freedland, agreed: “Whether you agree or not, that was a truly electrifying speech by Hilary Benn. One that will define his career.”

A Guardian news piece admired Benn’s ‘extraordinary’ speech. In the Observer, Andrew Rawnsley praised an “electrifying speech... It was a bravura performance...”

The hard-right “leftist” New Statesman, owned by multi-millionaire media tycoon Mike Danson, celebrated “Hilary Benn’s remarkable speech,” which “received thunderous applause and moved MPs to tears as he made the case for intervention.” Many more tears have been generated by the media’s response.

The oligarch-owned Independent noted: “Hilary Benn has been praised for ‘one of the truly great speeches’ seen in the House of Commons after making a passionate plea for Labour MPs joining him to support air strikes in Syria.”

The oligarch-owned Evening Standard (same oligarch), commented: “Hilary Benn’s Syria speech lauded as one of the greatest in Commons history.”

The Sun’s chief political correspondent, one Craig Woodhouse, declared: “If you haven’t seen it, watch Hilary Benn’s speech here. One of the best speeches ever.” In all of human history, we presume. The Spectator described Benn’s “extraordinary speech.” The Daily Mail felt that “Benn made the address of his political life,” drawing a “rapturous response.” Also in the Daily Mail, Andrew Pierce noted the “bravura” speech, “bookmakers have made him a favourite to succeed the hapless Jeremy Corbyn.” The Express reported that Benn’s speech was “gripping the nation.”

Andrew Neil, presenter of the BBC’s Sunday and Daily Politics programmes, tweeted: “Remarkable and unprecedented-

ed speech by Hilary Benn. House on both sides breaks into applause.”

Pulitzer prize-winning US journalist Glenn Greenwald commented on Neil’s tweet: “As always, fascinating how journalistic ‘neutrality’ always permits swooning in the face of politicians’ war cries.”

Greenwald added: “And asking genuinely: What was so ‘extraordinary’ about Benn’s speech? It was filled with typical, war-justifying, pseudo-tough-guy clichés.”

The BBC’s deputy political editor, James Landale, appeared overcome with emotion. It was, he said, “the most extraordinary speech... I’ve been reporting parliament for about 20 years and I have never seen a speech like it.”

Some restraint might have been expected from Landale, given his BBC News at Six description (August 22, 2011) of feelings inside 10 Downing Street on NATO’s calamitous and criminal war on Libya: “But all that caution has been matched by some satisfaction and optimism. Satisfaction that all David Cameron’s critics, who said that this couldn’t be done – that aerial bombardment would not work – have been proved wrong.”

On December 3, BBC Radio 4 ran Benn’s entire speech and suggested he might become Labour leader. We can be sure that this would not have happened – no matter how extraordinary the speech – if Benn had been arguing against war.

Zac Goldsmith, Tory MP for Richmond, London mayoral candidate and former editor of the Ecologist, tweeted: “Hilary Benn is delivering a truly magnificent speech. Worth watching.”

In truth, Benn’s speech was the kind of grim, gung-ho guff that would never get within a million miles of the Ecologist’s pages. Goldsmith voted for war on Syria, having previously voted for war on Libya and Iraq – a depressing transformation indeed for a leading environmentalist.

An editorial in the Times hinted at the problem with the speech: “Mr Benn’s vi-

sion of this country and its responsibilities on the international stage is one to which, in many respects, the Times subscribes.”

Needless to say, the speech was awesome: “Long after most have forgotten the detail of the House of Commons debate on British airstrikes on the self-styled Islamic State, many will remember the words of Hilary Benn.”

Adam Boulton wrote in the Sunday Times: “The applause after Hilary Benn’s speech in favour of extending RAF bombing into Syria was unprecedented, running in a Mexican wave from the Tory benches, around the horseshoe of the chamber...”

As Peter Osborne has noted, the parliamentary speaker did not allow applause for earlier speeches, but it was allowed for Benn’s speech – a clear case of bias. Boulton added that it was “a great parliamentary speech... of genuine national significance.”

As usual, it was noticeable that the more honest, uncompromised commentators did not share the false consensus. Osborne wrote, accurately, in the Daily Mail that the speech “was not nearly as impressive as reported. Mr Benn showed no comprehension of the complexities of the Syrian civil war;” being “a political mediocrity who has become a convenient stalking horse for the Blairite faction which has been determined to destroy Jeremy Corbyn since he was elected.” Which, indeed, explains the media response to the speech.

A tissue of twaddle

In his speech, Benn declared a “clear and present threat from Daesh;” language that bore an unfortunate resemblance to Blair’s claim of a “current and serious threat” from Saddam Hussein that earned rude noises from UK intelligence experts.

On September 10, 2014, a report in the New York Times commented on Isis: “American intelligence agencies have concluded that it poses no immediate threat to the United States. Some officials and terrorism experts believe that the actual danger

posed by ISIS has been distorted in hours of television punditry and alarmist statements by politicians, and that there has been little substantive public debate about the unintended consequences of expanding American military action in the Middle East.” And: “ ‘It’s pretty clear that upping our involvement in Iraq and Syria makes it more likely that we will be targeted by the people we are attacking,’ said Andrew Liepman, a former deputy director at the National Counterterrorism Center who is now a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation.”

In his speech, Benn argued: “We now have a clear and unambiguous UN Security Council Resolution 2249, Paragraph 5 of which specifically calls on member states to take all necessary measures to redouble and co-ordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIS...”

“So given that the United Nations has passed this resolution, given that such action would be lawful under Article 51 of the UN Charter – because every state has the right to defend itself.”

By contrast, the European Journal of International Law noted on the UN resolution: “However, though the resolution, and the unanimity with which it was adopted, might confer a degree of legitimacy on actions against IS, the resolution does not actually authorize any actions against IS, nor does it provide a legal basis for the use of force against IS either in Syria or in Iraq.”

And: “Thus, the resolution is to be seen as only encouraging states to do what they can already do under other rules of international law. It neither adds to, nor subtracts from, whatever existing authority states already have.”

Benn argued that there is much “support from within the region, including from Iraq.” He omitted to mention Syria and the fact that the attacks have not been requested by the Syrian government and are therefore illegal. Syrian president Assad

As Peter Osborne has noted, the parliamentary speaker did not allow applause for earlier speeches, but it was allowed for Benn’s speech – a clear case of bias

Perhaps, like many journalists, Benn has been deceived by Operation Inherent Resolve, a Washington propaganda campaign intended to mitigate the failure of its air campaign by making exaggerated claims of success

said recently of Western intervention: “It is legal only when the participation is in co-operation with the legitimate government in Syria... We are a sovereign country.”

Benn continued: “It has been argued in the debate that airstrikes achieve nothing. Not so. Look at how Daesh’s forward march has been halted in Iraq.”

The claim has been flatly contradicted by highly-respected, veteran investigative journalist, Patrick Cockburn, who commented in the London Review of Books last month: “By October the US-led coalition had carried out 7,323 air strikes, the great majority of them by the US air force, which made 3,231 strikes in Iraq and 2,487 in Syria. But the campaign has demonstrably failed to contain IS, which in May captured Ramadi in Iraq and Palmyra in Syria...”

Perhaps, like many journalists, Benn has been deceived by Operation Inherent Resolve, a Washington propaganda campaign intended to mitigate the failure of its air campaign by making exaggerated claims of success. Cockburn again: “Maps were issued to the press showing that IS had a weakening grip on between 25 and 30 per cent of its territory, but they conveniently left out the parts of Syria where IS was advancing. Such was the suppression and manipulation of intelligence by the administration that, in July, 50 analysts working for US Central Command signed a protest against the official distortion of what was happening on the battlefield. Russia has now taken advantage of the US failure to suppress the jihadis.”

Perhaps the most eloquent answer to Benn-style warmongering was supplied by the Boston Globe way back in April 2003 when it quoted As’ad AbuKhalil, a 22-year-old, Lebanese graduate student: “‘The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan gave us the Taliban,’ AbuKhalil says. ‘The American occupation of Saudi Arabia gave us bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. The Israeli occupation of Lebanon gave us Hezbollah. Let us see what the American occupation of Iraq

is going to give us.’”

Benn said: “I say the threat is now, and there are rarely, if ever, perfect circumstances in which to deploy military forces.”

Curiously, on November 15 – just three weeks before his December 2 speech – Benn himself was quoted in the Independent as being opposed to bombing: “Mr Benn... said that the government should drop plans for a new House of Commons vote authorizing military attacks in Syria to concentrate on peace talks and providing humanitarian support for refugees.”

“Mr Benn said the ‘terrible events in Paris’ meant it was ‘even more important that we bring the Syrian civil war to an end’ before considering air strikes on ISIS.... asked if he thought they should, Mr Benn said: ‘No.’ He added: ‘They have to come up with an overall plan, which they have not done. I think the focus for now is finding a peaceful solution to the civil war.’”

What changed between November 15 and December 2? A question that again has eerie echoes of the Iraq war, specifically the debate over legality.

In a stirring conclusion that brought tears to the eyes of many a state-corporate crocodile, Benn said: “And what we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated. And it is why, as we have heard tonight, socialists and trade unionists and others joined the International Brigade in the 1930s to fight against Franco. It’s why this entire House stood up against Hitler and Mussolini. It is why our party has always stood up against the denial of human rights and for justice.”

In similar vein, in his 2003 speech, Blair said: “We can look back and say: There’s the time; that was the moment; for example, when Czechoslovakia was swallowed up by the Nazis – that’s when we should have acted.”

On Benn’s claim that “Our party has always stood up against the denial of human rights and for justice,” British historian Mark Curtis observed wryly: “These claims

are... amusing for anyone with the remotest knowledge of Labour's post-war and recent foreign policy."

Curtis wrote in his book, *The Ambiguities of Power*: "Since 1945, rather than occasionally deviating from the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights and economic development in the Third World, British (and US) foreign policy has been systematically opposed to them, whether the Conservatives or Labour (or Republicans or Democrats) have been in power."

Unsurprisingly, Blair enjoyed Benn's speech immensely: "I thought it was a tour de force and very important in restating the progressive case in helping people in need."

There have been rare glimmers of dissent in the press, mostly supplied by comedians Frankie Boyle, David Mitchell and Mark Steel performing almost as jesters to the corporate liberal court.

Conclusion - beyond bias

The myth of corporate media impartiality – vital for retaining readers' support - makes it hard for structurally pro-war media to declare too openly in favour of the West's endless wars. What they can do is celebrate speeches that just happen to be pro-

war. To applaud skills of oratory, courage, leadership – to note that numerous politicians and journalists (all with a lucrative, warmongering axe to grind) admired the speech – is a powerful way of supporting war without looking too obviously biased. In his article, Mark Curtis wrote: "I've been monitoring the mainstream media for 30 years and cannot remember a time like this: Literally everything is being thrown at Corbyn."

Indeed, the propaganda war being waged on Corbyn and the related support for war and Benn's wretched speech – has moved beyond mere bias. The British corporate media are no longer merely channelling distorted news and views to democracy; they are openly working to undermine democracy. In effect, state-corporate power is telling the 250,000 people who voted for Corbyn, and anyone else who supports anti-war politics, that the Corbyn option is not allowed. Democracy is one thing, but his brand of politics goes too far.

When elite interests determine what is and is not politically possible, we are entering the realm of fascism. **GT**

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David Edwards is co-editor of Medialens, the UK press watchdog – <http://medialens.org>

The myth of corporate media impartiality – vital for retaining readers' support - makes it hard for structurally pro-war media to declare too openly in favour of the West's endless war

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Treading the blood-filled footsteps of Tony Blair

Felicity Arbuthnot on the latest lies that have dragged the UK into another Middle East war

Cameron's parliamentary press gangs managed to threaten and arm-twist through a vote to attack Syria in an action of shame that will surely haunt him as Blair is haunted by Iraq

"Russia bombing Syria will lead to further radicalization and increased terrorism." Prime Minister David Cameron, October 4, 2015

Prime Minister Cameron has been yearning to bomb Syria since August 2013 when his plans to involve Britain in the US-led aerial attacks on the Assad government were defeated in Parliament. His dreams of illegally bombing an historic nation of just 22.85 million people, 3,500-kilometres away, and posing no threat to Britain, was thwarted by a 285-272 vote.

The US threw a conciliatory bone to Cameron, by saying, according to the BBC, that it "would continue to consult with the UK, one of our closest allies and friends."

The then defence secretary, Philip Hammond, told BBC's Newsnight programme that he and the prime minister were disappointed with the parliamentary vote, saying it would harm Britain's "special relationship" with Washington. Ah ha, that tail wagging, panting, lap dog "special relationship" again.

The excuse for the 2013 rush to annihilate was accusations that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons in March and August of that year, a claim subsequently dismissed after UN investigations showed that Cameron's excuse for the attack had all the validity of Tony Blair's



David Cameron: Dashing off to war.

earlier fantasy that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

Then came the November 13 tragedies in Paris, and, by December 2, Cameron's parliamentary press gangs managed to threaten and arm-twist through a vote to attack Syria in an action of shame that will surely haunt him as Blair is haunted by Iraq.

As the bombs fell on December 6, Cameron celebrated the anniversary of his 10th year as leader of the Conservative Party with his very own military action. That, as with Blair's attack on Iraq, it is entirely illegal apparently bothers the former PR man not a whit.

Indeed, as the parliamentary debate was taking place, it was reported that RAF reconnaissance planes had already taken off for Syria from Scotland.

Apart from being illegal, did it even cross Cameron's mind that using the Paris attack as his reason to go to war not only defied law, it defied reason? To repeat again, those

attackers were French and Belgian-born, of North African extraction, with no Syrian connections, other than that some of them had travelled there to join the terrorists that Assad is fighting. Syria is the *victim*, not the perpetrator, deserving aid and protection, not cowardly retribution from 30,000 feet.

Within a week Chancellor George Osborne was in the US, addressing the Council on Foreign Relations, where he said that, with the air strikes, Britain had “got it’s mojo back” and stood with the United States to “reassert Western values.” It was, he said, “a real source of pride” to have the authority for air strikes in Syria. “Britain was prepared to play a bigger role,” he vowed.

Immediately after the vote, during a visit to RAF Akrotiri, the British base in Cyprus from which the air force operates, UK Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, told military personnel that their mission had the backing of both the government and the people of Britain. He lied. A recent ITV poll showed 89.32 per cent of British people were against bombing.

Despite their voting, pro-bombing MPs turned out to be anything but warrior material. When angry emails arrived from their constituents condemning the bombing, the deputy leader of the Labour Party, Tom Watson (pro bombing) complained of “bullying,” saying stronger social media policy was needed to prevent such correspondence.

Antiwar campaigners had also sent photographs of dead Syrian children to MPs to persuade them not to vote for creating more mutilated little souls. This, the warmongers said, was “intimidation.” A majority of British politicians, it seems is prepared to drop bombs on people, and blow their children, parents, relatives, villages, towns and homes to bits but are cowed by a few words. As for “bullied,” try being under a bomb, Mr Watson, preferably one of those you voted for.

Then we heard that Cameron had called Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn and those who voted against this shameful act of terror “terrorist sympathizers,” telling a par-

liamentary committee meeting before the vote, “You should not be walking through the lobbies with Jeremy Corbyn and a bunch of terrorist sympathizers.”

This presumably was payback time after Corbyn had said that “Cameron’s approach is bomb first, talk later. Instead of adding British bombs to the others now raining down on Syria, what’s needed is an acceleration of the peace talks in Vienna.”

Cameron also received widespread derision from colleagues, including Conservative MP Julian Lewis, chairman of the influential Defence Select Committee, who slammed his claims that there were 70,000 “moderate” fighters on the ground ready to take on ISIS after British bombing.

Another government source compared the claim to Tony Blair’s fantasy that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction on the West in 45 minutes.

However, perhaps the best encapsulation of anger and despair came from author Michel Faber, who sent his latest book to Cameron. In searing sarcasm, he wrote in an accompanying letter that he understood that, “A book cannot compete with a bomb in its ability to cause death and misery, but each of us must make whatever small contribution we can, and I figure that if you drop my novel from a plane, it might hit a Syrian on the head ... With luck, we might even kill a child: Their skulls are quite soft.”

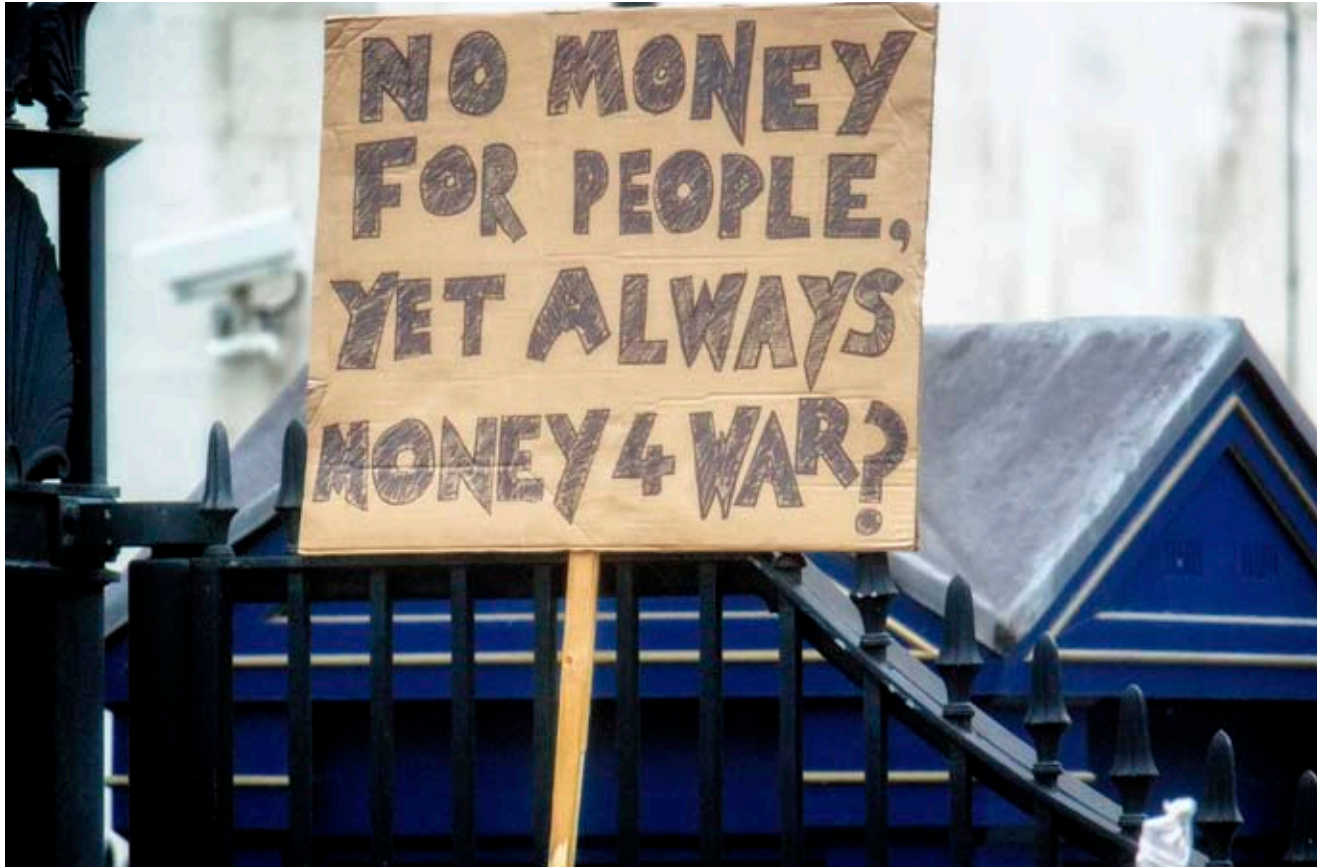
He added, “I just felt so heartsick, despondent and exasperated that the human race, and particularly the benighted political arm of the human race, has learned nothing in 10,000 years, 100,000 years, however long we’ve been waging wars, and clearly the likes of Cameron are not interested in what individuals have to say.”

He speaks for the despairing 89.32 per cent of Britons who hang their heads in shame at the actions of their prime minister.

CT

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Felicity Arbuthnot is a political activist and author based in London.

A recent ITV poll showed 89.32 per cent of British people were against bombing



How can Britain's government have no money to support its poorest citizens, but millions of pounds to bomb Syria?

Not okay with war

Britons march in London against war on Syria

Photos: **Garry Knight**

The words on the posters carried by anti-war demonstrators in London on December 12 speak much louder than a dozen newspaper editorial pages, make more sense than a million words from war-hungry MPs. Like Tony Blair before him, British PM David Cameron has finally got his fight, but the people of Britain do not share his enthusiasm for another Middle Eastern war, or the inevitable innocent refugees. *Tony Sutton*



PM Cameron declared war, but the majority of the people disagree.



"Collateral damage" is such an innocuous phrase. Until you add the words, "Mother, father, brother, sister, child!"



Above: Despite media demonization, Labour Party leader and anti-war veteran, Jeremy Corbin still has massive popular support. Left: Another citizen says NO to her warmongering leaders.

Garry Knight is a London photographer, who puts his work in flickr.com's public domain.

The more you read, the less you know

Dismayed by the media, both in Serbia and the West,
Srdjan D. Stojanovic pins his faith in the future of the Internet

“Why do these judges have to uphold the laws in the same manner as a drunk is holding on to a fence?”

I often wonder, is it possible that virtually all the actors on the mainstream public scene are telling lies? Is it that all we learn through education and practice is upside down and wrong? Can it really be that everything is empty ideology, designed to mask the interests of the ruling elite, including media owners? I've become accustomed to manipulations and lies of the domestic media here in Serbia, but are the international outlets, such as BBC, CNN, Russia Today, Sky News and Al Jazeera, trustworthy, or are they equally biased, partial and subjective? And are all the iconic notions from the arsenal of political correctness, such as democracy, rule of law and independent media, just empty shells? Is my faith, and that of the majority of decent people, in the values of democracy just a farce?

I grew up in a socialist country called Yugoslavia that can't be found on the map any more. The media were tightly controlled, democracy didn't exist, and the dictates of a single political party went unchallenged if you were to climb the steps of hierarchy. I remember one rather cynical statement from “our beloved leader,” Josip Broz Tito, on the rule of law, “Why do these judges have to uphold the laws in the same manner as a drunk is holding on to a fence?”

From the age of 15, I travelled abroad during

summer vacations, and, at 17, I started my education in the USA. My first journalistic piece, published in the school newspaper the Ilium, in 1977, was a defining moment of my life: I had found my profession. In my spare time, I read Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Milovan Djilas and Jerry Rubin, whose books were prohibited in Yugoslavia, but were available and collecting dust in my American school library.

I returned to Yugoslavia at the end of the '70s, freshly inspired by the ideals of democracy, freedom and unbiased media. Everything seemed crystal clear. We, in the East, were primitive, wrong, and backward. They – the West – were democratic, free, and forward-looking. Time for a change, I thought,

After finishing a law degree at the University of Belgrade, I studied international relations at Western Illinois University during the mid-'80s, and at the beginning of the '90s attended a seminar of the Open Society Institute in Budapest, “Democracy after Communism,” for future leaders from the ex-communist countries. My roommate, Mikheil Saakashvili, became the president of Georgia a decade later – which I had predicted.

The end of the '90s, when NATO bombed Yugoslavia during the conflict over Kosovo, I was at the London School of Economics, doing a master's degree in media

and communication. During these years I appeared regularly on BBC World Service TV, as a commentator on political affairs in the Balkans. The first decade of the new millennium I spent at the University of Westminster, in London, doing doctoral studies of media history.

Now, as someone who is professionally attached to the media, I need an adequate and balanced view of the world in which we live. My sources of information are varied, ranging from traditional newspapers and magazines (mainly in their electronic forms), radio stations (although this type of media is slowly dying), and scientific/academic journals, studies and books.

Not a single day passes by that I don't quarrel with the TV set (or the monitor of my computer), because what is offered to us as "news" is often an insult to our intelligence. Pure propaganda or "genetically modified news" seems to be more appropriate term. I wonder if we are witnessing a comprehensive demise of journalism?

If I ever had sympathy for any kind of ideology, including religion, time has proved them useless because all are based on certain level of trust. In the absence of proof, trust is quite often misplaced and wrong. The calculation is not "2+2=4." but rather, "Trust me, I give you my word". And if you choose to trust a politician, or priest, there is a very good chance that you will be misled or swindled.

Understanding the Serbian case

In such a relationship, power and might always win over argument, justice and rationale. And the role of the media (state or private) is to convey packaged and plausible narratives in the most convincing way they can. There isn't a media outlet in Serbia or elsewhere, that is not owned by the state or by a member of the ruling elite. So there's no need to wonder about their "independence."

Contemporary capitalist society is based

on the principles of sanctity of ownership and the rule of law. It is present even in Serbia, despite capitalism's late arrival in 2000, 11 years after the final overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe. And that means absolute domination by the powerful and mighty. There is no space or place for noble words such as justice, or democracy. Power and money are everything.

If we define the system of international law in a similar manner, it reflects how the will of the powerful and mighty is imposed upon less resourceful states. In the case of Serbia, the will of the USA and the European Union (NATO in military terms) was used to impose solutions in its relation to Kosovo, regardless of justice, or the historical or factual state of affairs.

It doesn't matter if Ed Herman, Noam Chomsky and other brilliant intellectuals point out the many injustices and lies of state spokespersons and their obedient disseminators of news – the dominant agenda can hardly be changed once it is set. They proved the truth in what Joseph Goebbels, the notorious Nazi minister of propaganda, claimed: If a lie is repeated 100 times, it becomes truth.

The Yugoslavian crisis began in 1991, and had its last phase (the Kosovo conflict) in 1999, during the decade of Russian weakness. So the "international solutions" used in settling the complicated Yugoslavian affairs were driven, designed and implemented by the West, using the power vacuum present at the time.

There is no love in such relationships, only interests: Small players, such as all the states of ex-Yugoslavia, do not get to choose their positions, but can only side with the power brokers and hope for positive outcome as a reward for their loyalty.

Aleksandar Vucic, the prime minister of Serbia, comes from a political background of extreme nationalism and opposition to the European Union. His decade-long political transformation from one extreme

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MEDIA & PROPAGANDA

Small players, like all the states of ex-Yugoslavia, do not get to choose their positions but can only side with the power brokers and hope for positive outcome as a reward for their loyalty

to the other, proves that ideology is dead. The only idea that drives contemporary politicians is their desire to be in power, regardless of the cost. Vucic is ready to bow to any pressure for recognition among the powerbrokers of EU. And, to get their way, EU politicians are quite willing to forgive and forget the Serbian's prime minister's past sins.

What his domestic constituency thinks and what is in their interest matters less. What Vucic does in domestic affairs is not under the scrutiny of the EU, as long as he follows its will in the international arena. And Vucic, minister of information during Milosevic's time, knows that by controlling the media he can manufacture the consent necessary to rule. Not a single day seems to pass without him holding a press conference, or giving not-so-exclusive interviews/monologues to subservient TV stations. His understanding of democracy is that he has a parliamentary majority, which guarantees him freedom to mistreat opposition and pass any law he wishes.

New world reality

Let's switch now from the Serbian to the international arena. It sounds cynical when, for example, a news anchor on CNN or BBC stresses that some news content originated from the "state-controlled" station Russia Today – implying to the audiences that it is not "trustworthy." CNN, a private company, shamefully and without double-checking and verification, bases its news on sources from the US administration. The same can be said for BBC World TV, a supposedly independent public state broadcaster, when it denounces other stations for being "state-controlled." Few



Russian leaders Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

people know that the BBC public service broadcaster is not the same as BBC World, which uses the same logos and visual identity, along with some of the same personnel. The budget for BBC World comes directly from the coffers of Foreign Office, unlike regular BBC, which is financed by a licence fee imposed on the British public.

When the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama declared the events from 1989 onwards as the "end of history," thereby proving the definitive triumph of democratic capitalism, the not-so-bright state employees/bureaucrats in Washington understood it as knock-out victory for the US. For them, it meant the long-standing power balance had been tilted their way, with no chance of the situation ever changing.

Russia had to live through a decade of difficult transition during the era of the West's favourite drunk, Boris Yeltsin. At the end of his rule, a country so rich with resources was at the verge of famine, declining in every aspect of life. But Yeltsin has to be credited with a single brilliant move – he chose Vladimir Putin as his successor. It turned out that Yeltsin's decade wasn't completely lost, but was used cleverly by the Russian leadership to regroup its resources, define its priorities, get rid of the

ballast (the majority of the former Eastern Bloc countries), forget socialism and enter a new epoch of capitalism, much refreshed and powerful. The new leader – who holds a doctorate in law, speaks foreign languages, and is a teetotal sportsman and trained pilot – didn’t appeal to the West, which insisted on portraying Putin as a clandestine, narrow-minded KGB agent. But, whatever they thought, Putin turned around the Russian economy, enabling it to recover its superpower status.

In world political and economic relations, another major development failed to be noticed by the American bureaucracy – China emerged as the leading industrial economy of the world. Now, instead of the bipolar world of the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s, and the unipolar one of the last two decades, we now live in a multipolar world.

America had trouble coming to terms with this new reality, so, instead of developing a balanced foreign policy, it fell into the trap of assuming the role of world policeman. Washington political circles and the think tanks that formulate American foreign policy are still consumed in a battle of wills with the followers of strategists from the ’70s, such as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Unfortunately, the almost 40-year dominance of Brzezinski’s way of thinking, with his pathological hatred of anything Russian, clouds the more realistic world views of Kissinger. The result is that highly-positioned bureaucrats can’t distinguish between a plot of land in Little Rock (Arkansas) and a desert in Libya, Iraq or Syria. Such inept policymakers don’t recognize that both new and old players on the scene are skillfully playing the game of democracy, even in the use of media propaganda as something new in their toolbox.

Epilogue: How to reclaim the broken trust

Governments of the world would like their citizens to believe the information they

are peddling is news. However, citizens are not owned and controlled by their governments, but have become citizens of the world, and have learned how to navigate through multiple layers of propaganda. Digesting media output is a specific skill, because one needs to carefully pick up bits and pieces of information from multiple sources, most likely to be “genetically modified news.”

The contemporary citizen of the global village is not the same person/subject as existed in the 20th century. He has power, unlike the old citizen, who did not have a choice of media outlets necessary to filter the news from layers of propaganda. A modern citizen, according to the American media scholar Michael Schudson, is a monitorial citizen – one who scans the subject and follows closely developments in fields of his/her interest, and chooses a moment to act (or not to act). And such a citizen is in possession of multiple sources of information.

The magic solution for all possible information needs is called the Internet. The anarchic nature of the Internet is an insurance policy against any monopoly on information, and an antidote for false belief, ideology or propaganda. Even monster hybrid companies, such as Google, Facebook and others, which are based on constantly changing and clandestine algorithms developed in Langley, cannot suppress the free spirit of the Internet. The only question is: Are you ready and willing to become a citizen of the world? **CT**

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Srdjan D. Stojanovic is a Serbian journalist, media scholar and independent documentary producer. He is a founder and editor of the contemporary affairs magazine *VREME JE* (*It is time*), published daily on the Internet. For last 35 years he worked for numerous Serbian and various international media outlets, including BBC World TV. He was educated in Serbia, USA and Great Britain and has passion for Chelsea football club.

Highly-positioned American bureaucrats can’t distinguish between a plot of land in Little Rock, Arkansas and a desert in Libya, Iraq or Syria

YouTube is Israel's new battleground

Jonathan Cook tells how Netanyahu is looking to social media giants to help his country's fight against militant Palestinians

In many cases such videos are posted not by Palestinians but by ordinary Israelis or their government as proof of a supposed Palestinian "barbarism"

Once it fell to politicians and diplomats to solve international conflicts. Now, according to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, responsibility lies with social media.

Tzipi Hotovely, Israel's deputy foreign minister, headed off to Silicon Valley to meet senior executives at Google and its subsidiary YouTube. Her task was to persuade them that, for the sake of peace, they must censor the growing number of Palestinian videos posted on YouTube.

Netanyahu claims these videos spur other Palestinians to carry out attacks, exemplified by the weeks of stabbings and car rammings against Israeli soldiers and civilians.

After the meeting, the foreign ministry issued a press release claiming Google had joined Israel's "war against incitement", and would establish a "joint apparatus" to prevent the posting of "inflammatory" videos. Google denied that any agreement was reached.

On other fronts of this so-called war,

the Israeli army has shut down three West Bank radio stations, accusing them of fomenting unrest. And inside Israel, officials have shut a newspaper and a separate website catering to Israel's large Palestinian minority.

Meanwhile, Palestinians, including children, are being arrested over their Facebook posts. Others accused by Netanyahu of spreading terror-like incitement include Hamas, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian education system, Palestinian parties in Israel's parliament and human rights organizations.

There is a deep cynicism at work here.

True, Palestinians are enraged by footage showing their compatriots shot or executed by Israelis, often after they have been disarmed or cornered, or – in the case of two teenage girls last month – badly injured.

But in many cases such videos are posted not by Palestinians but by ordinary Israelis or their government as proof of a supposed Palestinian "barbarism."

Most Palestinian videos are simply a re-



Benjamin Netanyahu: Seeking linkup with social media giants.

cord of their bitter experiences of occupation at the hands of soldiers and settlers. It is these experiences, not the videos, that drive Palestinians to breaking point.

A “war on incitement” waged through YouTube and Facebook won’t change Palestinian suffering. But it may, Netanyahu presumably hopes, conceal Israel’s brutality from the eyes of the world.

Unrest has escalated of late not because of social media but because Palestinians, faced with an Israeli government implacably opposed to ending the occupation, are losing all hope.

Israel’s generals have warned Netanyahu that without a diplomatic process there will be no end to the attacks. Desperate to obscure this obvious truth, the Israeli right needs to blame everything apart from its own uncompromising ideology.

Israel’s battle against “incitement” is not just meant to deflect attention from the right’s failing policies. It is also a form of incitement itself, and it is no surprise the campaign is led by two masters of provocation: Netanyahu and Hotovely.

Israel has accused Palestinians of incitement for suggesting that Al-Aqsa, the much-revered mosque in Jerusalem, is under threat, but Hotovely recently said her “dream” was to see the Israeli flag flying at Al-Aqsa.

There was a reminder, too, of Netanyahu’s own dismal record. An investigation was dropped last month against the prime minister over his warnings, using Israeli terminology for a military emergency, that Palestinian citizens were coming out “in droves” to vote in March’s general election.

A consequence of government-inspired incitement is an ever-uglier climate. In many towns, crowds calling “death to the Arabs” barely raise an eyebrow any more.

The justice minister, Ayelet Shaked, has backed a bill to stigmatize Israeli human-rights groups that receive foreign, mostly

European, funding. And the culture minister, Miri Regev, demanded that films showing in an Israeli festival about the Nakba, the Palestinians’ mass dispossession in 1948, be vetted for “incitement” and the cinemas showing them threatened with defunding.

Public meetings with groups such as Breaking the Silence, Israeli army veterans who want to shed light on the occupation, are being cancelled under police pressure.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, is giving a free hand to far right news sites as they make false and pernicious claims.

One, Newsdesk Israel, took a four-year-old video of Palestinians revelling at their acceptance into the United Nations and repackaged it as footage of Palestinians celebrating ISIS’s massacres in Paris. Another fabricated report suggested Palestinian citizens were proselytizing for ISIS by blasting its songs on their car stereos.

In fact, no target seems too big to avoid the Israeli right’s defamation – not even Europe, Israel’s largest trading partner.

Israeli politicians have misrepresented as a full-blown boycott the EU’s recent tepid move to label products from illegal West Bank settlements and thereby deny them special customs exemptions reserved for Israeli products. The right argues Israel is being uniquely punished by Europe, when in truth the EU has enforced economic sanctions, not just labelling, against 36 countries.

Incitement does indeed pose a threat to the future of Israelis and Palestinians. But it is to be found in the falsehoods promoted by Netanyahu and his ministers, not the bitter truths being posted on YouTube. **CT**

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 website is www.jonathan-cook.net

No target seems too big to avoid the Israeli right’s defamation – not even Europe, Israel’s largest trading partner

'I want my story to be heard'

Khalid Ahmad was one of the victims of the recent US bombing of the MSF hospital at Kunduz in Afghanistan. His story is told by **Dr WeeTeck Young**

Khalid had walked tentatively to the corridor, making sure his urinary catheter bag wasn't in the way as he sat down

"I feel very angry, but I don't want anything from the US military," said Khalid Ahmad, a 20-year-old pharmacist who survived the US bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders Hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, on the October 3, "God will hold them accountable."

The actions of the US military elicit the same contempt from Khalid and many ordinary Afghans as the actions of the Taliban or the ISIS.

Khalid was a little wary when I was introduced to him in a ward of Emergency Hospital in Kabul, where he has been recuperating from a shrapnel injury to his spine that nearly killed him.

But, immediately, I saw his care for others. "Please bring a chair for him," Khalid told his brother, not wanting me to be uncomfortable squatting next to him, as we began our conversation in the corridor space outside the ward.

Having just recovered strength in his legs, he had walked tentatively to the corridor, making sure his urinary catheter bag wasn't in the way as he sat down.

The autumn sun revealed tired lines on his face, as if even 'skin' can get permanently traumatized by the shock of bomb blasts.

"The Taliban had already taken control of all areas in Kunduz except the MSF Hos-

pital and the airport. I felt I could still serve the patients safely because neither the Afghan/US military forces nor the Taliban would bother us. At least, they're not supposed to," Khalid paused imperceptibly.

"As a neutral humanitarian service," Khalid continued, "we treat everyone alike, as patients needing help. We recognize everyone as a human being.

"I wasn't scheduled to be on duty the night of the incident, but my supervisor asked me to help because the hospital was swarmed with larger numbers of patients that week."

"I was sleeping when the bombing began at about 2 a.m. I went to see what was happening, and, to my horror, I saw that the ICU was on fire, the flames appearing to shoot 10-metres into the night sky. Some patients were burning in their beds.

"I was petrified.

"It was so frightening. The bombing and firing continued, and following after the bombs were showers of 'laser-like flashes,' which were flammable, catching and spreading the fire."

What were those laser-like flashes?

"With two other colleagues, I rushed to the guardhouse, which was about five metres from the hospital's main gate. In the guard house were four security guards. We all decided to make a run for the hospital gate, to escape the bombing."



Recovering from the attack: Former MSF Kunduz Hospital pharmacist, Khalid Ahmad, recuperating at Emergency Hospital in Kabul.

Photo: Kathy Kelly

Khalid cringed a little, disappointment soaking his voice. Such shock can be too much for a human being to bear – irreparable disappointment at the US military for attacking a humanitarian, medical facility, and an unfair feeling of guilt for having escaped death while many colleagues were killed.

“The first person ran. Then another. It was my turn. I took off, and just as I reached the gate, with one foot outside the gate and one foot inside the hospital compound, shrapnel hit me on my back.

I lost power in both legs, and fell. Dazed, I dragged myself to a nearby ditch and threw myself in.

“I was bleeding quickly from my back, the blood pooling at my sides. Feeling that my end was near, I was desperate to call my family. My colleagues and I had taken out the batteries from our cellphones because the US military has a way of tracking and target-killing people by picking up their cellphone signals. With one good arm, somehow, I pulled out my phone and inserted its battery.”

“I was bleeding quickly from my back, the blood pooling at my sides. Feeling that my end was near, I was desperate to call my family”

COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

“I saw people with amputated limbs. Some of my colleagues, some of my colleagues.... what wrong had we done? Is this what we get for serving people?”

“Mom, I’m injured, and don’t have time. Could you pass the phone to Dad?”

“What happened, my son?”

“Please pass the phone to Dad!”

“What happened, my son?”

I could almost hear his distraught mother wondering what could have happened to her son who should have been safe in the hospital environment.

“Mom, there’s no time left. Pass the phone to Dad.”

“I then asked my dad for forgiveness for any wrong I had done. I was feeling faint, and dropped the phone. In my half-consciousness, I heard the phone ring. It was my cousin. He asked me what had happened, and told me to use my clothes to stop the bleeding. I yanked my vest off, threw it behind my back, and laid on it.

“I must have passed out, as my next memory was of hearing my cousin’s voice and other voices, and being taken to the kitchen of the hospital, where basic first aid was being given to many injured people.

“I saw people with amputated limbs. Some of my colleagues, some of my colleagues . . . what wrong had we done? Is this what we get for serving people?”

As I struggled to register Khalid’s story in my mind, I remembered my own training and practice as a doctor in hospitals, and I wished there was a global conversation about the failure of the Geneva Conventions to protect civilians, and health facilities. The European Council in Brussels in 2003 estimated that, since 1990, almost four-million people had died in wars, 90 per cent of them civilians.

I also wished that more individuals could respond to UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, who declared in a June 2015 press release that, “We are witnessing a paradigm change . . . It is terrifying that, on the one hand, there is more and more impunity for those starting conflicts, and, on the other, there is seeming utter inability of the international

community to work together to stop wars and build and preserve peace.”

A positive way to respond would be to join MSF, as well as ICRC president Peter Maurer and UN head Ban Ki Moon in saying, “Enough! Even war has rules!” That is, we can sign MSF’s petition for an independent investigation of the Kunduz MSF Hospital bombing.

Passively accepting the Pentagon’s confessional report of ‘human error’ resulting in the killing of 31 staff and patients in the Kunduz Hospital bombing would allow the US and other militaries to continue to breach laws and conventions with impunity, as is happening in Yemen right now.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reported in October that almost 100 hospitals in Yemen had been attacked since March 2015. As recently as December 2, Khalid’s haunting story repeated itself in Taiz, Yemen, where an MSF clinic was attacked by the Saudi coalition forces, prompting Karline Kleijer, MSF operational manager for Yemen, to say that every nation backing the Yemen war, including the US, must answer for the Yemen MSF clinic bombing.

Khalid’s story was still haunting me. “To transport me, they used body bags meant for the dead. Feeble as I was, I panicked and made sure they heard me protesting, ‘I’m not dead!’ I heard someone say, “We know, don’t worry, we have no choice but to make do. My cousin took me to a hospital in Baghlan Province, which had unfortunately been abandoned because of fighting in the area. So, I was taken to Pul-i-Khumri, and on the way, because I had slightly long hair, I heard shouting directed at us, ‘Hey, what are you doing with a Talib?’ My cousin had to assure them that I was not a Talib.

“There was no available help in Pul-i-Khumri, either, so I was finally brought to this hospital in Kabul. I’ve had five surgical operations so far,” Khalid said, “and I needed two litres of blood in all.”

It struck me from Khalid's account that the US military could bomb a health facility in what Kate Clark of the Afghan Analysts Network suggested as "ripping up the rule book," and then not take any measures whatsoever to take care of casualties like Khalid and others. If you are a civilian bombed by the US military you'll have to fend for yourself!

Khalid sighed, "I'm grateful that I've been given a second life. Some of my colleagues weren't so lucky."

Khalid was exhausted. I understood from working in Afghanistan over the past years of a worsening war that his exhaustion wasn't just physical. "I'm angry. The US military is killing us because they want to be the Empire of the World."

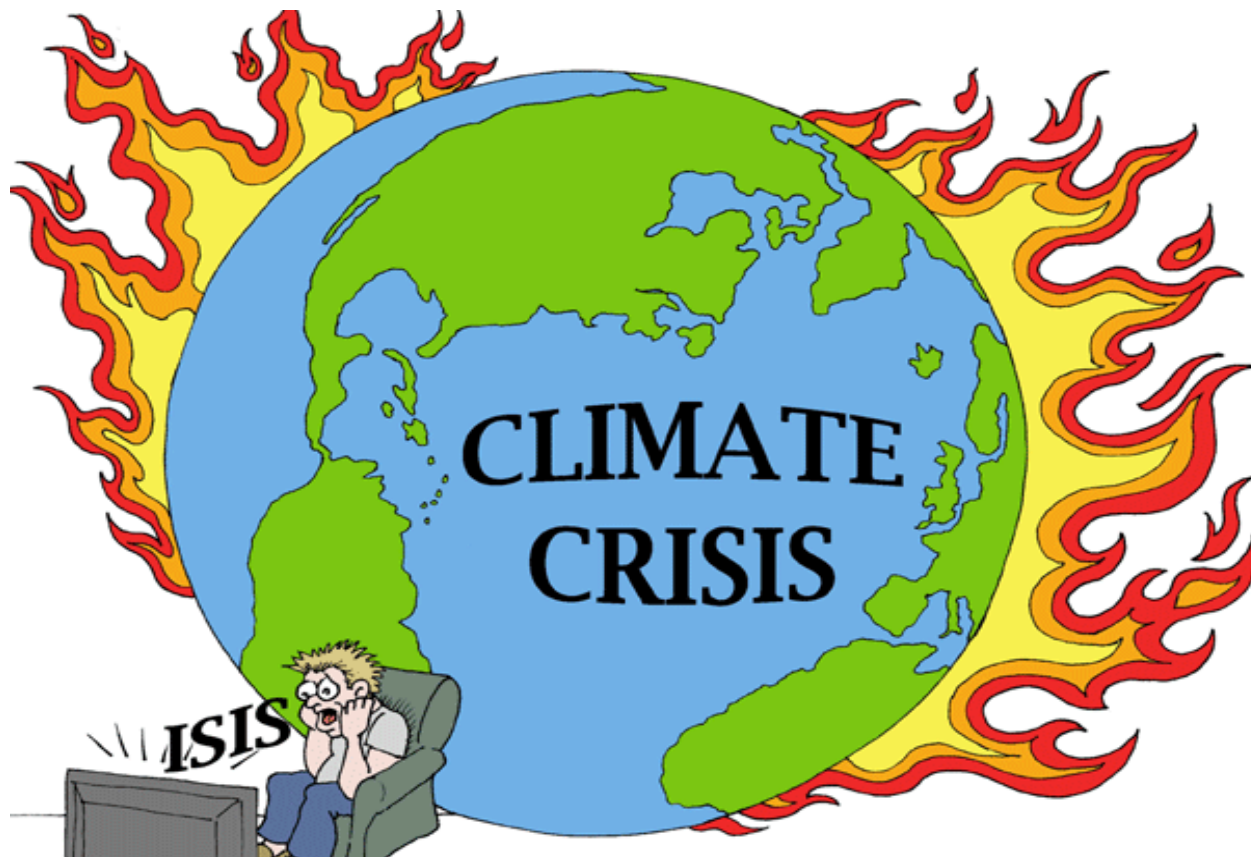
Khalid asked why we wanted to take his photograph. His question reminded me of what we as individuals can do: Taking and seeing his photo in this article isn't going to be enough. Then he steadied himself in the chair, placed his urine bag out of the camera's view and said with full dignity, "I want my story to be heard." **CT**

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Dr. Wee Teck Young is a medical doctor from Singapore who has done humanitarian and social enterprise work in Afghanistan for the past 10 years, including being a mentor to the Afghan Peace Volunteers, an inter-ethnic group of young Afghans dedicated to building non-violent alternatives to war. He is the 2012 recipient of the International Pfeffer Peace Prize.

If you are a civilian bombed by the US military, you'll have to fend for yourself

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt





The Mormon Church at Widtsoe, Utah, one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the American West in the mid-'30s.

Out West

Recently unearthed photographs from the 1930s by **Dorothea Lange**

From 1935 to 1944, the US Farm Security Administration undertook the largest photography project ever sponsored by the government. The programme began when President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced plans to help the poorest third of farmers displaced by the depression. To justify the programme, the Historical Section set out to document vulnerable areas and the administration of relief.

The Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information (FSA-OWI) produced

some of the most iconic images of the Great Depression, including work by photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Arthur Rothstein, who shaped the visual culture of the era both in its moment and in American memory. The negatives were sent to Washington, DC, where many of the 170,000 photographs lay unseen until they were recently uploaded to <http://photogrammar.yale.edu>

On these pages we feature some of Lange's images taken in 1936 in Utah. **TS**

RAISE 9



Above: An abandoned home in the Widtsoe area. Below: Families were resettled from the town to other parts of the state.



Above: Grocery store. Widtsoe, Utah.

IN THE PICTURE



Latter Day Saints portrait group. These people, man and wife, were both 85 years old.

Right: A Widtsoe, woman, a native of Denmark, gets her first old age assistance cheque.



Far right: Postmistress stands in the doorway of the post office at Widtsoe.





The Mormon church in the centre of Escalante, Utah.



Above: Widtsoe post office.

Just asking . . .

William Blum has some questions for reporters attending Obama's future White House press conferences - and some answers from a recent one

Why does the United States maintain crippling financial sanctions and a ban on military aid to Syria, Cuba, Iran and other countries but not to Saudi Arabia?

Here are a few questions to ask President Obama the next time (also the last time) you're invited to one of his press conferences:

1. Which is most important to you - destroying ISIS, overthrowing Syrian president Assad, or scoring points against Russia?

2. Do you think that if you pointed out to the American people that Assad has done much more to aid and rescue Christians in the Middle East conflicts than any other area leader that this would lessen the hostility the United States public and media feel toward him? Or do you share the view of the State Department spokesperson who declared in September that "The Assad regime frankly is the root of all evil"?

3. Why does the United States maintain crippling financial sanctions and a ban on military aid to Syria, Cuba, Iran and other countries but not to Saudi Arabia?

4. What does Saudi Arabia have to do to lose its strong American support? Increase its torture, beheadings, amputations, whippings, stonings, punishment for blasphemy and apostasy, or forced marriages and other oppression of women and girls? Increase its financial support for ISIS and other jihadist groups? Confess to its role in 9-11? Attack Israel?

5. What bothers you more: The Saudi

bombing of the people of Yemen or the Syrian bombing of the people of Syria?

6. Does the fact that ISIS never attacks Israel raise any question in your mind?

7. Does it concern you that Turkey appears to be more intent upon attacking the Kurds and the Russians than attacking ISIS? And provides medical care to wounded ISIS soldiers? Or that ISIS deals its oil on Turkish territory? Or that NATO-member Turkey has been a safe haven for terrorists from Libya, Chechnya, Qatar, and elsewhere? Or that last year Vice President Biden stated that Turkish President Erdogan's regime was backing ISIS with "hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons"?

8. If NATO had never existed, what argument could you give today in favour of creating such an institution? Other than - as some would say - being a very useful handmaiden of US foreign policy and providing American arms manufacturers with trillions of dollars of guaranteed sales.

9. Does the United States plan on releasing any of its alleged evidence to back up its repeated claims of Syrian bombing and chemical warfare against the Syrian people? Like clear photos or videos from the omnipresent American satellite cameras? Or any other credible evidence?

10. Does the United States plan on releasing any of its alleged evidence to back

up its repeated claims of Russian invasions of Ukraine in the past year? Like clear photos or videos from the omnipresent American satellite cameras? Or any other credible evidence?

11. Do the numerous connections between the Ukrainian government and neo-Nazis have any effect upon America's support of Ukraine?

12. What do you imagine would have been the outcome of the Second World War if the United States had opposed Soviet entry into the war because "Stalin must go"?

13. Would you prefer that Russia played no military role at all in Syria?

14. Can the administration present in person a few of the Syrian opposition "moderates" we've heard so much about and allow the media to interview them?

15. Have you considered honoring your promise of "No boots on the ground in Syria" by requiring all American troops to wear sneakers?

The adventures of a State Department spokesman

Excerpts from a State Department daily press briefing, November 24, 2015, following the Turkish shootdown of a Russian plane, conducted by Mark Toner, deputy spokesperson:

QUESTION: President Obama said he will reach out to President Erdogan over the next few days.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did not mention Putin. That really puts you squarely on Turkey's side, doesn't it?

QUESTION: You're saying Turkey has the right to defend itself; President Obama said the same thing. What defense are you talking about? Does anyone think Russia was going to attack Turkey?

MR TONER: Again, I mean, this is –

QUESTION: Do you think so?

MR TONER: Look, I don't want to parse out this incident. I said very clearly that we don't know all the facts yet, so for me to speak categorically about what happened is – frankly, would be irresponsible.

QUESTION: Even if you accept the Turkish version that the plane traveled 1.3 miles inside Turkey and violated its airspace for 17 seconds – that's according to Turkey – do you think shooting down the plane was the right thing to do?

MR TONER: Again, I'm not going to give you our assessment at this point. We're still gathering the facts.

QUESTION: In 2012, Syria shot down a Turkish plane that reportedly strayed into its territory. Prime Minister Erdogan then said, "A short-term border violation can never be a pretext for an attack." Meanwhile, NATO has expressed its condemnation of Syria's attack as well as strong support for Turkey. Do you see the inconsistency of NATO's response on this?

MR TONER: As to what President Erdogan may have said after that incident, I would refer you to him.

QUESTION: Turkoman forces in Syria said they killed the two Russian pilots as they descended in parachutes.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Turkoman forces are supported by Turkey and are fighting against the Syrian government, they are part of the rebel force there. Do you consider these rebels to be a moderate force in Syria?

QUESTION: I'm trying – I mean, do you think that everybody has the right to defend themselves?

MR TONER: We've said very clearly that people have the right to defend themselves.

QUESTION: Right? Including the Assad regime?

MR TONER: No.

Do the numerous connections between the Ukrainian government and neo-Nazis have any effect upon America's support of Ukraine?

.....
William Blum
is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II, Rogue State: a guide to the World's Only Super Power, West-Bloc Dissident: a Cold War Political Memoir, and America's Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else.

CT

The reckless war on evil

America's wars are self-defeating and have no end, writes **Ira Chernus**

I shouldn't be shocked anymore. I've seen it often enough as a historian studying wars against evil in the past, and as a citizen watching wars in my own lifetime

Oh, no! Not another American war against evil! This time, it's the Islamic State (IS). After the attacks in Paris, Barack Obama, spokesman-in-chief for the United States of America, called that crew "the face of evil." Shades of George W. Bush. The "evildoers" are back. And from every mountaintop, it seems, America now rings with calls to ramp up its war machine.

By the way, George W., how did that last war against the "evildoers" work out for you? Not quite the way you expected, right? I bet you didn't imagine that your Global War on Terror would plant the seeds of an Islamic State and turn significant stretches of Iraq (and Syria) into fertile soil on which IS would grow into a brand new, even more frightening enemy.

But that's the way wars against evil always seem to work.

Pardon me if I vent my exasperation with all the Washington policymakers, past and present, surrounded by their so-called experts and those war-drum-beating pundits in the media. I know I shouldn't be shocked anymore. I've seen it often enough as a historian studying wars against evil in the past – ever since biblical times, in fact – and as a citizen watching wars in my own lifetime, ever since the one that tore Vietnam (and, incidentally, America) apart.

Still, it drives me crazy to watch poli-

cymakers and experts making the same dumb mistakes time after time, several mistakes, actually, which synergistically add up to one self-defeating blunder after another.

What's worse, the dominant trend in public opinion is so often on the side of just those mistakes. You'd think someone would learn something. And in that someone I include "we, the people," the nation as a whole.

Yet now, facing the Islamic State, you guessed it: We're doing it all over again.

Let me try to lay out our repetitive mistakes, all six of them, one by one, starting with...

Mistake No. 1: Treating the enemy as absolute evil, not even human.

Barack Obama called the Paris tragedy "an attack on all of humanity," which means that, even for the president, IS fighters stand outside that category. They are evidently some other species and merely appear to be human. And this was the mildest of descriptions in this overheated political season of ours. "The face of evil" sounds modest indeed compared to the vivid images offered by the Republicans vying to replace him. For Ben Carson, IS are a bunch of "rabid dogs;" for Ted Cruz, "scorpions." Donald Trump calls them "insane," "animals."

All point to the same dangerous conclusion: Because we are human and they are not, we are their opposite in every way. If they are absolute evil, we must be the absolute opposite. It's the old apocalyptic tale: God's people versus Satan's. It ensures that we never have to admit to any meaningful connection with the enemy. By this logic, it couldn't be more obvious that the nation our leaders endlessly call "exceptional" and "indispensable," the only nation capable of leading the rest of the world in the war against evil, bears no relationship to that evil.

That leads to...

Mistake No. 2: Buried in the assumption that the enemy is not in any sense human like us is absolution for whatever hand we may have had in sparking or contributing to evil's rise and spread.

How could we have fertilized the soil of absolute evil or bear any responsibility for its successes? It's a basic postulate of wars against evil: God's people must be innocent.

As a result, we don't need to look at all the ways in which the US, even in battle mode, continues to contribute to the successes of Islamic State fighters in Sunni Arab lands by, for instance, supporting an Iraqi Shi'ite regime in Baghdad that has a grim history of oppressing Sunnis, a history that drives many of them to tolerate, or even actively support IS.

By refusing a future role of any sort for Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, we have hindered the diplomatic process that might heal the civil war in that country. Instead we let the Syrian chaos continue as a breeding ground for IS expansion (though perhaps this policy is just beginning to change). Our long-term alliance with Saudi Arabia is equally counterproductive, protecting funding networks that feed a burgeoning caliphate.

Just as we don't look at all this in the present, so we blind ourselves to what the US has done in the past. Consider this...

Mistake No. 3: Call it blotting out history.

We lose the ability to really understand the enemy because we ignore the actual history of how that enemy came to be, of how a network of relationships grew up in which we played, and continue to play, a central role.

The historical record is clear for all who care to look: The US (the CIA in particular) was a key to the creation, funding, and arming of the mujahideen, the rebel fighters in Afghanistan who took on the Soviet army there in the 1980s, the men (often extreme Islamists) whom President Ronald Reagan compared to our founding fathers. From that situation came al-Qaeda.

George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq cracked the region open and paved the way for the Islamic State. The Bush administration tore Iraq to shreds and then demobilized Saddam Hussein's army and dispatched its members to the unemployment lines of a wrecked country.

One of those shreds, al-Qaeda in Iraq, populated by disaffected officers from that disbanded army, would later transform itself into the nucleus of the new Islamic State movement. Indeed the US nurtured the present leadership of that movement in American military prisons in Iraq, where we introduced them to each other, so to speak. The process was at least hastened, and perhaps ultimately caused, by the vehement anti-Sunni bias of the Shi'ite Iraqi government, which the US installed in power and also nurtured.

To sustain our image of ourselves as innocents in the whole affair, we have to blot out this empirical history and replace it with a myth (not so surprising, given that any war against evil is a mythic enterprise). That's not to say that we deny all the facts. We just pick and choose the ones that fit our myth best.

In that tale, the enemy is simply what Christians for centuries have called the devil, which brings us to...

By refusing a future role of any sort for Syria's president Bashar al-Assad, we have hindered the diplomatic process that might heal the civil war in that country

STILL FIGHTING

Whatever we might think of their actions, we generally ignore a wealth of evidence that the Islamic State's fighters couldn't be more human or have more comprehensible motivations

Mistake No. 4: We assume that the enemy, like Lucifer himself, does evil just for the sake of doing it.

Even the most liberal parts of the media often can't see IS fighters as more than lunatics bent on slaughter for its own sake.

Under such circumstances, what a foolish task it obviously is even to think about the enemy's actual motives. After all, to do so would be to treat them as humans, with human purposes arising out of history. It would smack of sympathy for the devil.

Of course, this means that, whatever we might think of their actions, we generally ignore a wealth of evidence that the Islamic State's fighters couldn't be more human or have more comprehensible motivations. In fact, if you look hard enough, you can find evidence of just that.

The Atlantic, for instance, gained some attention for publishing an article by Graeme Wood that explored the complex religious ideas of the IS movement. In the New York Review of Books, Scott Atran and Nafees Hamid offered insights from people who had taken the time to actually talk with IS fighters or former fighters about its strategy and their own motives in becoming part of it. In this manner, Atran and Hamid helped explain the great mystery of IS (if you believe it is an inhuman organization): How can it attract so many young followers, especially from the US and Europe? Why do some disaffected young men and women find the movement profoundly alluring?

Olivier Roy, a leading scholar of political Islam, has answered that many of these youth, full of "frustration and resentment against society," are lured by the fantasy of joining a "small brotherhood of super-heroes." But a recent study by the Program in Extremism at George Washington University, full of rich details on American IS supporters, concluded that "their motivations are diverse and defy easy analysis."

Add up this sort of evidence and you're

likely to come to a startling and, in our present context, deeply unsettling conclusion. It's not just that IS fighters are distinctly human, but that in some ways they are eerily like us. After all, we, too, have a military that uses an ideological narrative to recruit young people and prepare them to be willing to die for it. Our military, too, is savvy in using social media and various forms of advertising and publicity to deploy its narrative effectively. Like IS recruits, youngsters join our military for all sorts of reasons, but some because they are rootless, disaffected, and in search of a belief system, or at least an exciting adventure (even one that may put them in danger of losing their lives). And don't forget that those young recruits, like the IS fighters, often have only the sketchiest grasp of what exactly they are signing up to die for or of the nature of the conflicts they may be involved in.

Our state ideology is, of course, secular. But most of us are certainly familiar personally (or at one remove) with American religious fundamentalists whose beliefs share much with the IS narrative. On both sides, people want to turn back the clock of history and live according to a sacred plan supposedly etched in stone many centuries ago.

There are, in fact, striking parallels – and I say this as a professor of religious studies – between the evangelical mood and methods of our fundamentalists and those of the Islamic State. Both agree that one must choose between God's truth (derived from an ancient text) and the devil's. Both offer the psycho-social comfort of a community supposedly living by immutable laws. Some of our fundamentalists, such as the Christian Reconstructionists, would be happy to see this nation governed under religious law, as long as it's their religion we're talking about.

Whatever any of us think of our home-grown fundamentalists, we would hardly deny them their humanity, even if we often wonder what leads them to such (to many of us) strange beliefs. So here's the question: Why shouldn't we be just as curious

about the believers of the Islamic State, even if they are our enemies?

Remember, to understand is not to justify. Quite the opposite, understanding often opens up ways of thinking more constructively and creatively about how to respond to such a challenge. It's clear that Islamic State strategists understand American and European political cultures well indeed and, as they've repeatedly shown, they use that understanding to their grim advantage. They know just how to provoke us into anti-Muslim rhetoric and belligerent policies, which they find most useful to their project and their movement. Like classic judo warriors, they employ our immense strength remarkably effectively against us.

Every one of Washington's words and acts of war, every ally, such as Great Britain that joins the bombing campaign against IS, only confirms the Islamic State's message that Muslims are under attack by the West. All of it only plays into the IS's apocalyptic worldview. Every step in the process makes the IS more attractive to Muslims who feel oppressed and marginalized by the West. So think of every threat uttered in the presidential campaign here and every bomb now being dropped as yet more global recruitment posters arriving "like manna from heaven" for that movement. Each is an invitation to launch yet more Paris-style attacks.

Our blindness to them as human beings, and to all the ways we have influenced them, increases their power and undermines our power to shape the outcome of events in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the Greater Middle East. Ironically, we accept this loss of power willingly, even eagerly, because it allows us to hold on to what seems to matter most to us: our vision of a war against inhuman evildoers, which brings us to...

Mistake No. 5: To convince ourselves that the Islamic State is evil incarnate, we imagine that the enemy is as relentless, intractable, and implacable as the devil himself.

As a result, we also imagine that nothing we could do might diminish their will to evil. Since, as we see it, we had nothing to do with creating these monsters, no changes in our policies or actions could possibly influence their behavior. And since they are just crazy – not capable of normal rationality – there is no point in trying to talk with them.

By this route we finally, inevitably, arrive at...

Mistake No. 6: The belief that we have only one option: annihilation.

Or if that proves impossible, despite the military forces at our disposal, then at least containing them forever.

In fact, the presidential candidates of this moment all demand annihilation and nothing less. In Donald Trump's words, "bomb the shit out of 'em." In Hillary Clinton's more demure formulation, "crush ISIS... break the group's momentum and then its back." Even Bernie Sanders agrees: "Our priority must be... to destroy the brutal and barbaric ISIS regime."

The dream of a war of annihilation against evil has a long, long history in white America. It began in 1636 when Puritans in New England wiped out the Pequot tribe, promising that such a lesson would prevent further attacks by other tribes. In fact, it created a spiral of violence and counter-violence, and a war-against-evil template that the country still follows nearly four centuries later in its "war on terror." The current conflict in Iraq and Syria seems only to be locking us into that template and its guaranteed cycle of violence ever more firmly.

Why do we as a nation keep on playing into the same dismal scenario and committing the same mistakes? Why this seemingly irresistible urge to fight yet another war against evil?

I worry that the answer to such questions may lie in what I've called an American myth of national insecurity. It tells us that we will always be at war with evildoers

Most of us are certainly familiar personally (or at one remove) with American religious fundamentalists whose beliefs share much with the IS narrative

STILL FIGHTING

Maybe someday the Islamic State will figure out that brutal killing and other acts of horror in the name of the caliphate are not such a good idea after all

bent on destroying us, that this war (which-ever the latest one may be) is the mission and the meaning of our nation; and that the only way to feel like a real American is to enlist permanently in permanent war.

In other words, even as we stoke the Islamic State, we stoke ourselves as well. The longer we fight, the more deeply we are seized by fear. The more we fear, the more fiercely we are determined to fight. Perhaps the point is not to win the war but to remain trapped in this vicious circle, which feels perversely comforting because it offers a sense of unified national identity as nothing else can in our otherwise deeply divided nation.

National myths are, however, invented

by human beings, and we are always capable of changing our minds. Who knows? Maybe someday the Islamic State will figure out that brutal killing and other acts of horror in the name of the caliphate are not such a good idea after all. And maybe the United States will figure out that depending on an eternal, self-defeating war against evil for our national identity is a huge mistake after all. Maybe. **CT**

Ira Chernus is professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado Boulder and author of the online MythicAmerica: Essays. He blogs at <http://mythicamerica.us>

This essay was originally published at <http://tomdispatch.com>

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Two degrees C? Absolutely nothing to worry about

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

Been reading Hedges on the end of the world,
It's something I do when I need my hair curled.
And you have to admit that ol' Chris is right,
The jig is well up and we're in for a fight.

I'd like to believe that smart folks will think,
Of some way to make the CO₂ shrink,
But with all the crap that's already there up,
One good puff will brimmeth over our cup.

As I hear it, the number's two degrees C,
Being all that separates my jollies from me.
Then Air Misery will push back from the gate,
And take off so steep that we'll toss what we ate.

Yet how will this play, this two-degree waltz?
Reports that we're fine, slight sounding of schmaltz?
Will we make short work of that lame first degree,
Just to be told – whoops! – the number was three?

When the New York subway turns submarine,
And taxis turn gondola, the ground floor eighteen,
And the great Midwest with sleek sand dunes fills,
Will we all then be told to head for the hills?

No, I think we'll be told to stay in our seats,
And fasten those belts despite minor defeats.
For the CO₂'s falling and, Hey, what's more,
Scientists now figure the number was four!

And on will we soar on this bumpy plane ride,
Floods, winds and heat waves all taken in stride,
Not knowing our pilots see mountains loom close,
As we're Crunching Candy that does so engross.

Yes, those two cheap degrees much make me ponder,
Just when, where and who are the guys that launder
The numbers from which our dear daily do's hung,
And whether they'd tell us that yet the gong's rung.

*Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation.
His four novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009.
His website is <http://philipkraske.com>*

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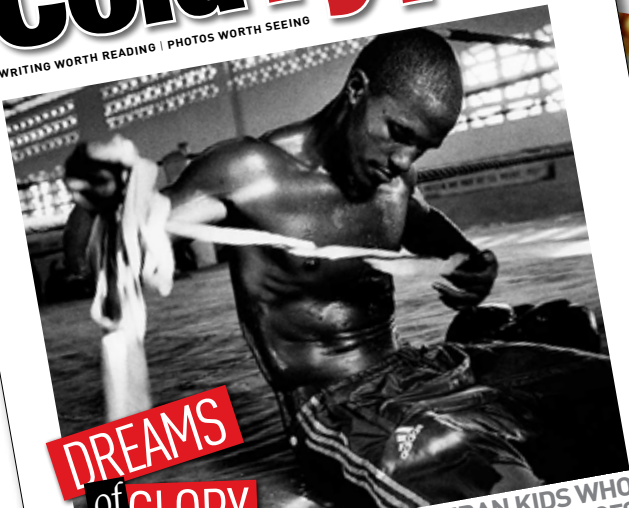


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PHOTOS WORTH SEEING



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