

ISSUE 50

INSIDE: TEA WITH FRANKENSTEIN ● BAD WARS & GOOD PEOPLE ● EVOLVING MADNESS ● BLAIR'S UNCHALLENGED JOURNEY ● DRONES ON TRIAL

The ^{ColdType} READER

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Former publisher, now part-time farm hand, **Stacey Warde** tells how it feels to be a victim of the Crash of 2008

RUNNING ON EMPTY

The ^{ColdType} READER



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COVER PHOTO:
Life on the farm
– Stacey Warde

Running on empty

Until the nation's money disappeared down a big black hole created by Washington and big business, **Stacey Warde** had never imagined a life tending blueberries

As I write this, a collection agency is leaving another annoying message on the answering machine. The voice is petulant, measured and all business. I've just walked back into the house to make a call of my own after starting up my work truck – a 30-year-old beast that backfires and sputters – and finding the gas tank too close to empty to go anywhere but to a gas station.

I'm literally running on empty. Unfortunately, I don't have money to buy gas.

My career as publisher of a literary magazine came to a quick end two years ago when the US economy threatened a meltdown unlike any since the Great Depression. Suddenly, the nation's money was being sucked into a black hole somewhere near Washington, D.C., as legislators handed out welfare checks to automakers and bankers.

Average Americans like me were left to sink or swim on their own. It's been a rough ride, with money and jobs more scarce than ever, unemployment rising and the long-term unemployed not even counted.

Official unemployment estimates – which don't include those who have stopped looking for work, or those no longer on the welfare rolls because they've been out of work for too long (and who have fallen further behind in their professions) – put the rate at 9.5 percent. Other sources, which are more inclusive, put the unemployment rate

in the US at closer to 22 percent, just short of the 25 percent unemployment rate of the Great Depression.

I'm lucky to have what little work I've found. At least, I'm not working in a taco factory or fast food joint, where many recent college graduates, with few other prospects, have landed jobs.

I now work as a farm labourer, tending blueberries. Occasionally, I pick up extra hours installing residential landscapes. It's good, honest work, and I like it. I'm outside, mostly solo, away from the crowds, pulling weeds, trimming plants and repairing irrigation lines. Most days, however, I'm at the farm, where it's quiet except for the screeching of a red-tailed hawk or the occasional flyovers of multi-million dollar fighter jets from a nearby naval base, performing aerials, circling wildly overhead in patterns of evasion. I ponder the expensive military aircraft circling overhead as I slug it out for a measly \$12 an hour, which is considerably more than what most farm workers earn but much less than what I've earned in the past: All those billions of dollars spent on defending a nation on the verge of bankruptcy seems like such a huge waste.

Working in the field is the perfect refuge from the economic storm that swept the country two years ago and dispossessed an entire population of its livelihood and fantasies about “having it all.” No one owns

I ponder the expensive military aircraft circling overhead as I slug it out for a measly \$12 an hour

AFTER THE CRASH

Older Americans aren't being hired back in any significant numbers and if they are hired, it's at severely reduced rates and in positions for which they are overqualified

much and work is scarce – except for farmhands and military enlistees.

Debt and bankruptcies increase daily.

I'm glad to have my quiet refuge as a farmhand but what little work it provides barely covers the basic necessities, such as food and rent, not enough to keep any cash on hand, and little to put in the bank. But that doesn't stop the collection agencies from calling.

I wait impatiently for the collections caller to leave his unwanted message on our home line so I can call my roommate and ask her for \$10. That will get me enough gas to drive to the farm. I know, it's pathetic, but what are my options?

I've been looking for work, like millions of other Americans, since the economy crashed. I'm one of the "long-termed unemployed," those who don't receive welfare payments and who no longer count in official unemployment figures.

AT 52, I belong to the age group hardest hit with long-term unemployment in the US. Older Americans aren't being hired back in any significant numbers and if they are hired, it's at severely reduced rates and in positions for which they are overqualified. We're learning to live small, which is probably a good thing. Americans have been living large for too long, consuming more of the world's resources than any other nation, and bankrupting themselves in the process. The party had to end, sooner or later, but no one was prepared to give up the "lifestyle." We all got greedy, not just the bankers and politicians, who encouraged us to believe that greed is good.

Americans who once valued thrift and self-reliance feverishly embraced the idea that we could live beyond our means, world without end, and if we stepped blindly into an abyss of debt that would eat what little wealth we created, we could always buy cheaper goods and borrow more money from China.

Now, America faces moral, political and economic bankruptcy.

I struggle to collect my thoughts but, even with the voice machine turned down, I can still hear the annoying bottom feeder trying to get money out of me.

"I'll leave my number with you one more time in case it wasn't clear...."

Oh, it's clear, all right. They call six times a day. How could it *not* be clear? Our only recourse, given we can't afford debt relief services, or even to file for bankruptcy, is to ignore them.

It's ironic that gas has become the symbol of my worst poverty ever. Gas has always meant going places, getting things done, getting to work on time, making money. Now, I have just enough quarters to put a gallon in my tank. I doubt it would have been a factor in my misery had the US begun more than 30 years ago, like Brazil, to wean itself from fossil fuels and to innovate and re-tool its industries for renewable energies. We could have avoided two costly wars that had more to do with oil than terrorism and have bled the national treasury of more than a trillion dollars and wasted precious human lives. We could have created more jobs, improved education and healthcare, relied less upon unproven and potentially disastrous technologies such as deep drilling for oil.

Cheap oil just isn't cheap any more.

Neither are cellphones, which my roommate and I canceled; neither are food and clothing, which have been severely reduced in our budget. Whittling our expenditures hasn't hurt so much as the grinding, demoralizing effect of living paycheck to paycheck, and having barely enough money to cover our basic needs.

I'm certain that my circumstances are caused as much by forces beyond my control – corporate greed, inept foreign and domestic policies, and unqualified political leadership – as they are by my own failures of character. Still, it's hard not to feel like a loser when every day six of the 10 messages on our answering machine are from collection agencies.

There's a loser stigma that goes with be-

ing unemployed or unable to pay your bills in America. We tend to blame the individual for being lazy or for doing something wrong; we don't hold our policymakers or captains of industry responsible for their lack of imagination or inability to think clearly and beyond the bottom line when it comes to creating jobs and protecting workers.

We don't consider the impact of exporting jobs overseas, where America's global corporations have found cheaper labour, nor do we think how much our continued reliance on fossil fuels have hurt us and limited the potential for creating new industries and jobs based on renewable energy. We're still enamored with the American Dream of No Limits and, if the dream continues to elude us, it's no one's fault but our own.

In America, if you're poor, it's better if you don't complain, or talk about how tough things have been. If you do, you're a whiner, and you wallow in self-pity; if you can't pay your bills, for god's sake, shut up and get another job!

I heard of one collector who, when informed that his potential victim was already holding down two jobs, barked: "Well, get a third job!"

If only it were that easy.

I NEVER bought into the lie that I could spend more than I earn. Yet, like many Americans, I got behind on my payments, and in this economy it's tougher than ever to get caught up. The banks, despite their recent good luck obtaining record-level government handouts, refuse to renegotiate.

I'm no genius when it comes to keeping books and tracking finances, but I do know that you have to keep balanced accounts and deal honestly with people. The financiers who brought the nation's economy to the verge of collapse did neither, and yet they were the first to receive federal aid.

They lied to us, leading us to believe that there's unlimited wealth in the form of credit and now, with taxpayer dollars in hand to keep them from going under, they thumb their noses at the people whose taxes bailed

them out and need financial aid the most.

Greed has never been more ugly, and thrift has never been more necessary.

Thrift becomes second nature when you're counting quarters to buy a gallon of gasoline. I keep my change in a baseball cap on the dresser, which makes me think of the automakers, who were just as reprehensible as the bankers, begging the government for money when everyone else was suffering worse than they were.

Like many Americans, it makes me sick and angry. The motherfuckers! They fly to Washington in private jets to ask Congress for money, and I've got to wait for my roommate to get home so I can borrow \$10 to buy gas?

It pisses me off because the automakers showed no interest in innovation, no interest in building fuel-efficient cars, until the government made it a condition of their bailout. Meanwhile, gas prices go up and up, and fuel efficiency standards remain pathetically low.

My only consolation on days like this comes from knowing I'm not alone. I'm not alone in my poverty, my anger over government handouts to corrupt bankers and lame automakers, or my frustration over the lack of jobs. It's a small consolation but it's better than none.

Figures indicating the bleak outlook on the economy keep appearing in the news but they don't tell the real story of how so many millions of Americans are struggling. The public discourse seems to have fixated on meaningless numbers and freaks of nature. "Unemployment rose a fraction last month to 9.6 percent," says one recent report. Tens of thousand of jobs have been created but not enough to sustain a healthy "recovery."

Some prognosticators say we'll never be the same; wages will never be as high as they once were, homes never as expensive, and banks never as loose with their money.

Experts have been telling us it will be at least 10 years before the economy fully recovers. Recently a panel informed us that

I'm not alone in my poverty, my anger over government handouts to corrupt bankers and lame automakers, or my frustration over the lack of jobs

AFTER THE CRASH

So many people appear, like me, unsettled, angry, and financially depleted

the recession ended more than a year ago. Who knew? Until an actual recovery does occur, economists say, we're in for even leaner times, worse than what has already passed. I shudder to think about it. The unrest at home seems to be mirrored throughout the neighborhood and beyond. So many people appear, like me, unsettled, angry, and financially depleted.

Yet, in a culture driven by greed and enamored with celebrity, it's hard to find out how working-class Americans actually live, or even what got us into this mess. We don't get trusted news reports or reporters any more. There are no Walter Cronkites or Edward R. Murrows; instead we've got Fox News and CNN, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck. We get reports of a Tea Party insurgency that tells only half the story of disenfranchised Americans.

The only trusted name in American news reporting, strangely enough, is comedian Jon Stewart, whose Daily Show on Comedy Central is the favorite among viewers under 30. He regularly sheds light on the frequent misleading or false reports from national news organizations and skewers "reporters" for spreading half-truths and leading viewers into believing such lies as President Barack Obama isn't a citizen of the US, or is a socialist, or is secretly a Muslim.

Mr. Stewart, whom *New York* magazine recently hailed as "the most trusted man in America," builds his comedy upon lies like these. The reach and importance of his comedy is Shakespearean in scale, attracting the attention of the nation's best minds. Our wit and wisdom come not from our leaders, or from corporate news outlets, but from the nation's court jesters.

America's politics and public discourse are truly a joke. We've allowed ourselves to be distracted by celebrity rehabs, and by "news" reports such as Pastor Terry Jones's threat to burn the Qu'ran, as well as by updates on Sarah Palin's most recent Tweet. American politics and public discourse are a joke because they've blinded us from seeing that our lifestyle, including the deficit fund-

ing of the longest war in our history, went terribly askew and set the stage for economic and domestic disaster. But who knew? We don't seem to want truth in reporting. Americans prefer the marketed "truth" brought to us by reality TV programming, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., unquestioned government pronouncements, and corporate spin machines.

We like the trivial and absurd. We suck glitter and eat shit tacos for lunch, and go home feeling angry without knowing why. We've let our entertainment/propaganda machine fool us into thinking we're safe from terrorism, safe from environmental harm, safe from economic collapse.

It's clearer than ever now that corporate America rules the public square, where debates seldom touch on how Americans actually live; it's Wall Street and the financiers who got what they wanted, not the average US citizen struggling to keep from losing his home to the bank.

People on the street have been saying for a long time that the system is rigged; not just conspiracy theorists, but regular folk who've grown tired and angry over endless marketing ploys to twist the truth, which make tainted brands like BP or Blackwater, Halliburton or Fox News, Goldman Sachs or the Bernie Madoffs of the world (the list goes on and on...) appear less ominous than they really are.

We've been conditioned to think that marketing is free speech and that free speech is subversive. If you speak truth to power in the US, you'll be shot down as a kook. But if you can tell a good lie to Congress, you'll be rewarded with taxpayer bailouts.

Once upon a time, Americans upheld a vision of a shared commonwealth, where the interests of all parties were honored and protected, where economic advances benefited the whole community. Not any more. We don't have a vision that upholds the interests of all Americans.

Our current president won office through the promise of change and hope, and his campaign fooled a lot of people into think-

ing he stood for a vision that was inclusive, that would protect every American's interests. That hope for change crashed hard when the Obama administration turned its back on the electorate and gave all of its attention to Wall Street.

Sadly, I find myself echoing Sarah Palin: "How's that hopey changey stuff workin' for ya?" It's not working for me, and it doesn't appear to be working for many others who similarly complain that Obama has proven himself to be nothing more than shill for corporate interests. Nothing's changed, and there's little hope.

The middle-class in America, what's left of it, has fallen on hard times, malcontents have hit the streets, complaining of socialists and Muslims, and religious nuts threaten to burn holy books, while the government throws billions of dollars down the drain to fight the longest war in our nation's history.

And what, really, have been the benefits of two endless wars and the largest cash delivery in history? What have we gained? Where are the jobs? Where's the money for

small businesses? What happened to education, healthcare and the infrastructures that enable commerce and industry to thrive?

Now, it seems, we stand at a precipice, where we vainly await the long, slow and elusive recovery. After two years, however, I'm tired of living so close to the edge of disaster. I'm ready for that change, Mr. President.

But, until it comes, I've set my sights on lesser dreams. I'm scaling back and learning to live with less.

MY ROOMMATE finally arrives in time to hear the fourth collections call of the day. "Don't they ever give up?" she says. She hands me \$10 and a few dollar bills. "Will that be enough?" she asks.

"Fine," I say, "thank you. I just need enough to get to work." **CT**

Stacey Warde is the former editor and publisher of The Rogue Voice: A Literary Magazine with an Edge. He grows blueberries in California, and writes at www.roguesview.blogspot.com

And what, really, have been the benefits of two endless wars and the largest cash delivery in history? What have we gained?

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitz



Banning slaughter

Kathy Kelly reminds us that no matter how accustomed we become to indiscriminate slaughter, we are ultimately responsible for war crimes committed in our names

Swinging a big, steel T-hook, I'd stab a large pork loin, pull it out of the pile, and plop it on a conveyor belt carrying meat into the pickle juice machine

In the early 1970's, I spent two summers slinging pork loins in a Chicago meat-packing factory. Rose Packing Company paid a handful of college students \$2.25 an hour to process pork. Donning combat boots, yellow rubber aprons, goggles, hairnets and floor length white smocks that didn't stay white very long, we'd arrive on the factory floor. Surrounded by deafening machinery, we'd step over small pools of blood and waste, adjusting ourselves to the rancid odors, as we headed to our posts.

I'd step onto a milk crate in front of a huge bin full of thawing pork loins. Then, swinging a big, steel T-hook, I'd stab a large pork loin, pull it out of the pile, and plop it on a conveyor belt carrying meat into the pickle juice machine.

Sometimes a roar from a foreman would indicate a switch to processing Canadian pork butts, which involved swiftly showing metal chips behind rectangular cuts of meat. On occasion, I'd be assigned to a machine that squirted waste meat into plastic tubing, part of the process for making hot dogs. I soon became a vegetarian.

But, up until some months ago, if anyone had ever said to me, "Kathy Kelly, you slaughtered animals," I'm sure I would have denied it, and maybe even felt a bit indignant. Recently, I realized that in fact I did participate in animal slaughter. It's similar,

isn't it, to widely held perceptions here in the United States about our responsibility for killing people in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Iraq and other areas where the US routinely kills civilians.

The actual killing seems distant, almost unnoticeable, and we grow so accustomed to our remote roles that we hardly notice the rising antagonism caused by US aerial attacks, using remotely piloted drones. The drones fire missiles and drop bombs that incinerate people in the targeted area, many of them civilians whose only "crime" is to be living with their family.

Villagers in Afghanistan and Pakistan have little voice in the court of US public opinion and no voice whatsoever in US courts of law. Aiming to raise concern over US usage of drones for targeted killings, 14 of us have been preparing for a trial in Las Vegas, where we are charged under Nevada state law with having trespassed at Creech Air Force Base, in nearby Indian Springs, Nevada.

The charges stem from an April, 2009 action when several dozen people held vigils at the main gate to Creech AFB for ten days. One of our banners said, "Ground the Drones, Lest Ye Reap the Whirlwind." Franciscan priest Jerry Zawada's sign said: "The drones don't hear the groans of the people on the ground - and neither do we." Jerry carried that sign onto the base on April 9,

2009 when 14 of us attempted to deliver several letters to the base commander, Colonel Chambliss. Nevada state authorities charged us with trespass. We believed that international law, which clearly prohibits targeted assassinations, obliged us to prevent drone strikes.

“It is incumbent on pilots, whether remote or not, to ensure that a commander’s assessment of the legality of a proposed strike is borne out by visual confirmation,” writes Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, “and that the target is in fact lawful, and that the requirements of necessity, proportionality, and discrimination are met.”

The United States isn’t at war with Pakistan. US leaders repeatedly stress that Pakistan is our ally. Nevertheless, US operated drones are used for targeted killing in North and South Waziristan.

“Targeted killing is the most coercive tactic employed in the war on terrorism,” according to the *Harvard Journal*. “Unlike detention or interrogation, it is not designed to capture the terrorist, monitor his or her actions, or extract information; simply put, it is designed to eliminate the terrorist.”

The Pentagon claims that the drone attacks are an ideal strategy for eliminating Al Qaeda members. Yet in the name of bolstering security for US people, the US is institutionalizing assassination as a valid policy. Does this make us safer?

General Petraeus may perceive short-term gains, but in the long run it’s likely that the drone attacks, as well as the night raids and death squad tactics, will cause blowback. What’s more, drone proliferation among many countries will lessen security

for people in the US and throughout the world.

With the usage of drones, the US populace can experience even greater distance and less accountability because US armed forces and CIA agents, invisible to the US populace, can assassinate targets without ever leaving a US base. Corporations that manufacture the drones and technicians who design them celebrate cutting edge technology and rising profits.

Recalling my own involvement in slaughter, I’m ashamed that I took the job for no other reason than to earn a few dimes more, per hour, than I might have gotten at a job which didn’t involve killing. It took me four decades to realistically assess what I’d done. Will it take 40 years for us humans to acknowledge our role in slaughtering other human beings who have meant us no harm.

In a Las Vegas courtroom, on September 14, 2010, the Creech 14 activists were fortunate to welcome former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Retired Colonel Ann Wright, and Professor Bill Quigley, the Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights as expert witnesses in our trial.

It was a riveting day in court. Defendants opted to forego testifying on their own behalf and we listened to Brian Terrell deliver a superb closing statement. Judge Jansen said that he would take three to four months to study the issues and the testimony that was presented. I think he acted in an exemplary way. January 27th is the next scheduled court date..

CT

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

Drones on trial

Jessica Arents goes to court and gets an education

What were the chances that a Las Vegas court that normally handles traffic violations and minor offenses would admit three expert witnesses to testify on behalf of defendants charged with a simple trespass?

I received an education on September 16. I wasn't in a classroom. I wasn't laboring over a paper, strategizing in a small group, poring over a textbook or hustling across campus. I was sitting as a spectator in the front row of Judge Jansen's courtroom in Clark County, Nevada.

Fourteen peace activists were on trial for trying to hand-deliver a letter to the base commander at Creech Air Force Base in April of 2009. Their letter laid out concerns about usage of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or drones, for surveillance and combat purposes in Afghanistan. The Creech 14 believe the usage of remote aerial vehicles to hunt down and kill people in other lands amounts to targeted assassination and is prohibited by international and US law. Soldiers carrying M16s stopped them after they had walked past the guardhouse at the base entrance and a few hours later Nevada state troopers took them, handcuffed, into custody.

The next day, they were charged with trespass to a military facility and released. The charges were later dropped, then reinstated. Defendants, upon learning of a September 14, 2010 court date, had ten months to plan for their trial. They decided to represent themselves pro se and to call, as expert witnesses, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Colonel Ann Wright and Professor Bill Quigley, the Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. What were the

chances that a Las Vegas court that normally handles traffic violations and minor offenses would admit three expert witnesses to testify on behalf of defendants charged with a simple trespass? Slim to zero in the view of most observers.

In an opening statement, Kathy Kelly summarized what defendants would prove regarding their obligations under international law and their exercise of rights protected by the US constitution. The judge told her, quite firmly, that any testimony unrelated to the charge of trespass would be disallowed.

Yet, much to our surprise, Judge Jansen decided that all three expert witnesses would be allowed to testify. Rev, Steve Kelly, SJ rose and called on former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark as his first witness.

After Clark was sworn in, he slowly sat down and scanned the room.

About fifty supporters filled the court. The defendants were seated in the jury box. To me, they represented a choir of my finest teachers. Steve Kelly remained standing, and then, with great care, questioned Ramsey Clark, first to establish his credibility as a witness and then to elicit his testimony regarding the issue of trespass. Steve asked Ramsey Clark about his history as a deputy attorney general during the civil rights era. Ramsey Clark spoke of lunch-counter sit-ins with his soft-spoken charm, emphasizing how important it was for people to violate

the “No Trespass” rules that forbade blacks and whites to drink coffee together. Later, he relied on the age-old necessity defense to advocate on behalf of people who protested indiscriminate killing in Viet Nam. Bringing us up to date, Ramsey asked a question. “When indiscriminate killing is occurring, are you just supposed to stand by the gate [of Creech Air Force Base] and hide your face?”

Despite Judge Jansen’s insistence that the defense could only discuss matters related to a misdemeanor trespass charge, the expert witnesses were able to knit together the Nuremburg principles, international law, and the justification of necessity to establish not only the right but sometimes the duty of people to engage in acts that violate trespass laws. Ann Wright spoke about how isolated military members were from public opinion and of how likely it was that, if informed, they would respond to any great debate taking place in the public forum.

Bill Quigley, the last defense witness to take the stand, testified that when he taught law students about trespass statutes, he always raised with them the possibility of a necessity defense. Helping demonstrate “the space between law and justice,” he held his hands in front of him, about a foot apart. “I encourage my students to work, every day, to narrow the gap between law and justice,” said Bill Quigley. “I ask them to adopt a ‘Hundred Year Vision,’ and remember that 100 years ago, Jim Crow laws were permitted, domestic violence was allowed, and discrimination against women, and the disabled were all considered legal acts.

The prosecution hoped to discredit all expert witnesses. “And do you know any of the defendants?” barked the prosecutor when cross-examining Ramsey Clark. “Of course”, answered Ramsey Clark, maintaining eye contact with the prosecutor. “I love them”

Following the prosecutor’s cross-examination of Bill Quigley, Judge Jansen asked him several questions, the last of which pertained to Bill Quigley’s advice to law students who might contemplate crossing a line for idealistic reasons. “Now if some of your students

informed you of their intention to cross onto an Air Force Base clearly marked with a No Trespass sign,” Judge Jansen wondered, “What would you say to them?”

“I would tell them to weigh the consequences carefully”, answered Bill Quigley, noting that their convictions would come at a steep price.

With the possible exception of the prosecution, all assembled seemed in agreement that they had witnessed an extraordinarily rich education about our collective duties to uphold basic human rights. But, so far, the word “drone” had been mentioned only in the opening statement. Brian Terrell rose to deliver a closing statement. He referred to a metaphor already employed by two of our witnesses, that of a baby trapped inside a house on fire. “We fourteen are people who saw the smoke,” said Brian. “We’ve seen the babies dying in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and no trespass sign can keep us from trying to reach the children.”

Judge Jansen then addressed all of us. He said that he had just celebrated his 25th anniversary as a judge, but in all those years every trespass case that came before him was settled with a plea. This was the first time that defendants took a trespass case to trial. Given that this was his first time trying such a case and considering the many important issues raised, Judge Jansen stated that he would need time to study the issues and write his decision. He said he’d need at least three months and then invited the defendants to quickly examine their calendars and propose a date for their next court appearance. All agreed to return on Jan 27, 2011.

It’s one thing for me to announce that I’ve received an exceptional education over the course of an unusual day. It’s quite another for a US judge who has been on the bench for 25 years to voice appreciation for what he has learned from defendants and witnesses, and then promise his continued attentiveness to the issues that were raised.

His delayed decision gained him entry into the choir of teachers. “Go in peace,” he said, as he left the courtroom. **CT**

“We fourteen are people who saw the smoke,” said Brian. “We’ve seen the babies dying in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and no trespass sign can keep us from trying to reach the children”

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The fraudulent criminalisation of pot

Ex-cop **William Cox** recalls the lies and subterfuge that created the stupid and unnecessary war on drugs in North America

Operation Midnight Climax secretly tested LSD on the unwitting patrons of a CIA-financed whorehouse

For almost 40 years, the United States has waged a war on its own citizens who have used marijuana as a part of a drug culture originally encouraged by the government. The war was commenced despite the government's own findings that marijuana posed less of a risk to American society than alcohol, and that the greatest harm that would result from criminalisation would be the injury caused to those arrested for possession and use. The harm caused by the war extends beyond its 15 million prisoners; its cost has exceeded a trillion dollars, and it has benefitted only those who profit from the illegal cultivation and sale of marijuana.

Drug use became endemic among US troops serving in Vietnam with more than 80% getting stoned on marijuana and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). Many of the secrets are still hidden; however, we now have some information about the extent of the government's responsibility for the development of the drug culture in the military and in communities across America. These are the highlights:

Although the US was a signatory to the Geneva Convention protocols banning the use of chemical weapons, the US Army engaged in extensive testing of marijuana and its active ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) as an incapacitating agent in warfare. A secret research program tested these

substances, including highly-concentrated derivatives, on thousands of American GIs without their informed consent.

The CIA engaged in a ten-year secret program to identify and test drugs for use as truth serums during interrogations and as incapacitating agents. Operation Midnight Climax secretly tested LSD on the unwitting patrons of a CIA-financed whorehouse.

The US Army envisioned "driving people crazy for a few hours" by spiking a city's water supply and developed a super hallucinogen known as quinuclidinyl benzilate (BZ), which was tested on thousands of soldiers. Known as "agent buzz," the Army produced more than 100,000 pounds of the chemical in a facility specifically designed for its incorporation into conventional bombs. Allegations in foreign publications that BZ was deployed against North Vietnam troops have never been confirmed, and all files on the subject remain top secret. However, it is known that the government considered using it for the control of domestic riots.

To facilitate its alliance with the intelligence agencies of Thailand and Nationalist China, the CIA supported the transportation and refining of opium into heroin in Southeast Asia, including the opening of a cluster of heroin laboratories in the Golden Triangle in 1968-1969. The CIA remained silent as its allies, including officers of the Hmong irregular army, routinely supplied heroin to

American troops in Vietnam, resulting in the addiction rates as high as 34%. In a secret report in 1972, the CIA Inspector General said: "The past involvement of many of these officers in drugs is well-known." During classified testimony before a House committee in 1999, CIA Inspector General Britt Snider admitted that the CIA allowed its Nicaraguan Contra allies to smuggle huge quantities of cocaine into the United States during the 1980's, which was refined into "crack" for sale by street gangs. The House report found that "CIA employees did nothing to verify or disprove drug trafficking information, even when they had the opportunity to do so. In some of these, receipt of a drug allegation appeared to provoke no specific response, and business went on as usual."

The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse

In 1971, President Nixon appointed Governor Raymond P. Shafer of Pennsylvania to chair a national commission to "report on the effects of marijuana and other drugs and recommend appropriate drug policies. Governor Shafer was a former prosecutor, who was known as a "law and order" governor.

The "Shafer" Commission conducted the most extensive and comprehensive examination of marijuana ever performed by the US government. More than 50 projects were funded, "ranging from a study of the effects of marijuana on man to a field survey of enforcement of the marijuana [sic] laws in six metropolitan jurisdictions . . ."

"Through formal and informal hearings, recorded in thousands of pages of transcripts, we solicited all points of view, including those of public officials, community leaders, professional experts and students. We commissioned a nationwide survey of public beliefs, information and experience . . . In addition, we conducted separate surveys of opinion among district attorneys, judges, probation officers, clinicians, university health officials and free clinic personnel."

Among the Commissions findings were:

"No significant physical, biochemical, or

mental abnormalities could be attributed solely to their marijuana smoking."

"No verification is found of a causal relationship between marijuana use and subsequent heroin use."

"In sum, the weight of the evidence is that marijuana does not cause violent or aggressive behavior; if anything marijuana serves to inhibit the expression of such behavior."

"Neither the marijuana user nor the drug itself can be said to constitute a danger to public safety."

"Marijuana's relative potential for harm to the vast majority of individual users and its actual impact on society does not justify a social policy designed to seek out and firmly punish those who use it."

The Commission concluded that "society should seek to discourage use, while concentrating its attention on the prevention and treatment of heavy and very heavy use. The Commission feels that the criminalisation of possession of marijuana for personal [use] is socially self-defeating as a means of achieving this objective . . . Considering the range of social concerns in contemporary America, marijuana does not, in our considered judgment, rank very high. We would deemphasize marijuana as a problem."

President Nixon called Governor Shafer on the carpet and pressured him to change the Commission's conclusion saying, "You see, the thing that is so terribly important here is that it not appear that the Commission's frankly just a bunch of do-gooders." Governor Shafer declined to change his conclusions, and Nixon declined to appoint him to a pending federal judgeship.

The war on drugs

White House tapes reveal that Nixon's opinions about marijuana were based on his personal prejudices rather than the evidence. He can be heard to make statements such as: "That's a funny thing, every one of the bastards that are out for legalizing marijuana is Jewish. What the Christ is the matter with the Jews, Bob, what is the matter with them? I suppose it's because most of them are psy-

CIA Inspector General Britt Snider admitted that the CIA allowed its Nicaraguan Contra allies to smuggle huge quantities of cocaine into the United States during the 1980's, which was refined into "crack" for sale by street gangs

Wanting to be strong, “like the Russians,” and to “scare” marijuana users, Nixon ordered his administration to come down hard on users and to target them as enemies in his “war on drugs”

chiatrists . . . By God, we are going to hit the marijuana thing, and I want to hit it right square in the puss . . . ”

When Nixon was talking with Art Linkletter about “radical demonstrators,” he said “They’re all on drugs.” On another occasion, Nixon compared marijuana to alcohol use saying that marijuana users smoke it to “get high,” while “a person drinks to have fun.”

Wanting to be strong, “like the Russians,” and to “scare” marijuana users, Nixon ordered his administration to come down hard on users and to target them as enemies in his “war on drugs.”

The war on marijuana and the false myths associated with its usage have been continued by every president since Nixon. Since 1973, 15 million people, mostly young people who were committing no other crime, have been arrested for marijuana. In just the last ten years, 6.5 million Americans have been arrested on marijuana charges. Of the 829,625 people who were arrested in 2006, 738,915 of them were in simple possession.

Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. announced in March 2009 that the administration would discontinue raids on the distributors of medical marijuana, including California – which was the first state to legalize marijuana sales upon a doctor’s recommendation.

Although President Obama backed off on arresting medical marijuana users, his 2010 National Drug Control Strategy continues the hard line: “Keeping drugs illegal reduces their availability and lessens willingness to use them. That is why this Administration firmly opposes the legalization of marijuana or any other illicit drug.” Contrary to the findings of the Shafer Commission, the only existing comprehensive government study on the subject, Obama goes on to say, “Diagnostic, laboratory, clinical and epidemiological studies clearly indicate that marijuana use is associated with dependence, respiratory and mental illness, poor motor performance, and cognitive impairment, among other negative effects, and legalization would only exacerbate these problems.”

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have now followed California in passing laws permitting the use of marijuana for medical purposes; however, no state, thus far, has decriminalized personal possession for recreational use or personal enjoyment.

After spending a trillion dollars in the battle, the war on marijuana has been a complete failure. Although a marijuana user is arrested every 38 seconds, one hundred million people, or about one third of all Americans acknowledge they have used marijuana, and 15 million “criminals” used it in the last month.

The only victors in the war on drugs have been the criminals who have profited from illegal sales. There is an estimated \$15 billion in illegal cannabis transactions each year just in California. These transactions are not taxed or regulated.

The cultivation of marijuana in Mexico soared 35% last year to production levels greater than any time in the last 20 years. According to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, in 2006 more than 60% of the revenue generated by Mexican drug cartels came from cannabis sales in the US

Nixon’s war has been expensive; it has been a failure; and it has caused great damage to the fabric of America society. The harm has been particularly felt by its young people who suffer up to 80% of the marijuana arrests and who are disproportionately African American and Latino.

California’s initiative to decriminalize marijuana possession

The penalty upon conviction for possession and use of less than an ounce of marijuana in California is now restricted to a maximum of a \$100 fine. If California voters approve Proposition 19 on their November ballot, such possession by a person over the age of 21 will no longer be a crime under California law.

Just as California and New York ended criminal sanctions against the possession and sale of alcohol before prohibition was repealed, California voters again have the

chance to remedy the evils caused by almost 40 years of a war without foundation or cause.

The initiative: “Changes California Law to Legalize Marijuana and Allow It to Be Regulated and Taxed.” It includes the following provisions:

- *Allows people 21 years or older to possess, cultivate, or transport marijuana for personal use.*
- *Permits local governments to regulate and tax commercial production and sale of marijuana to people 21 years or older.*
- *Prohibits people from possession marijuana on school grounds, using it in public, smoking it while minors are present, or providing it to anyone under 21 years old, and*
- *Maintains current prohibitions against driving while impaired.*

The California Legislative Analyst and the Director of Finance estimate there will be savings of up to several tens of millions of dollars annually to state and local governments on the costs of incarcerating and supervising certain marijuana offenders. In addition, there are unknown, but potentially major tax, fee, and benefit assessment revenues to state and local government related to the production and sale of marijuana products.

Conclusion

In 1972, during the same year of the Shafer Commission, I was a sergeant of police in Los Angeles and had just completed a two-year assignment to write and obtain approval of the Department’s Policy Manual, which defined the principles and philosophy of policing in the city. I was also attending law school and I was “loaned” to the staff of the Police Task Force of President Nixon’s National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, where I was privileged to draft the introductory chapters defining the role of the police in America.

Following graduation the next year and passing the state bar examination, I moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the Justice Department’s Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to implement national crim-

inal justice standards and goals. As a result of these initiatives, the quality of policing in America has been vastly improved over the years, and today, law enforcement is a profession which I am proud to have been a part of.

Several times I had to fight for my life while enforcing the law, and three of my law enforcement friends were murdered in the line of duty. I am not naive. I have walked through too much blood and have seen too much pain and suffering during my career. Everything I have learned during almost 50 years in the justice system compels a conclusion that the criminalisation of marijuana was a fraud on the American people from the very inception of the war on drugs.

I am not alone in this conclusion, which has been joined by a large number of active and retired law enforcement officials and judges in the United States and other countries.

Every voter has a duty to honestly consider the issues presented by Proposition 19 and vote as though one of his or her children, a niece or nephew, or a friend’s child will be caught experimenting with marijuana in the future. How will you want the matter handled? By creating a criminal, or by using the occasion as an educational opportunity?

We hopefully remember the danger to society caused by the prohibition of alcohol and we have seen how education and reasonable regulation has substantially reduced the use of tobacco in our society.

Let us rely on the true facts, our experience, our best judgement, and our consciences, instead of our prejudices or the misleading myths that continue to be perpetuated by our government. Let us bring an end to the fraudulent war on marijuana. **CT**

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Everything I have learned during almost 50 years in the justice system compels a conclusion that the criminalisation of marijuana was a fraud on the American people from the very inception of the war on drugs

Big doin's in Juarez

Fred Reed has some things we ought to think, but don't

If Mexico were not next to the world's most ravenous drug market, it would be a corrupt, but functioning and reasonably successful upper Third-World country

Things change. I arrived in Mexico seven years ago amid dire warnings from all and sundry that I would die of foul disease, trampling by burros or splashing sanguinary crime. All of this I regarded as nonsense, because it was. The State Department issued travel warnings and similar alarums, but State would regard Massachusetts as hazardous. There was little to fear. Expats traveled at will and walked the streets without concern.

Things change. While crime is hardly epidemic where I live, and in most places mostly involves narcos killing narcos, and takes place mostly away from the agringada regions rife with Americans, these days there is more of it. Before, you could walk home from a watering hole after midnight without worry. Now, no. There's not a lot of worry, but more than before.

The local people remain as decent as always, small towns tending to be law-abiding everywhere on the planet. The problem is the growing reach of the drug cartels, causing a weakening of the fabric of law. When one variety of violent crime gets out of control, every other kind more easily flourishes.

If Mexico were not next to the world's most ravenous drug market, it would be a corrupt, but functioning and reasonably successful upper Third-World country. If this were not so, Mexico would not have the huge number of Americans who have come here

to retire. But the country cannot withstand a drug business that brings the traffickers forty billion dollars a year. The money means that the cartels can buy heavier armament than can the government, as well as buy heavier officials on either side of the border. (It is an American conceit that corruption exists only in other countries. Tell me another story, Grandpa.)

It is getting out of hand. The killing of policemen, judges, and mayors is common. Journalists die in droves. After the murder of another of its reporters, *El Diario*, the major paper of Ciudad Juarez, published the following editorial, addressed to the drug lords: "We bring to your attention that we are communicators, not mind-readers. Therefore, as workers in information, we want you to explain to us what you want of us, what you want us to publish or stop publishing, what we must do for our security.

"These days, you are the de facto authority in the city, because the legally instituted authorities have been able to do nothing to keep our co-workers from continuing to fall, although we have repeatedly asked this of you. Consequently, facing this undeniable fact, we direct ourselves to you, because the last thing we want is that you shoot to death another of our colleagues."

This is astonishing. It is worse. A blue whale singing *Aida* would be merely astonishing, but here we have the editors of the

major newspaper of a substantial city stating candidly, with perfect clarity, that the narco-trafficantes, not the national government, exercise sovereignty over the city. The federal government understandably denounced the editorial. No capital wants to be told that it does not control its territory. But this is exactly what the paper said.

Why is this happening? The root of the chain of cause is plain enough: that Americans want drugs, want them intensely, at almost any price – but the federal government doesn't want Americans to have drugs. Lots of gringos want dope: We are not talking of a few ghetto-blasted crackheads and William Burroughs types sticking needles in their arms in rat-infested alleys. These don't have forty billion dollars. The users are college students, high-school kids, Ivy League profs, pricey lawyers, Congressmen, bus drivers, cosmetologists and American presidents (though they don't inhale).

All God's chillun want drugs. Or at least enough of them do to make fortunes for those who sell the stuff.

Let's admit it: Americans are drug-mad. Legal, illegal, smokable, injectable, edible – it don't matter. They would inject plaster of paris if nothing better were available. When I was in Washington, at least half – at the very least, half – of the single women I knew were on lithium, Depacote, Prozac, Xanax, Zoloft, all the gobbled M&Ms of the quietly unhappy. Shrinks regularly prescribed drugs for high-school girls miserable over divorce and uncertainty. Boys were forced to take Ritalin. My parents' generation survived on Miltown and Equanil. In the Sixties, hippies took drugs. Now it's everybody. We have democratized chemistry.

But Mother Washington doesn't want Americans to have drugs. Nor does it want to imprison half of Yale for droppin,' poppin,' and tokin,' as we once said. In effect the feds protect the consumption (through low penalties and slight likelihood of being caught) while penalising the sale, thus keeping prices high.

The War on Drugs is, of course a farce,

having accomplished less than nothing over a half-century. Somewhere the other day I saw a story saying that consumption in the US has just risen by seven percent. This is not surprising since, as a society decays, the escape market prospers. And, despite excited hype about having killed this or that drug lord, there is no hope, no hope at all, of eliminating a business that lets impoverished third-worlders drive BMWs.

None of this would matter if it weren't causing copious bloodshed in countries like Mexico, and threatening the anarchy that is often called "destabilization." Absent this creeping violent anarchy in the streets, everyone would be happy. The narcos would get their money, consumers their drugs, officials their bribes, and DEA types their salaries. All good. But the bloodshed exists.

Intelligent Mexicans of sound mind, to the extent that humans can approximate the condition, worry that all hell may break loose. Not "will," but "may." There is a sense here, as there is in the United States, that something is wrong, and that something will happen. Mexico cannot defeat the *traficantes*. These are bad, bad boys, willing to ambush police convoys, kill federal judges, and rule towns. By comparison the Italian mafia was a basket of puppies.

The US had better think about what it wants on its borders. As long as drugs are illegal, they will flow and the gringos will buy and the narcos will roll in dough. Nothing will stop or impede this. American colonels with steely gaze and firm handshakes and the comprehension of flatworms have told me that the Merida Initiative will rid Mexico of corruption and then the Federales will clean house on the narcos. Is there an adult in the house?

I understand that Americans have no interest in Mexico other than to give jobs to illegals and then complain that they have them. And, of course, to buy drugs and then complain that Mexicans sell them. But a bit of attention, even of realism, might have its virtues. Afghanistan is somewhere else. Mexico isn't.

These are bad, bad boys, willing to ambush police convoys, kill federal judges, and rule towns. By comparison the Italian mafia was a basket of puppies

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Tony Blair's unchallenged *Journey*

David Edwards criticises the BBC for its choice of interviewer to grill the former British PM about his new book

“Frankly, the main mood [in Downing Street] is of unbridled relief. I’ve been watching ministers wander around with smiles like split watermelons”

Andrew Marr must have seemed the natural choice to BBC executives looking for an interviewer to grill Tony Blair on his new autobiography, *A Journey*.

After all, Blair has become the most reviled British politician of modern times largely thanks to violent policies that Marr openly celebrated.

On April 9, 2003, as Baghdad superficially fell to the illegal US-UK invasion, Marr lauded Blair's great triumph on the main BBC evening news:

“Frankly, the main mood [in Downing Street] is of unbridled relief. I’ve been watching ministers wander around with smiles like split watermelons.”

Marr delivered this news with his own watermelon smile. He continued:

“Well, I think this does one thing – it draws a line under what, before the war, had been a period of... well, a faint air of pointlessness, almost, was hanging over Downing Street. There were all these slightly tawdry arguments and scandals. That is now history. Mr Blair is well aware that all his critics out there in the party and beyond aren't going to thank him – because they're only human – for being right when they've been wrong. And he knows that there might be trouble ahead, as I said. But I think this is very, very important for him. It gives him a new freedom and a new self-confidence. He confront-

ed many critics.

“I don't think anybody after this is going to be able to say of Tony Blair that he's somebody who is driven by the drift of public opinion, or focus groups, or opinion polls. He took all of those on. He said that they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right. And it would be entirely ungracious, even for his critics, not to acknowledge that tonight he stands as a larger man and a stronger prime minister as a result.” (Marr, BBC 1, News At Ten, April 9, 2003)

Two years earlier, as Blair bombed Serbia, Marr wrote:

“I am constantly impressed, but also mildly alarmed, by his [Blair's] utter lack of cynicism.” (Marr, ‘Hail to the chief. Sorry, Bill, but this time we're talking about Tony’, *The Observer*, May 16, 1999)

Marr even supported Blair's crazed call for a ground invasion:

“I want to put the Macbeth option: which is that we're so steeped in blood we should go further. If we really believe Milosevic is this bad, dangerous and destabilising figure we must ratchet this up much further. We should now be saying that we intend to put in ground troops.” (Marr, ‘Do we give war a chance?’, *The Observer*, April 18, 1999)

In 2005, the former BBC reporter and pro-

ducer, Tim Luckhurst, no radical, wrote in the Daily Mail:

“Andrew Marr has dismayed licence-payers with apologies for New Labour in general and Tony Blair in particular.” (Luckhurst, ‘As John Humphrys announces his retirement. The giant the BBC hasn’t got the guts to replace,’ *Daily Mail*, May 3, 2005)

Who better than Marr, then, to interview Blair in 2010? David Aaronovitch, perhaps?

In 2007, when the BBC was looking for someone to interview Blair for its series, *The Blair Years*, management eyes fell on the *Times* commentator. “This is troubling,” Peter Osborne wrote in the *Daily Mail*, “for over the past ten years Aaronovitch has never... ceased to extend a helping hand to Tony Blair...” (Osborne, ‘Forget the Queen fiasco, it’s the BBC’s love affair with the Blairs that’s so disquieting,’ *Daily Mail*, July 14, 2007)

Like Marr, Aaronovitch had strongly backed Blair’s attack on Serbia, also supporting Blair’s call for a ground war. After two million people marched against the looming Iraq war in London on February 15, 2003, Aaronovitch asked them:

“Finally, what are you going to do when you are told – as one day you will be – that while you were demonstrating against an allied invasion, and being applauded by friends and Iraqi officials, many of the people of Iraq were hoping, hope against hope, that no one was listening to you?” (Aaronovitch, ‘Dear marcher, please answer a few questions,’ the *Guardian*, February 18, 2003)

So why *does* the BBC, a public service broadcaster, habitually turn to journalists who have previously declared their firm support for Blair’s militant Christian policies to interview Blair about those policies? The answer is that no-one outside the BBC has the remotest idea – there is flat-zero openness on this kind of choice; it is deemed none of the public’s business.

Certainly, the choice can have nothing to do with perceived public preference – it seems undeniable that a huge majority of people would *love* to see Blair’s feet held to the fire. But this never happens. Perhaps, of

course, Blair might refuse to appear if this seemed a likely outcome. But then he should be denied the opportunity to peddle his book and his advocacy of Permanent War. The sense in reality, of course, is of elite media managers protecting their elite political friends.

The Chicago Doctrine – rationalising the bloodbath

Not only did Marr not seriously challenge Blair, he challenged common sense by dredging up a bogus justification for Blair’s actions. Marr said of Kosovo and Sierra Leone:

“After those two interventions you made what in retrospect seems a *very* significant speech in Chicago in 1999, where you developed a new doctrine about dictatorships.”

In fact Blair spoke in Chicago on April 22, 1999, in the middle of the bombing of Serbia (between March 24 and June 10, 1999). The speech was a typically audacious attempt to suggest that deep principle underlay what was actually cynical realpolitik. John Norris, director of communications during the war for US deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, commented, “it was Yugoslavia’s resistance to the broader trends of political and economic reform – not the plight of Kosovar Albanians – that best explains NATO’s war”. (Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo*, Praeger, 2005, p.xiii)

Marr implied that the so-called ‘Chicago Doctrine’ was rooted in lessons learned by Blair *after* his two interventions thus far, and that these lessons informed his subsequent decision to attack Iraq. Between the lines, we were to read: ‘Iraq’s WMDs were never really the point from the perspective of the Chicago Doctrine.’ Blair clearly knew exactly what Marr had in mind and was quick to accept the emphasis:

“I also think that there can be circumstances in which it is legitimate to intervene even in another country’s affairs where the oppression of the people is so cruel and where you can’t simply say well, unless our national interest is directly threatened in a very specific way we’re not going to have

Why *does* the BBC, a public service broadcaster, habitually turn to journalists who have previously declared their firm support for Blair’s militant Christian policies to interview Blair about those policies?

Marr must have known that Blair would once again offer the defence that “the intelligence was wrong”, and yet it was a lie that he failed to challenge

anything to do with it.”

Marr then reinforced the point: “So you can topple tyrants *because* they’re tyrants, not because they immediately threaten other people.”

Even a cursory glance at Blair’s Chicago speech reveals that Marr was bending over backwards to find the speech “*very significant*” in this way. In the speech, Blair said that, in judging the case for military intervention, “we need to bear in mind five major considerations”. The fifth of these involved asking: “do we have national interests involved? The mass expulsion of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo demanded the notice of the rest of the world. But it does make a difference that this is taking place in such a combustible part of Europe.”

In other words, the conflict was of “national interest” – it *did* “threaten other people”.

Marr’s claim on the significance of the Chicago speech is bogus for more obvious reasons. George Bush could not have been clearer in 2002-2003 when he said: “The world needs him [Saddam Hussein] to answer a single question: Has the Iraqi regime fully and unconditionally disarmed, as required by Resolution 1441, or has it not?”

The “single question” concerned the supposed threat posed by Iraq, not the nature of its government.

Ari Fleischer, Bush’s Press Secretary, said, “we have high confidence that they have weapons of mass destruction. That is what this war was about and it is about.”

The *Independent’s* Andreas Whittam Smith wrote in May 2003:

“There was no ambiguity about the reasons for fighting. The only text which matters is the motion the Prime Minister put down in the House of Commons on 18 March, just before hostilities began. It asked members of Parliament to support the decision of Her Majesty’s Government ‘that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction’.

“There was nothing else in the motion

other than citations of various United Nations Security Council resolutions. Regime change was not a British war aim.” (Whittam Smith, ‘If the weapons are not found, Blair must quit,’ the *Independent*, May 19, 2003)

The intelligence lie – and the real death toll

In his interview with Marr, Blair said:

“And I’ve always apologised for the fact that the intelligence was wrong. What I can’t apologise for, however, is the decision we took. Which we took, incidentally, based on intelligence, at the time. So all I’m saying to you is, you know – this has been gone over many, many times. The intelligence picture was clear. We acted on it.”

Marr must have known that Blair would once again offer the defence that “the intelligence was wrong”, and yet it was a lie that he failed to challenge. But why? Carne Ross, a key Foreign Office diplomat responsible for monitoring UN arms inspections in Iraq, had given testimony to the Iraq Inquiry just six weeks earlier that left Blair’s lie utterly exposed. Ross said:

“It remains my view that the internal government assessment of Iraq’s capabilities was intentionally and substantially exaggerated in public government documents during 2002 and 2003. Throughout my posting in New York, it was the UK and US assessment that while there were many unanswered questions about Iraq’s WMD stocks and capabilities, we did not believe that these amounted to a substantial threat. At no point did we have any firm evidence, from intelligence sources or otherwise, of significant weapons holdings...”

“In all the policy documents I reviewed in preparation for this testimony, there is no mention prior to 9/11 of any increase in the threat assessment for Iraq. Instead, these documents discuss the difficulty in maintaining support for sanctions in the absence of clear evidence of WMD violations by Iraq...”

Ross talked of a “process of deliberate public exaggeration”:

“This process of exaggeration was gradual, and proceeded by accretion and editing from document to document, in a way that allowed those participating to convince themselves that they were not engaged in blatant dishonesty. But this process led to highly misleading statements about the UK assessment of the Iraqi threat that were, in their totality, lies.”

In the interview, Marr commented: “100,000 plus people certainly died” as a result of the war, “some people say more”.

Indeed “some people” do say “more” – the world’s leading medical journal, the *Lancet*, for example, publishing a top group of epidemiologists, led by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Like virtually the entire media, Marr prefers to cite a figure offered by the website, Iraq Body Count (IBC), described as “a very misleading exercise” even by the head of a major Western news bureau in Baghdad, one of IBC’s key sources (Email forwarded to Media Lens, October 25, 2006).

Marr ought to be aware of a recent study by Professor Brian Rappert of the University of Exeter, which details how the UK government worked to discredit the *Lancet* studies. A ‘Restricted’ letter from a ministry’s Chief Economist dated 8 November 2004 closed with:

“It might also be possible, as Gerald Russell has suggested, to try and validate the study’s preinvasion estimate of mortality by checking it against unpublished MoH health figures. But there is (a) no certainty at this stage that this kind of work would invalidate the *Lancet* findings, or (b) any guarantee that if it does produce a difference answer, that the rejection of the *Lancet* findings would be conclusive.”

Rappert comments:

“This quote suggests, again, that deliberations were geared in a particular direction – towards finding grounds for rejecting the *Lancet* study, without any evidence of countervailing efforts by government officials to produce or endorse alternative other studies or data. At numerous other occasions in the

exchanges released it could be argued that officials were not undertaking a neutral attempt to understand the impact of violence in Iraq on the civilian population. Rather – and in the absence of evidence and research of their own – they adopted the attitude of opponents of one particular study. While they did not wish to override the more nuanced evaluations of technical advisors, the general thrust of inter-ministry deliberations reads as seeking to find as many grounds possible for dismissal of the study’s findings as possible.”

The media swallowed the government smear campaign with gusto – the *Lancet* studies have been consigned to oblivion in most media reporting. Thus, the *Guardian* last month preferred to cite IBC, “which is widely considered as the most reliable database of Iraqi civilian deaths”.

From the BBC to the *New York Times*, from the *Guardian* to Channel 4 News, the figure of choice is that offered by Iraq Body Count of around 100,000 civilian deaths by violence. Sometimes this figure is interpreted as total Iraqi deaths as a result of the war, sometimes as total Iraqi civilian deaths, sometimes as total Iraqi deaths by violence. Almost *never* do journalists make clear that it is an extremely limited count of deaths recorded by media in a country that is obviously much too dangerous for journalists to be able to work effectively. Why do we say ‘obviously’?

The most lethal war for journalists

A recent report from Reporters Without Borders (RWB) comments:

“The second US war with Iraq [2003 onwards] has been the most lethal for journalists since World War II. To date, the number of journalists and media contributors killed in the country since the conflict broke out on 20 March 2003 stands at 230. That is more than those killed during the entire Vietnam War or the civil war in Algeria.

“Iraq has also been the world’s biggest market for hostages. Over 93 media professionals were abducted in those seven years,

The media swallowed the government smear campaign with gusto – the *Lancet* studies have been consigned to oblivion in most media reporting

Why, anyway, is it important to focus on civilian deaths by violence? The key question for international law is how many civilians have died as a result of illegal American and British actions, as a result of the collapse of social infrastructure – health systems, sewage systems, water supplies, electricity supplies, and so on – caused by the US-UK invasion

at least 42 of whom were later executed. Moreover, 14 are still missing.”

A study of deaths in Guatemala from 1960 to 1996 by Patrick Ball et al at the University of California, Berkeley (1999) found that numbers of murders reported by the media *decreased* as violence increased. Ball explained that “the press stopped reporting the violence beginning in September 1980. Perhaps not coincidentally, the database lists seven murders of journalists in July and August of that year”. (Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak, and Herbert F. Spirer, ‘State Violence in Guatemala, 1960-1996: A Quantitative Reflection’, 1999;

Ironically, then, as a theatre of war becomes more lethal to civilians, including journalists, media reports of civilian deaths can give the impression of a falling death toll. RWB comments further on the aftermath of the 2003 invasion:

“From day one, the new government proved to be extremely distrustful of the media, going so far as to prohibit Al-Jazeera from operating in the country, after accusing the TV news network of ‘inciting violence and sedition.’ The Qatari network still does not have an office in Iraq and is operating via on-site correspondents.

“Iraqi journalists soon had to face numerous restrictions and prohibitions enforced by the latest ruling authorities....

“In 2006, Nuri al-Maliki’s government regularly threatened to shut down certain newspapers after accusing them of incitement to violence. Television networks were also pointed out as being responsible for stirring up ethnic and religious passions. They were prohibited from broadcasting segments that showed blood or murder scenes. On 5 November 2006, the Minister of the Interior decided to close down the Sunni television networks Al-Zawra and Salah-Eddin for having broadcast footage of demonstrators waving pictures of former dictator Saddam Hussein and protesting against his capital sentence. Both stations are still closed down.”

Professor Rappert notes “that the Secretariat of the 2006 Geneva Declaration on

Armed Violence and Development (an instrument which the UK sits on the coordinating group of) estimates that “between three and 15 times as many people die indirectly for every person that dies violently.” (Rappert, Ibid.) In 2007, Les Roberts told us that an ORB poll revealing that 1.2 million Iraqis had been murdered since the 2003 invasion seemed “very much to align” with the 2004 and 2006 *Lancet* studies he had co-authored.

And why, anyway, is it important to focus on civilian deaths by violence? The key question for international law is how many civilians have died as a result of illegal American and British actions, as a result of the collapse of social infrastructure – health systems, sewage systems, water supplies, electricity supplies, and so on – caused by the US-UK invasion. IBC focuses only on direct deaths of civilians by violence as reported by the media (and, in recent years, other sources like morgues).

The absurdity is such that the *New York Times* felt able to report last month:

“Caracas, Venezuela – Some here joke that they might be safer if they lived in Baghdad. The numbers bear them out.

“In Iraq, a country with about the same population as Venezuela, there were 4,644 civilian deaths from violence in 2009, according to Iraq Body Count; in Venezuela that year, the number of murders climbed above 16,000.” We asked Ziad Obermeyer, a public health researcher at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle, Washington, for his opinion on the *New York Times* comparison:

“Government statistics on deaths in Venezuela are quite accurate, at least according to a recent UN report (Mathers et al, Bulletin of the World Health Organization 83:3, 2005), making the number of 16 000 murders quite plausible. Media reports in Iraq, on the other hand, are widely recognized as an absolute minimum, with most other estimates several times higher. Comparing data from such different sources is unlikely to yield any clear insights into the true magnitude of differ-

ences.” (Email to Media Lens, September 1, 2010)

In his interview with Blair, Marr expressed views that shared, rather than challenged, Blair's view of the world. He referred to Blair “successfully intervening in Kosovo and, later, Sierra Leone”. The war in Afghanistan, Marr argued, was “another war, another piece of nation-building...” So that war, and by implication the Iraq war they had just discussed (hence “another”) was “a piece of nation-building”, rather than a war crime.

Blair said Britain should threaten Iran militarily “if they continue to develop nuclear weapons.” Marr failed to remind Blair that there is currently no credible evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Marr asked: “Are you actually saying that we should threaten them militarily if they are determined to develop nuclear weapons?”

Blair said: “If necessarily militarily... I think there is no alternative to that if they continue to develop nuclear weapons and they need to get that message loud and

clear.”

It really doesn't matter why Blair is promoting Perpetual War. It could be that he believes he has been chosen by the Creator to fight Evil. More likely, he is a Machiavelian driven to do whatever furthers his political and financial interests – a cynic who gambled and lost on the Iraq war.

We believe that, in a different society – one in which vested interests did not benefit from the promotion of illusions and violence – Blair would be exposed so brutally, so often, by the media that he would quickly become an object of ridicule and disappear from sight. **CT**

*David Edwards is co-editor, with David Cromwell, of the British media watchdog medialens – www.medialens.org Their latest book is *Newspeak in The 21st Century*, of which John Pilger says, “Not since Orwell and Chomsky has perceived reality been so skilfully revealed in the cause of truth.”*

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Now Blair should take a journey to jail

Jodie Evans packed a pair of handcuffs into her purse when she went to listen to Tony Blair in New York

I leapt up with handcuffs held high above my head. “You Liar. I was in Iraq and met with weapons inspectors before we invaded and they said they had found no WMDs. You are a War CRIMINAL! LIAR!”

Tony Blair was in conversation with Katie Couric on September 14 at the 92nd St Y. I happened to be in town for a board meeting so headed over to a sold-out house to see if I could get in. Luck was with me as I got a ticket about 13 rows from his chair on the aisle. Blair has been traveling across the US and UK recently to promote his new memoir, *A Journey*. Peace activists from both countries have rightly been calling it “A Journey to Crime,” and have even been taking it upon themselves to move copies of the book to the Crime section of their local bookstores.

I had handcuffs in my purse and was ready to get to the front of the room in five strides. Very early on, Katie talked about him being forced out of Ireland by a pelting of eggs and shoes. His answer was that these actions are the ‘tyranny of protesters.’ “Those that shout the loudest don’t necessarily deserve to be heard,” he said. Unde-

tered by his attempt to marginalize people who speak out at his book events I waited to hear what he had to say.

Her next line of questions was about the Iraq War. Did he have regrets? No, he said, because he had acted correctly. Saddam wouldn’t allow weapons inspectors in, so therefore there must have been WMDs. My blood was boiling. What about the weapons inspectors who were there, who had been given access to everything who said there were no WMDs??? He continued to say he had done right and it was just like Iran. No weapons inspectors means WMDs.

I leapt up with handcuffs held high above my head. “You Liar. I was in Iraq and met with weapons inspectors before we invaded and they said they had found no WMDs. You are a War CRIMINAL! LIAR!” At this moment I was surrounded by NYC cops and British Secret Service and they slammed me up against the wall and dragged me out of

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the room to cheers. The British guys were brutal, dragging me, yelling at me and begging the NYPD to arrest me. They looked at them like they were off a bit and didn't really react. One of the NYPD went back to get my purse and handed it to the British SS who had literally just thrown me out into the street. He was so furious that he put my purse far away from me. He told me to thank him for not putting me in jail. Just minutes before, he told me that the broadcast had cost a lot of money and that I had ruined it. I told him if he wanted to arrest me, then go ahead, it makes for a better story. He was not happy with me.

I brushed myself off and went to pick my computer bag, which I had left at Gloria Steinem's. There I met up with awesome feminist activist Shelby Knox, who took a photo of me with the handcuffs, which I somehow managed to leave the event with. I'll have to keep them handy with so many war criminals still on the loose.

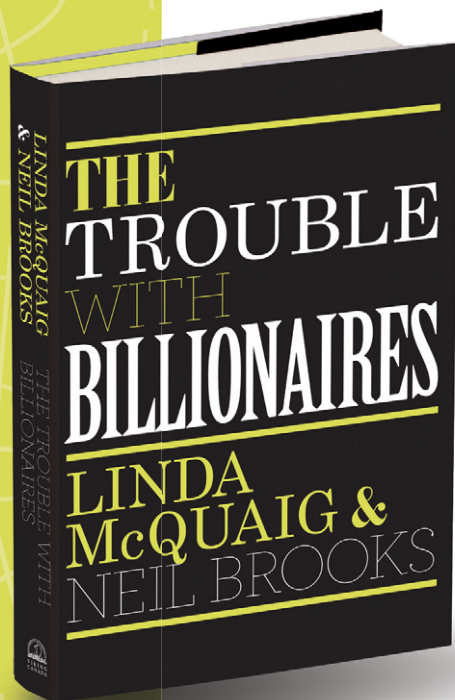
What was really frightening to me, be-

yond the fear of being kicked out or arrested, was to be in an audience eating up his every word. I was in Iraq during the time we were discussing. International media and 30 some members of the EU Parliament were there at the same time being taken to all the supposed WMD sites that were just empty spaces in a desert. Medea Benjamin spoke to inspectors in their various languages (since she speaks them all) and they assured us they had found none and had been looking hard.

How do we bring liars like Tony Blair to justice? Continue to disrupt their lies everywhere they go. The following day, Medea disrupted Karl Rove at his speaking event in Washington DC. As he backed off from the podium, he exclaimed, "It's the CODEPINK women!" They know they're lying and we can't let them continue to rewrite history. **CT**

*Jodie Evans is a co-founder of Coldpink –
www.codepink.org*

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The disappearance of democracy

Chris Hedges is angry at the way the democratic ideal has been subverted by dysfunctional political parties and cynical, greedy corporations

The democratic system, and the liberal institutions that once made piecemeal reform possible, is dead. It exists only in name. It is no longer a viable mechanism for change. And the longer we play our scripted and absurd role in this charade the worse it will get

There are no longer any major institutions in American society, including the press, the educational system, the financial sector, labor unions, the arts, religious institutions and our dysfunctional political parties, which can be considered democratic. The intent, design and function of these institutions, controlled by corporate money, are to bolster the hierarchical and anti-democratic power of the corporate state. These institutions, often mouthing liberal values, abet and perpetuate inequality. They operate increasingly in secrecy. They ignore suffering or sacrifice human lives for profit. They control and manipulate all levers of power and mass communication. They have muzzled the voices and concerns of citizens. They use entertainment, celebrity gossip and emotionally laden public-relations lies to seduce us into believing in a Disneyworld fantasy of democracy.

The menace we face does not come from the insane wing of the Republican Party, which may make huge inroads in the coming elections, but the institutions tasked with protecting democratic participation. Do not fear Glenn Beck or Sarah Palin. Do not fear the tea party movement, the birthers, the legions of conspiracy theorists or the militias. Fear the underlying corporate power structure, which no one, from Barack Obama to the right-wing nut cases who pollute the airwaves, can alter. If the hegemony of the

corporate state is not soon broken we will descend into a technologically enhanced age of barbarism.

Investing emotional and intellectual energy in electoral politics is a waste of time. Resistance means a radical break with the formal structures of American society. We must cut as many ties with consumer society and corporations as possible. We must build a new political and economic consciousness centered on the tangible issues of sustainable agriculture, self-sufficiency and radical environmental reform. The democratic system, and the liberal institutions that once made piecemeal reform possible, is dead. It exists only in name. It is no longer a viable mechanism for change. And the longer we play our scripted and absurd role in this charade the worse it will get. Do not pity Barack Obama and the Democratic Party. They will get what they deserve. They sold the citizens out for cash and power. They lied. They manipulated and deceived the public, from the bailouts to the abandonment of universal health care, to serve corporate interests. They refused to halt the wanton corporate destruction of the ecosystem on which all life depends. They betrayed the most basic ideals of democracy. And they, as much as the Republicans, are the problem.

“It is like being in a pit,” Ralph Nader told me when we spoke recently. “If you are four feet in the pit you have a chance to grab the

top and hoist yourself up. If you are 30 feet in the pit you have to start on a different scale.”

All resistance will take place outside the arena of electoral politics. The more we expand community credit unions, community health clinics and food cooperatives and build alternative energy systems, the more empowered we will become.

“To the extent that these organizations expand and get into communities where they do not exist, we will weaken the multinational goliath, from the banks to the agribusinesses to the HMO giants and hospital chains,” Nader said.

The failure of liberals to defend the interests of working men and women as our manufacturing sector was dismantled, labor unions destroyed and social services slashed has proved to be a disastrous and fatal misjudgment. Liberals, who betrayed the working class, have no credibility. This is one of the principle reasons the anti-war movement cannot attract the families whose sons and daughters are fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. And liberal hypocrisy has opened the door for a virulent right wing. If we are to reconnect with the working class we will have to begin from zero. We will have to rebuild the ties with the poor and the working class which the liberal establishment severed. We will have to condemn the liberal class as vociferously as we condemn the right wing. And we will have to remain true to the moral imperative to foster the common good and the tangible needs of housing, health care, jobs, education and food.

We will, once again, be bombarded in this election cycle with messages of fear from the Democratic Party – designed, in the end, to serve corporate interests. “Better Barack Obama than Sarah Palin,” we will be told. Better the sane technocrats like Larry Summers than half-wits like John Bolton. But we must resist. If we express the legitimate rage of the dispossessed working class as our own, if we denounce and refuse to cooperate with the Democratic Party, we can begin to impede the march of the right-wing trolls

who seem destined to inherit power. If we are compliant we will discredit the socialism we should be offering as an alternative to a perverted Christian and corporate fascism.

The tea party movement is, as Nader points out, “a conviction revolt.” Most of the participants in the tea party rallies are not poor. They are small-business people and professionals. They feel that something is wrong. They see that the two parties are equally responsible for the subsidies and bailouts, the wars and the deficits. They know these parties must be replaced. The corporate state, whose interests are being championed by tea party leaders such as Palin and Dick Armey, is working hard to make sure the anger of the movement is directed toward government rather than corporations and Wall Street. And if these corporate apologists succeed, a more overt form of corporate fascism will emerge without a socialist counterweight.

“Poor people do not organize,” Nader lamented. “They never have. It has always been people who have fairly good jobs. You don’t see Wal-Mart workers massing anywhere. The people who are the most militant are the people who had the best blue-collar jobs. Their expectation level was high. When they felt their jobs were being jeopardized they got really angry. But when you are at \$7.25 an hour you want to hang on to \$7.25 an hour. It is a strange thing.” “People have institutionalized oppressive power in the form of surrender,” Nader said. “It is not that they like it. But what are you going to do about it? You make the best of it. The system of control is staggeringly dictatorial. It breaks new ground and innovates in ways no one in human history has ever innovated. You start in American history where these corporations have influence. Then they have lobbyists. Then they run candidates. Then they put their appointments in top government positions. Now, they are actually operating the government. Look at Halliburton and Blackwater. Yesterday someone in our office called the Office of Pipeline Safety apropos the San Bruno explosion in California. The

The failure of liberals to defend the interests of working men and women as our manufacturing sector was dismantled, labor unions were destroyed and social services were slashed has proved to be a disastrous and fatal misjudgment

FUTURE SHOCK

We do not have much time left. And the longer we refuse to confront corporate power the more impotent we become as society breaks down

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

press woman answered. The guy in our office saw on the screen that she had CTR next to her name. He said, 'What is CTR?' She said, 'I am a contractor.' He said, 'This is the press office at the Department of Transportation. They contracted out the press office?' 'Yes,' she said, 'but that's OK, I come to work here every day.' "

"The corporate state is the ultimate maturation of American-type fascism," Nader said. "They leave wide areas of personal freedom so that people can confuse personal freedom with civic freedom – the freedom to go where you want, eat where you want, associate with who you want, buy what you want, work where you want, sleep when you want, play when you want. If people have given up on any civic or political role for themselves there is a sufficient amount of elbow room to get through the day. They do not have the freedom to participate in the decisions about war, foreign policy, domestic health and safety issues, taxes or transportation. That is its genius. But one of its Achille's heels is that the price of the corporate state is a deteriorating political economy. They can't stop their greed from getting the next morsel. The question is, at what point are enough people going to have a breaking point in terms of their own economic plight? At what point will they say enough is enough?"

It is anti-corporate movements as exemplified by the Scandinavian energy firm Kraft&Kultur that we must emulate. Kraft&Kultur sells electricity exclusively from solar and water power. It has begun to merge clean energy with cultural events, bookstores and a political consciousness that actively defies corporate hegemony.

The failure by the Obama administration to use the bailout and stimulus money to build public works such as schools, libraries, roads, clinics, highways, public transit and reclaiming dams, as well as create green jobs, has snuffed out any hope of serious economic, political or environmental reform coming from the centralized bureaucracy of the corporate state. And since the government did not hire enough auditors and examiners to

monitor how the hundreds of billions in taxpayer funds funneled to Wall Street are being spent, we will soon see reports of widespread mismanagement and corruption. The rot and corruption at the top levels of our financial and political systems, coupled with the increasing deprivation felt by tens of millions of Americans, are volatile tinder for a horrific right-wing backlash in the absence of a committed socialist alternative.

"If you took a day off and did nothing but listen to Hannity, Beck and Limbaugh and realized that this goes on 260 days a year, you would see that it is overwhelming," Nader said. "You have to almost have a genetic resistance in your mind and body not to be affected by it. These guys are very good. They are clever. They are funny. They are emotional. It beats me how Air America didn't make it, except it went after [it criticized] corporations, and corporations advertise. These right-wingers go after government, and government doesn't advertise. And that is the difference. It isn't that their message appeals more. Air America starved because it could not get ads."

We do not have much time left. And the longer we refuse to confront corporate power the more impotent we become as society breaks down. The game of electoral politics, which is given legitimacy by the right and the so-called left on the cable news shows, is just that – a game. It diverts us from what should be our daily task – dismantling, piece by piece, the iron grip that corporations hold over our lives. Hope is a word that is applicable only to those who grasp reality, however bleak, and do something meaningful to fight back – which does not include the farce of elections and involvement in mainstream political parties. Hope is about fighting against the real forces of destruction, not chanting "Yes We Can!" in rallies orchestrated by marketing experts, television crews, pollsters and propagandists or begging Obama to be Obama. Hope, in the hands of realists, spreads fear into the black heart of the corporate elite. But hope, real hope, remains thwarted by our collective self-delusion. **CT**

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Bad wars and good people

Michael Moore reminds us that many high-powered liberals share responsibility for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

The administration gleefully fed this false information not to Fox News or the *Washington Times*. They gave it to America's leading liberal newspaper. They must have had a laugh riot each morning when they'd pick up the *New York Times* and read the nearly word-for-word scenarios and talking points that they had concocted in the Vice President's office

I know we've been "free" of the Iraq War for a few weeks now and our minds have turned to the new football season and Fashion Week in New York. And how exciting that the new fall TV season is just days away!

But before we get too far away from something we would all just like to forget, will you please allow me to just say something plain and blunt and necessary:

We invaded Iraq because most Americans – including good liberals like Al Franken, Nicholas Kristof & Bill Keller of the *New York Times*, David Remnick of the *New Yorker*, the editors of the *Atlantic* and the *New Republic*, Harvey Weinstein, Hillary Clinton, Chuck Schumer and John Kerry – wanted to.

Of course the actual blame for the war goes to Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld/Wolfowitz because they ordered the "precision" bombing, the invasion, the occupation, and the theft of our national treasury. I have no doubt that history will record that they committed the undisputed Crime of the (young) Century.

But how did they get away with it, considering they'd lost the presidential election by 543,895 votes? They also knew that the majority of the country probably wouldn't back them in such a war (a *Newsweek* poll in October 2002 showed 61% thought it was "very important" for Bush to get formal approval from the United Nations for war – but

that never happened). So how did they pull it off?

They did it by getting liberal voices to support their war. They did it by creating the look of bipartisanship. And they convinced other countries' leaders like Tony Blair to get on board and make it look like it wasn't just our intelligence agencies cooking the evidence.

But most importantly, they made this war (and its public support) happen because Bush & Co. had brilliantly conned the *New York Times* into running a bunch of phony front-page stories about how Saddam Hussein had all these "weapons of mass destruction." The administration gleefully fed this false information **not** to Fox News or the *Washington Times*. They gave it to America's leading liberal newspaper. They must have had a laugh riot each morning when they'd pick up the *New York Times* and read the nearly word-for-word scenarios and talking points that they had concocted in the Vice President's office.

I blame the *New York Times* more for this war than Bush. I **expected** Bush and Cheney to try and get away with what they did. But the *Times* – and the rest of the press – was supposed to STOP them by doing *their* job: Be a relentless watchdog of government and business – and then inform the public so we can take action.

Instead, the *New York Times* gave the Bush

administration the cover they needed. They could – and did – say, ‘Hey, look, even the *Times* says Saddam has WMD!’

With this groundwork laid, the Bush crowd ended up convincing a whopping 70% of the public to support the war – a public that had given him less than 48% of its vote in 2000.

Early liberal support for this war was the key ingredient in selling it to a majority of the public. I realize this is something that no one in the media – nor most of us – really wants to discuss. Who among us wants to feel the pain of having to remember that liberals, by joining with Bush, made this war happen?

Please, before our collective memory fades, I just want us to be honest with ourselves and present an unsanitized version of how they pulled off this war. I can guarantee you the revisionists will make sure the real truth will not enter the history books.

Children born when the war began started second grade this month.

Kids who were eleven in 2003 are now old enough to join up and get killed in Iraq in a “non-combat capacity.”

They’ll never understand how we got here if *we* don’t.

So let me state this clearly: This war was aided and abetted by a) liberals who were afraid to stick their necks out and thus remained silent; and b) liberals who actually said they believed Colin Powell’s cartoon presentation at the U.N. and then went against their better judgment by publicly offering their support for the invasion of Iraq.

First, there were those 29 (turncoat) Democratic senators who voted for the war. Then there was the embarrassing display of reporters who couldn’t wait to be “embedded” and go for a joy ride on a Bradley tank.

But my real despair lies with the people I counted on for strong opposition to this madness – but who left the rest of us alone, out on a limb, as we tried to stop the war.

In March of 2003, to be a public figure speaking out against the war was considered instant career suicide. Take the Dixie

Chicks as Exhibit A. Their lead singer, Natalie Maines, uttered just one sentence of criticism – and their career was effectively dead and buried at that moment. Bruce Springsteen spoke out in their defense, and a Colorado DJ was fired for refusing to not play their songs. That was about it. Crickets everywhere else.

Then MSNBC fired the only nightly critic of the war – the television legend, Phil Donahue. No one at the network – or any network – spoke up on his behalf. There would never again be a Phil Donahue show. (Little did GE know that, when they soon filled that 8pm hour with a sports guy by the name of Keith Olbermann, they would end up with the war’s most brilliant and fiercest critic, night after night after night.) There were a few others – Bill Maher, Janeane Garofalo, Tim Robbins and Seymour Hersh – who weren’t afraid to speak the truth. But where was everyone else? Where were all those supposed liberal voices in the media?

Instead, this is what we were treated to back in 2003 and 2004:

● **Al Franken**, who said he “reluctantly” was “a supporter of the war against Saddam.” And six months into the war Al was still saying, “There were reasons to go to war against Iraq ... I was very ambivalent about it but I still don’t know if it was necessarily wrong (to go to war).”

● **Nicholas Kristof**, columnist for the *New York Times*, who attacked me and wrote a column comparing me to the nutty right-wingers who claimed Hillary had Vince Foster killed. He said people like me were “polarizing the political cesspool,” and he chastised anyone who dared call Bush’s reasons for going to war in Iraq “lies.”

● **Howell Raines**, editor-in-chief of the “liberal” *New York Times*, who was, according to former *Times* editor Doug Frantz, “eager to have articles that supported the war-mongering out of Washington ... He discouraged pieces that were at odds with the administration’s position on Iraq’s supposed weapons of mass destruction and alleged links of al-Qaeda.” The book *Hard News* reported that “according to half a dozen sources within the

There were a few others – Bill Maher, Janeane Garofalo, Tim Robbins and Seymour Hersh – who weren’t afraid to speak the truth. But where was everyone else? Where were all those supposed liberal voices in the media?

SHARING BLAME

the support of the war by these leading liberals and the majority of the Democrats in the Senate made it safe for the Right to let loose a vicious and unchecked tirade of hate and threats on anyone (including myself) who dared to step out of line

Times, Raines wanted to prove once and for all that he wasn't editing the paper in a way that betrayed his liberal beliefs..."

● **Bill Keller**, at the time a *New York Times* columnist, who wrote: "We reluctant hawks may disagree among ourselves about the most compelling logic for war – protecting America, relieving oppressed Iraqis or reforming the Middle East – but we generally agree that the logic for standing pat does not hold. ... we are hard pressed to see an alternative that is not built on wishful thinking."

(The *New York Times* is so left-wing that when Raines retired, they replaced him with... Keller.)

● **The New Yorker**, the magazine for really smart liberals, found its editor-in-chief, **David Remnick**, supporting the war on its pages: "History will not easily excuse us if, by deciding not to decide, we defer a reckoning with an aggressive totalitarian leader who intends not only to develop weapons of mass destruction but also to use them. ... a return to a hollow pursuit of containment will be the most dangerous option of all." (To cover its ass, the *New Yorker* had another editor, Rick Hertzberg, write an anti-war editorial as a rebuttal.)

Some of the above have recanted their early support of the war. The *Times* fired its WMD correspondent and apologized to its readers. Al Franken has been a great Senator. Kristof now writes nice columns.

But the support of the war by these leading liberals and the majority of the Democrats in the Senate made it safe for the Right to let loose a vicious and unchecked tirade of hate and threats on anyone (including myself) who dared to step out of line. It was not uncommon to hear the media describe me as "un-American," "anti-American," "aiding the terrorists," and being a "traitor."

Here are just a couple of examples of what was said about me over the airwaves by two of the nation's leading conservative commentators:

"Let me just tell you what I'm thinking. I'm thinking about killing Michael Moore, and I'm wondering if I could kill him myself,

or if I would need to hire somebody to do it. No, I think I could. I think he could be looking me in the eye, you know, and I could just be choking the life out – is this wrong? I stopped wearing my 'What Would Jesus Do' band, and I've lost all sense of right and wrong now. I used to be able to say, 'Yeah, I'd kill Michael Moore,' and then I'd see the little band: 'What Would Jesus Do?' And then I'd realize, 'Oh, you wouldn't kill Michael Moore. Or at least you wouldn't choke him to death.' And you know, well, I'm not sure." (Glenn Beck)

And:

"Well, I want to kill Michael Moore. Is that all right? All right. And I don't believe in capital punishment. That's just a joke on Moore." (Bill O'Reilly)

(Ironically, O'Reilly made his threat/joke the night after Janet Jackson's breast was bared at the Super Bowl – which got CBS fined over half a million dollars because, you know, nipples are far more frightening than death threats.)

So that's how I'll personally remember the early war years: living with a real and present danger caused by the hate whipped up by right-wing radio and TV. (I've been advised not to recount certain specific incidents that happened to me, as it would only encourage other crazy people.)

So I dealt with it. And I'm still here. And I know many of you went through your own crap, standing up against the war at school, or work, or at Thanksgiving dinner, taking your own blows for simply saying what was the truth.

But how much easier it would have been for all of us if the liberal establishment had stood with us? We didn't own a daily newspaper, or a magazine with a circulation in the millions. We didn't have our own TV show or network. We weren't invited on shows like "Meet the Press," because they simply could not allow our voice to be heard.

The media watchdog group FAIR reported that in the three weeks after the war started, the CBS Evening News allowed only one anti-war voice on their show – and that was

on *one night in one soundbite* (and that was four seconds of me in a line from my Oscar speech) – even though in March of 2003 our anti-war numbers were in the millions (remember the huge demonstrations in hundreds of cities?). We were around 30% of the country according to most polls (that’s nearly 100 million Americans!) and yet we had no way to communicate with each other aside from through the *Nation* and a few websites like CommonDreams.org and Truth-Out.org.

But that was no way to build a huge mass movement of Middle Americans to oppose the war. Unless you had just lucked out and been handed an Oscar on live television in front of a gazillion people where you had 45 seconds to say something before they cut you off and booed you off the stage, you had no public platform. (Jeez, I sure did get booed a lot that year: simply walking through an airport, or eating dinner in a restaurant, or sitting at a Laker game where they suddenly put me up on the Jumbotron and the place went so angry-crazy that Larry David, who was sitting next to me, felt that maybe for his own safety he should perhaps slide a few seats down or go get us a couple of wieners. Instead, he stuck by my side – and his skillful ninja moves got us out of there alive after the game.)

I know it’s hard to remember, but when this war started, there was no YouTube, no Facebook, no Twitter, no way for you to bypass the media lords so you could have your own friggin’ say.

Too bad for the bastards, those days are over.

The next time around, it won’t be so easy to shut up a country girl band or try to silence someone while he accepts his little gold statue – or completely ignore the millions of citizens in the streets.

So now we can hope that one of our wars is over. Too bad we lost. I hate to lose, don’t you? But the fact is, we lost the very day we invaded *a sovereign nation that posed absolutely no threat to us and had nothing to do with 9/11*. We lost lives (over 4,400 of ours, hundreds of thousands of theirs), we lost

limbs (a total of 35,000 troops came back with various wounds and disabilities and God knows how many more with mental problems). We lost the money our grandchildren were supposed to live on.

And we lost our soul, who we were, what we stood for as a once-great country – lost it all. Can we now ask for redemption – for forgiveness? Can we be... “America” again?

I guess we’ll see. The vast majority of the country eventually came around to the Dixie Chicks’ position. And we elected an anti-Iraq-war guy by the name of Barack Hussein Obama.

But, please, promise yourselves never to forget how our country went crazy 7½ years ago – even though, to many people at the time, it seemed completely normal. And I’m here to tell you, no matter how much better it’s gotten, no matter how normal you may think things are now, we’re still halfway nuts. Just listen to the new batch of “sensible pundits” as they start to beat the drums about what we should do to Iran. One war down, one (or two or three) to go.

C’mon, Mr. President, not one more kid needs to die overseas wearing a uniform with our flag on it. We can’t win like this. Let’s dig a few thousand wells in Afghanistan, build a few free mosques, leave behind some food and clothing, fix their electrical grid, issue an apology and set up a Facebook page so they can stay in touch with us – and then let’s get the hell out. Your own National Security Advisor and your CIA Director have told you there are less than 100 al-Qaeda fighters in the entire country. **100???**

100,000 US troops going after 100 al-Qaeda? Is this a Looney Tunes presentation? “A-ba-dee-a-ba-dee-a-ba-dee – *That’s All Folks!*” Let’s get real. I’m glad one war is “over.” But I know how we got there – and I’m willing now to fight just as hard to stop these other wars if you won’t, Mr. Obama. **CT**

Michael Moore recently won the John Steinbeck Award. His latest film is *Capitalism: A Love Story*. His web site is www.michaelmoore.com

The next time around, it won’t be so easy to shut up a country girl band or try to silence someone while he accepts his little gold statue – or completely ignore the millions of citizens in the streets

Music's war on racism and the far right

Alexander Billet tells how music is helping combat the rise of the re-emerging fascist movement in Britain

We feel that LMHR is a version of that: it reaches people other anti-racist movements can't reach

Martin Smith is one of Britain's leading anti-fascist campaigners, and is a national officer of Unite Against Fascism. He is also the author of *John Coltrane: Jazz, Racism and Resistance* and the national coordinator for Love Music Hate Racism, a music-oriented campaign against racism and the far-right.

On September 7 – two days after this interview – Martin appeared before a London court to face charges of assaulting a police officer at a protest against the far-right British National Party in October of 2009. Despite no evidence and few witnesses, he was found guilty, sentenced to 80 hours of community service and ordered to pay a total of \$700 in fees.

Here, Martin speaks with Alexander Billet about his case, the struggle against fascism in Britain and the role that music plays in fighting for a better world.

What is Love Music Hate Racism?

Love Music Hate Racism (LMHR) started about 10 years ago because what we're seeing across England and Europe is a rise of racist and fascist parties. And they've certainly made an attempt to appeal to bored young people – people who've got no sense of identity.

We thought it was important to try and reach young people in a way that political movements can't always do. There's a kind of

lager in Britain called Carlsberg, and they say it "reaches the parts other beers can't reach." We feel that LMHR is a version of that: it reaches people other anti-racist movements can't reach. What we try to do is use music, poetry, all kinds of art, to reach young people culturally with a strong anti-racist and anti-fascist message.

I suppose the other part of it is we try to mix genres. We kind of call ourselves the grandchildren of Rock Against Racism in the '70s, which mixed punk and reggae. What we do is mix everything; we don't do gigs that just have rock or indie or punk or hip-hop. If you go to one of our gigs, it'll have all different kinds of music all at the same time.

Lots of promoters find it nerve-wracking, but we found it's really possible to mix different genres, and people really like it. We're partly responsible – I won't say completely – for the crossing between grime and indie music. So we're seeing young Black kids hanging around with young indie kids, and it's shaped British independent music a lot.

What specifically are some of the attempts by the far right to reach out to young people?

The British National Party – a fascist party in Britain – produced a CD of various folk, Oi! and ska music. Lots of the bands are not identified, and they were giving them out to school kids at the school gates.

We're seeing overall an attempt to reach out to kids who are looking for a bit more raw in their music, so they used music to do that. Plus, in Britain we have a long tradition of music being used for right-wing politics – you know, some the Oi! bands in the late '70s and early '80s started to really reach into this. Also, you've got people like Morrissey, who's made several quite outrageous comments and seems to be flirting with this kind of stuff. And for the first time ever, we have house and dance music DJs making outrageous comments against Muslims in particular.

So you've got new genres developing with some racism involved in it – I won't exaggerate it, but there are the beginnings of it. And obviously with Morrissey, that could go in different directions.

So they're real problems we have to deal with just in terms of the cultural front.

Morrissey has also had a relationship with LMHR in the past. Back in 2008, he gave several thousand pounds to the group to help out with one of your carnivals. With his recent comments, though – calling the Chinese a “subspecies” – do you think there will be any kind of relationship in the future?

No, I think it's gone now. I'm a lot older than many of your readers will be. I was around the punk scene in the late '70s in Britain and was part of Rock Against Racism. At that time in Britain, we had a much more serious problem with very big bands – punk bands – flirting with fascism. The Sex Pistols wore swastika armbands – well, certainly Sid Vicious did and so did Siouxsie Sioux from Siouxsie and the Banshees.

We have a famous case of Elvis Costello saying about Ray Charles, “Can you get that nigger offstage?” when he was performing. You had David Bowie coming back to England after a tour of Germany wearing a Nazi uniform and going through Victoria Station like Hitler. You had British Movement skinheads hanging around bands like Sham 69 or Madness – gigs were being disrupted.

Some of the bands had quite a dubious record on this: Bowie certainly was flirting with fascism, Madness defended their road crew who were fascists, Jimmy Pursey of Sham 69 had lots of hardcore fascist fans following him around.

We had a policy, though, which was try to engage with these artists, win them away from racism and certainly get them to distance themselves from the people associated with fascism. We were accused at the time of being soft, but we never thought that. We thought you had to win the hearts and minds of the artists.

You shouldn't just say, “If you make a racist comment, you are forever doomed.” I think it was really successful because of the people I've mentioned, all have subsequently completely and utterly dissociated themselves from fascism and racism. In fact, many of them have become quite left-wing artists in their own right. David Bowie has both given money to the Anti-Nazi League and completely condemned his views from the '70s. Madness are very friendly to Love Music Hate Racism. Elvis Costello, too.

We were very nervous about Morrissey from the beginning when we launched LMHR because of some of the songs he's sung, like “Bengali in Platforms,” hanging around the Madness gig wearing a Union Jack flag and all that. Now, when he made the comments about immigration [in the NME in 2008], he made quite a strong case that he didn't say them, and he wanted to make a statement against racism and come out in support of an anti-racist cause.

I would have been more suspicious, but before that, he was starting to hang around LMHR concerts. He came to one of our very first gigs with the Libertines. He was there, he signed T-shirts, and he really wanted to support us. He was already beginning to hang around with anti-racist bands, and we thought, “Come on, let's give the man a chance.” He sponsored the carnival, gave us \$44,000, and he also wanted us to put stalls up at his gigs to make a strong anti-racist statement. We thought that was worth do-

We have a famous case of Elvis Costello saying about Ray Charles, “Can you get that nigger offstage?” when he was performing

INTERVIEW

The way they try to portray Roma in the press is that they're all thieves or they just live in squat camps and take your jobs

ing. But this time...you know, everyone's entitled to be wrong or change their mind once. I think the problem we've got with Morrissey is that he's done it several times.

I don't believe it's a mistake. I think it's conscious, and I think he's gone too far. In our organization, some of the bands have already met and talked about it, and we don't want to be associated with him. We feel it's not helpful to anybody. Of course, he could come out and make a clear denunciation, saying he didn't say it – he hasn't done that so far. And he hasn't contacted us to say he wants to distance himself from his statements. I think really he has to grow up at minimum. These are much more serious statements than he's made before. "Subhuman" is crude racism, to put it mildly. If someone like Adolf Hitler said that, you'd talk about biological racism, which everyone knows is genocidal. So I feel he's really crossed the Rubicon.

The diversity of genres and bands that have been associated with LMHR is really stunning. Just looking on the Web site, you see a riot grrrl gig followed a couple of nights later by an anti-racist symphony. Do you see that wide spectrum as an advantage in putting forward the concept of a multicultural society in opposition to the fascists?

I do. I think there's a lot to be said for mixing genres. You know, what punk and reggae did when they first started to fuse together – we called it "punk reggae nights" – is it brought black and white kids together in a way that nothing else did before.

If you were black or of West Indian origin in Britain, you would go to black-only clubs. If you were white, you generally hung around white punk rock bands. What fusing it together did was it brought me in touch with bands I would have never known about otherwise – bands like Steel Pulse, Misty In Roots. Not so much Bob Marley, because he was popular by then, but [Peter] Tosh, Abyssinians, the whole Trojan sound system. Suddenly, it opened up this completely different cultural world.

I feel it's really important that we try and do the same thing now. You know, I often find that musical genres are really defined not by people but by companies who want to market their products. Actually, what you really find is lots of things that connect these musics together. And therefore, the more we break the walls down, the more people can just experiment and enjoy all forms of music. I think it actually opens people's minds.

It did help break barriers down. I won't say it changed the world, but it certainly broke down barriers, and it made the discussion about racism much more open and fluid.

In Britain today, there's a lot to be said for breaking down genres and mixing it up together. We have a lot of subgenres in British music now that are fusions of different kinds. Grime is definitely a fusion of hip-hop and drum 'n' bass. A lot of indie stuff mixes house music with their own sound. We really are seeing people using music as a melting pot, and just chucking it all in. And that means you get much more multiracial audiences, which again makes it easier to deal with anti-racist questions.

The Roma question is very big in Europe – anti-Roma racism. But when you have Gogol Bordello or you see lots of klezmer bands that are very popular in the festivals right now, it does help make the basic argument about Roma people being part of our lives. It breaks down stereotypes. The way they try to portray Roma in the press is that they're all thieves or they just live in squat camps and take your jobs. What the Roma music scene proves is that these are people who have their own culture and music. And I do think it helps break down the most basic racial stereotypes that some people are trying to push right now across Europe.

Who are some of the artists that are backing LMHR right now?

Well if you look at our past two concerts – the big ones – we had Pete Doherty from the Libertines, who's massive in Britain. We had Kelly Rowland from Destiny's Child on the same bill. We had Lowkey, one of the great

rappers in Britain. We had Reverend and the Makers, we had a young British black soul singer, and one of the great jazz musicians in Britain, Courtney Pine.

So you literally have everything from pop, indie, hip-hop, jazz and soul. You look at the Barnsley carnival that we had recently, and you have Chipmunk, one of the new grime artists, alongside Reverend and the Makers, alongside Get Cape Wear Cape Fly, alongside local Barnsley artists. We had 32 stages around the city playing everything from trad-jazz to death metal to country and everything in between. So we had something for everybody, and thousands and thousands of people came out; the whole town was taken over.

So yeah, we really mix it right up and have had some great bands play for us. The Kaiser Chiefs have played LMHR gigs. So has Damon Albarn from Blur, Jerry Dammers from the Specials and other old-school artists like Mick Jones from the Clash, right through to the youngest hip-hop artists like Kano, Roll Deep and everything in between.

With the current climate being what it is – with the ongoing economic crisis – do you think there’s a potential for kids today to be influenced and radicalized by the project of Love Music Hate Racism?

Yeah, I do. Personally, I think there’s a polarization taking place in Europe right now. You’ve got both movements to the left and to the right. It’s very similar to the ‘70s; in fact, I think it’s much deeper than the ‘70s. And to be honest with you, among the young, there is generally a very wide acceptance of anti-racism. However, there are a couple of problems. One is Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism, which is much deeper than, say, if it was about black kids. There’s much more racism just accepted about Muslim kids in Britain – you know, “terrorists,” “they don’t want to mix,” that kind of stuff. And so we have a real problem with migration in Britain and Islamophobia. So those two things aside, other elements of racism you see much, much less.

LMHR doesn’t just do gigs. We do lots of school projects. We take over a school for a week or a day and we do anti-racism all the way through. So we go through everything from history to geography to gigs in the music department – everything. And what you find is that the thirst for Love Music Hate Racism among young people is ginormous.

When you go to our gigs, the Barnsley carnival was sold out, 8,000 for the main stage, and I would think that the main age was 16 to 18. When we did our concert in Victoria Park two years ago, we had 110,000 people there and again the vast majority were young people. So there’s a real thirst among young people for anti-racism.

I’m going to speak at the Bestival festival in the Isle of Wight, which is a huge festival. A hundred thousand people will be there – it’s like another Glastonbury! Now, I’ll be on the main stage, and I’ll bet you any amount of money that when I shout “love music,” the first thing the crowd will shout back will be “hate racism.”

So we get massive support, even from bands who are not necessarily playing for us. They’ll let us put up stalls at their gigs, or let us come and speak before they go on at festivals.

How do you think the far right is going to be defeated, and how does music dovetail with that?

I’ll start with the first question. In terms of how we’re going to defeat the far right in Britain, I really do believe, ultimately, there has to be an ideological, political and physical defeat of them. I don’t separate the things out – I don’t believe it’s one or another. I don’t believe one on its own can actually do it.

It seems to me that we have to have an ideological struggle against the far right – winning people to the idea of being anti-racist. Not just for multiculturalism; I’m for multiculturalism, but I believe that alone is not enough. There’s a difference between being for multiculturalism – which is just tolerance of people’s culture – and being active, firm advocates of anti-racism.

There’s much more racism just accepted about Muslim kids in Britain – you know, “terrorists,” “they don’t want to mix,” that kind of stuff

INTERVIEW

I have no illusions that music can change the world – I don't believe it can. But I think it can articulate and bring people together like very little else

I think politically that we have to offer an alternative to the hatred of the right. You can't just be "anti" something; you have to be for something. And it seems to me that the right is growing both out of the racism that is being promoted by many rulers of the world and also conditions – mass unemployment, poverty – that mean people are looking for scapegoats.

So I think that they're growing from this – both the growing racism and the economic crisis. We have to offer a political alternative to that. That's why I'm a socialist. I make no apology for that. I believe we have to have a different way of running the world.

And the third thing I think we need is to physically oppose them. Because if you leave these people to run around the streets, go to schools, attack communities, they will get stronger, and our side will get weaker. I stand in a long tradition in Britain of physically opposing these people when they take to the streets. In 1936, we had a group called the British Union of Fascists, led by [Oswald] Mosley, organize a huge demonstration through East London – which at that time was a very Jewish area. They wanted to intimidate the community. A hundred thousand people went in the streets and broke the back of Mosley's organization.

In the 1970s, the National Front, another fascist organization, tried to march through South London in a place called Lewisham – which is a very big Afro-Caribbean community. All the local community came out. We put 60,000 on the streets, and the NF didn't pass. They were driven off the streets.

Again, in the early '90s, when the British National Party won their first-ever elections in Britain, we broke them at a place called Brick Lane in East London, which is where the main Bengali community in Britain is. White anti-racists and the Bengali community in the thousands turned up there and drove them out. I think we need to do the same again. We need a physical, political and economic solution to the far right.

I don't believe that music changes the world. There's a famous quote from Sam

Cooke: he wrote this wonderful civil rights song called *A Change Is Gonna Come*, and he was asked, "Did that song inspire the civil rights movement?" I can't remember the exact words, but he said, "No, without the Birmingham civil rights protests, my song would mean nothing. But I do believe I can be a clarion call for the movement."

I have no illusions that music can change the world – I don't believe it can. But I think it can articulate and bring people together like very little else. I think that's the power of music and culture – it can articulate anti-racism or hatred of racism or the desire for a more equal world better than any speeches can. In *Love Music Hate Racism*, we can be an added tool in the fight against racism and fascism.

What would you say to artists or music fans in the US who are longing for music to play a bigger role in activism and struggle?

I'd say do it yourself. The whole punk ethic was called "DIY," or "do it yourself." And what was great about punk was that it was a grassroots movement that developed without any support from the music labels, or any support from the mainstream. We created our own fanzines, our own bands, our own clothes, our own culture, our own clubs, and we took spaces and we made them our own.

Part of making it our own was also the struggle against fascism. So what we would say to anyone is, don't just hope that your great rock bands will do it, start it yourselves. Rock Against Racism started with a local group called the Carol Grimes Band playing, and Misty In Roots. They were tiny bands, but it snowballed in support. And what I would say to everyone is put a gig on in your local area – at your local youth club, your union hall, your college or school – and have a message that says it will be a gig against racism.

I think we can create a grassroots movement with the support of these young bands. And what you'll find is that as these bands become more popular, then we can draw

bigger crowds in. We can't rely on the record labels to do anything, because I don't believe they do. They don't like LMHR. They let their bands play, but they get no profits out of it. All our bands play for nothing – it's a great ethos because they're not doing it for wealth, they're doing it for the message. I really believe in that. None of us get paid for what we do; we do it because we believe in it.

So I would say to any American kid or adult: don't just sit back and get angry. Get organized. I was very pleased to see what Rage Against the Machine are doing around [the passage of Arizona's anti-immigrant SB 1070] with the Sound Strike. It's fantastic! But I think we could do that in every city!

We don't have to wait for the Rage Against the Machines. Every band, every poet, every rapper, every dancehall kid can do this. And it would make a massive difference if we had this in hundreds of cities across America. That's what we're trying to do here in Britain. We just don't wait for the next Libertines to come along; we want to start with our bands when they're still very young.

Last words. I want to give you a chance to talk about the legal charges and possible jail time you're facing.

The key thing to understanding Britain is that for the first time, one and a half years ago, we elected to the European Parliament two fascist MEPs. That's the first time in British history that two fascists have been elected that way. We've had councillors, but never with that size of a vote. They got 1 million votes in that election, which is a huge number remembering Britain is only a fifth of the size of America – I suppose it would be like a fascist becoming a senator.

We've never had fascists appear on TV in Britain before. After that victory, they invited Nick Griffin, who's the leader of the fascists in Britain, to appear on the most prestigious TV program called Question Time.

There was a huge outpouring of anger against that, and Unite Against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism made a decision to call a protest outside of the studio where

that debate was being filmed. Three or four thousand people showed up, surrounded the BBC. And we held a really very big picket, some young students broke through the gates and occupied the studio for 10 minutes before the police got them out; it was a very militant protest supported by lots of different unions and musicians.

I was one of the organizers of that demonstration, and I basically just did a series of TV interviews the whole time. The police arrested me in front of everybody, and dragged me through the crowd – I believe to provoke a riot. They didn't get that, but they charged me with assault of a police officer.

So I will be going to court on Tuesday, charged with assault of a PC, which is six months in prison. The officer is bringing no other witnesses with him, no other police officers corroborate his evidence. There's 10,000 hours of CCTV footage and none of it shows me doing anything at all to him. Most people in this country believe it's a set-up.

We believe that anti-racists and anti-fascists are being criminalized, and it's not the first time. If you think about your own country's history: how many people went to prison in Birmingham in 1963? Four thousand? Five thousand?

All I'm guilty of is being an anti-fascist. So we've called a protest outside the court on Tuesday, and support of it has been fantastic. Four national unions in Britain are backing my case. Jerry Dammers from the Specials will be coming to speak there – I'm very proud of that; the Specials go right the way back to my punk days! Drew McConnell from Babyshambles will be coming and singing a song. The King Blues will be there, and also Lowkey.

And I suppose my line is that if I'm going to go down, I'm going to go down singing! That's the way I'm going to be on Tuesday. *(As mentioned earlier, Smith was sentenced to 85 hours of community service and ordered to pay \$700 in costs)*

CT

This interview first appeared on the Socialist Worker web site at www.socialistworker.org

We believe that anti-racists and anti-fascists are being criminalized, and it's not the first time

Evolving madness

Why does a crazy set of beliefs in one field seem to migrate into unrelated subjects? asks **George Monbiot**

A rich collection of unfounded beliefs is a common characteristic of those who deny – despite the overwhelming scientific evidence – that manmade global warming is taking place

I've often been struck by the way in which people who subscribe to one set of baseless beliefs are susceptible to others, in fields that are not obviously related. The internet is awash with sites that explain how the US government destroyed the twin towers – and how alien landings have been covered up by the authorities. Many of those who insist that Barack Obama is a Muslim also believe that sex education raises the incidence of unwanted pregnancies.

A rich collection of unfounded beliefs is a common characteristic of those who deny – despite the overwhelming scientific evidence – that manmade global warming is taking place. I've listed a few examples before, but I'll jog your memories.

Lord Monckton, whose lecture asserting that manmade climate change is nonsense has been watched by 4 million people, also maintains that he has invented a cure for HIV, multiple sclerosis, influenza and other incurable diseases.

Nils-Axel Morner, whose claims that sea levels are falling are widely cited in the *Telegraph* and elsewhere, also insists that he possesses paranormal abilities to find water and metal using a dowsing rod, and that he has discovered “the Hong Kong of the [ancient] Greeks” in Sweden.

Peter Taylor, the *Daily Express's* favourite climate change denier, has claimed that a

Masonic conspiracy has sent a “kook, a ninja freak, some throwback from past lives” to kill him, and insisted that plutonium may “possess healing powers, borne of Plutonic dimension, a preparation for rebirth, an awakener to higher consciousness”.

Now our old friend Christopher Booker reminds us of his membership of this select club, with a remarkable article for the *Spectator's* website.

“I spent a fascinating few days in a villa opposite Cap Ferrat, taking part in a seminar with a dozen very bright scientists, some world authorities in their field. Although most had never met before, they had two things in common. Each had come to question one of the most universally accepted scientific orthodoxies of our age: the Darwinian belief that life on earth evolved simply through the changes brought about by an infinite series of minute variations. The other was that, on arriving at these conclusions, they had come up against a wall of hostility from the scientific establishment.”

He goes on to list the tiredest old creationist canards, each of which has been answered a thousand times by evolutionary biologists. How can distinct species exist if evolution proceeds by gradualism? Where are the intermediate forms? How could natural selection “account for all those complex organs, such as the eye, which require so many interdependent changes to take place

simultaneously?” How could it account for changes across “an improbably short time, such as those needed to transform land mammals into whales in barely two million years?”. DNA and cellular reproduction are “so organisationally complex” that “they could not conceivably have evolved just through minute, random variations.”

He appears to be unaware that these objections have been repeatedly debunked. He also appears to be unaware of any developments in the science of evolution since the Origin of Species was published. He maintains that these objections expose evolutionary scientists as “simply ‘believers’ taking a leap of faith”, who treat any dissent as a “thought crime”. He compares them to the Inquisition and to Trofim Lysenko: the Soviet agronomist whose hypotheses were imposed by Stalin as the official orthodoxy.

His view of evolutionary science, in other words, is identical to his view of climate science. Indeed, he makes the link explicit.

“We have seen a remarkably similar response from the scientific establishment to anyone dissenting from that other dominating theory of our time, that rising CO₂ levels caused by human activity are leading to runaway global warming.”

What he’s saying is that it is no longer acceptable to tell people that they are wrong. If you knock down the claims of people who can marshal no sound science to support them, you place yourself in the same category as the Inquisition or Stalin’s thought police.

Sadly he doesn’t tell us who the “world authorities” who have destroyed the theory of natural selection are. In fact he cites no scientist, no paper, no publication of any kind, except Darwin and the Origin of Species. We must simply take his word for it that the entire canon of evolutionary biology,

just like the entire canon of climate science, is not just wrong but a fiendish conspiracy against the public, that those who reject it are true scientific heroes, and those who defend it are witch-finders and despots.

Needless to say, some of Booker’s fans have swallowed all this and reproduced his article on their own sites. Piers Corbyn, also a well-known manmade climate change denier, added this comment to the *Spectator* thread:

“Superb stuff Christopher. We seem to be having to fight attempts to impose a new age of religiosity where belief in the ‘Official’ view reigns supreme.”

So here’s a poser. Are people who entertain a range of strong beliefs for which there is no evidence naturally gullible? Or does the rejection of one scientific discipline make you more inclined to reject others?

To dismiss an entire canon of science on the basis of either no evidence or evidence that has already been debunked is to evince an astonishing level of self-belief. It suggests that, by instinct or by birth, you know more about this subject (even if you show no sign of ever having studied it) than the thousands of intelligent people who have spent their lives working on it.

Once you have taken that leap of self-belief, once you have arrogated to yourself the authority otherwise vested in science, any faith is then possible. Your own views (and those of the small coterie who share them) become your sole reference points, and are therefore unchallengeable and immutable. You must believe yourself capable of anything. And, in a sense, you probably are. **CT**

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

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Tea with Frankenstein

American politics has sunk to the depths of insanity and we're all going to suffer the consequences, writes **David Michael Green**

America, this is you, 2010. Kinda makes you pine for the good ol' days of the thirteenth century, doesn't it?

Just when you thought you'd reached the ground floor in the well of American self-destruction, you find out once again that that pit is absolutely bottomless.

Now that primary season is almost over, the far-right tea party movement has scored impressive victories over the far-right establishment in a slew of Republican primaries. I've always said that the regressive movement would end up eating its young, and now it is.

The new batch of Republican monsters includes a candidate – now the official Republican nominee for the United States Senate from Delaware, mind you – who has staked out a tough position against – no, I'm not kidding here – masturbation.

Christine O'Donnell once averred that “The Bible says that lust in your heart is committing adultery. So you can't masturbate without lust.”

And why the hell not? Surely the reason that our country has so rapidly fallen into decline is that god is punishing America because so many of us are jerking off all the time.

You know who you are.

Oh, and did you hear that she was once a witch? That she believes that scientists have bred mice-men with human brains? That she has no job? And that – despite running on a platform of cleaning up Washington's fiscal

disaster – she has a train wreck for a record of her personal finances?

I'm not kidding. Remember way back when – like, you know, yesterday – when you would have accused me of bad comedy writing for making such things up? Guess what? None of these are.

America, this is you, 2010. Kinda makes you pine for the good ol' days of the thirteenth century, doesn't it?

Here in New York the nominee is a bazillionaire who sends out racist and pornographic email to people. Hah-hah. Love that kind of real working man's humor, don't you? After being rejected by the Republican party initially, Carl Paladino hired Richard Nixon's political hit man to run his campaign, injected millions of his own money to fund it, and trounced the hapless establishment candidate, Rick Lazio, who just couldn't get extreme enough to win, whore himself as he might, and as he readily did.

The *Christian Science Monitor* notes that, “Paladino, who espouses family values, has a daughter with a former employee who is not his wife”. It is also noted of this great and incendiary paragon of small government that, “As a landlord, he made a lot of money renting space to the state in Albany and using state tax incentives for his real estate empire”.

Similarly, Paladino has compared labor unions to pigs, and, according to the Huff-

ington Post, “said he would transform some New York prisons into dormitories for welfare recipients, where they could work in state-sponsored jobs, get employment training and take lessons in ‘personal hygiene’”.

Did I mention that his father was employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression? Perhaps if Franklin Roosevelt had incarcerated père Paladino and instructed him in better hygiene – instead of wasting taxpayer money to create a monstrosity big government in remote Washington, DC that continually oppressed the people with stupid wasteful programs that like, oh, you know, kept starving Americans alive – we in New York wouldn’t be stuck with the fruit of his loins assaulting our senses today.

Whatever. I mean, what’s the point of having Republicans if it’s not gonna be all about hypocrisy and twisted sexual obsession, anyhow? Meanwhile, America’s thirty year March to the Sea goes on unabated. It is the most astonishing thing, if you think about it. Of course ‘thinking’ and ‘America’ are increasingly becoming words that can no longer be smashed into the same sentence anymore, even with the use of advanced new weaponry the Pentagon is producing. But indulge me for the moment.

What has happened to this country is that the United States – which was holding a pretty goddam good winning hand, thank you very much, by the middle of the twentieth century – started following (what were inaccurately labeled) conservative politicians and policies in the 1980s, and things got a lot worse. Then we followed even more regressive idiots this last decade, and things got a whole lot worse yet.

So what are we up to now, in reaction to these twin debacles of precambrian policymaking? Following even crazier still über-extremist right-wing monster freakazoid criminals dressed up as ordinary angry citizens, of course. Natch, babe. In for a penny, in for a pound. In for a pound, in for a planet.

It is the stuff of fiction, really – almost unimaginable to remotely sentient beings

operating in the real world. Something that requires a master novelist to do it proper justice. But Orwell’s long dead, so even that possibility is off the table.

Not everybody quite gets how perilous is the moment, however. Democratic pundits who are rejoicing over the tea party primary victories, thinking that they are good for the Democratic Party, are stupid slugs who ought to have the living shit kicked out of them, just for brainlessly taking up space on the planet. First of all, who could possibly care in the slightest about the fate of the Democratic Party? Am I really supposed to be so filled with motivating joy about the prospects of electing slightly less regressive agents of the American oligarchy to Congress that I will run down to party headquarters and start phone banking for my local Democrat? Are we really supposed to get electrified and rally around our president and the inspirational likes of Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, simply because they are marginally less obnoxious than the alternative? Golly, I just don’t think so.

But more importantly, Democrats are the very reason for the tea party, this latest episode of American idiocy. Had the party done something with the grand historic opportunity handed to them two years ago, none of this would be happening. Had they not booted so badly a rare alignment of the stars that gave them crises allowing real, serious solutions, along with a despised opposition allowing the final crushing of the conservative disease for a generation or more, we wouldn’t be sitting here today laughing at serious candidates for the United States Senate who have staked out firm positions on the societal perils of onanism.

If Barack Obama had channeled Harry Truman instead of Neville Chamberlain, this show would have been over a long time ago. But the president instead decided to make nice with vicious thugs, even though he never needed to, and even though they were publicly excoriating him in the ugliest and most deceitful terms, just as he was negotiating with them. And negotiating. And negotiating

Democratic pundits who are rejoicing over the tea party primary victories, thinking that they are good for the Democratic Party, are stupid slugs who ought to have the living shit kicked out of them, just for brainlessly taking up space on the planet

PRIMARY MADNESS

Obama's stupidity is a gift that will keep on giving for a long time. By means of his actions in the White House so far, he has nearly guaranteed that he cannot recover in the coming years, no matter what

some more. The Fool Down The Hill spent a year cutting deals with Republicans in Congress on his health care debacle, giving in to them at every turn, and stiff-arming the progressives who had made him president, only to achieve exactly what anyone who has been remotely conscious since Joe McCarthy's day knew would be the outcome: no Republican votes for a bill they themselves had helped water down to near insignificance. Add to that Republican obstruction on every other issue, the almost complete absence of GOP votes on anything – even legislation they had previously sponsored – the Democrats favored, along with the right's continuous assault on every real or (mostly) imagined personal characteristic of the president, and now you see a huge part of the explanation for the tragicomedy that is American politics at this moment.

What's worse, Obama's stupidity is a gift that will keep on giving for a long time. By means of his actions in the White House so far, he has nearly guaranteed that he cannot recover in the coming years, no matter what. He has done one of the few things that more or less assures his presidency of being finished. The right will never let up on him, even if he were to adopt their agenda wholesale. And let's be clear about this – he more or less already has. If you lay out the positions of the Obama administration on everything from civil liberties to gay rights to economic policy to national 'defense' and more, there's hardly a damn shred of difference between his positions and George W. Bush's. It's a ludicrous lie to call this milquetoast regressive in a Democratic suit a liberal, let alone a socialist. And we've only just begun with Bad Barry, folks. After he gets his ass royally kicked in November, Obama will lurch even further to the right. But that will engender even greater scorn from the sickos living over there under their slime-infested rocks, as well as endless congressional investigations of bogus administration scandals, likely including an impeachment. Or did you miss the 1990s entirely, Barack?

But that's only the start of it. Because

Obama was too dumb to recognize that everything hinged on reviving the economy (did you miss the last century, too, Bro?), and because he was too cowardly to move boldly on anything whatsoever that he did, he has also lost ordinary, centrist, independent voters who think both parties are generally worthless but will vote for anyone who can actually produce solutions. It's possible that you can bring those people back, but it ain't likely. The first rule of politics is that people vote their pocketbooks. Thus, any prayer at winning again would require an economic recovery. But that isn't gonna happen, in part because Half O'Bama half-assed the stimulus bill, partly because he was seeking bipartisan support which – wait for it now – never came, despite the compromises which reduced the size of the stimulus and turned one-third of it into ineffective tax cuts that the one-tune-jukebox Neanderthals demanded. It's also not gonna happen because this downturn is less a one-off event than it is the culmination (we grimly hope – it could get worse yet) of a thirty year grand national downsizing project, and because it is less an economic recession than it is a wholesale and permanent restructuring. No economist I've heard of sees any shred of economic recovery anywhere on the horizon throughout all of 2011, and neither do I. In fact, there are good reasons to think it gets worse from here. And that means Obama and his party are toast, not just in this election cycle, but the next one as well.

Having thus irrevocably alienated aliens on the right in addition to the just-gimme-some-results voters in the middle, Obama is producing some of the same effect on progressives as well. It was a very bad idea to speak in bold, Lincolnesque strokes as a candidate if you intended to govern like a small town city manager, and a feeble one at that. Lots of young folks, especially, who flocked to the banner of hope and change are now feeling burned, and well they should. For many others – including the dude I see in my bathroom mirror every morning – this is more like the last straw, the final frontier. Having

spent decades holding our noses and voting for Democrats just because the Republicans were so goddam destructive, many of us are now done, possibly forever. Not only is it unimaginable to me that I would vote for Obama in 2012 – no matter who is his Republican opponent – I refuse, with rare possible exception, to vote for any Democrat ever again, until the party can at least get back in the ballpark of progressive politics.

And so it is Obama and his co-conspirators in Congress have lost the right and the center, and at least the enthusiasm if not the votes of the left. But, more importantly, they have done so in ways that are mostly permanent, ways that mostly preclude any possible recovery of these voters' support. This is precisely the reason that Democratic pundits and functionaries are even more self-destructively stupid now than they have been for thirty years, rejoicing in tea party primary victories, thinking that those represent good news for their party.

Consider the appropriately-named Bob Shrum as one example, he whose great wisdom has produced an astonishing zero-for-eight record as a top presidential campaign staffer over the decades (in a hissy fit after nine days on board, he actually quit the Jimmy Carter campaign, the only successful one he was ever involved with). Looking ahead to the presidential prospects of 2012 given the surge of the tea party, he surveys the Republican field, noting that, “The GOP’s 1964 tragedy of Goldwater, who was at least a serious figure, could be repeated in the farce of Palin. ... Newt Gingrich is positioning himself as Palin with a brain. Gingrich has now become a font of smears and off-the-rail ideas – from privatizing Social Security to the transparently racist charge that Obama channels the Kenyan anti-colonialism of the father he barely knew. With his pandering to both prejudice and extremism, Gingrich could be the 2012 nominee. He would be unelectable. ... So would Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor who’s proposed scrapping the progressive income tax, the sinister idea championed by that great socialist Republi-

can Theodore Roosevelt. ... In desperation, Republican strategists are thinking of Mississippi Republican Gov. Haley Barbour, who would also compete with an appeal to the birthers, the resentful, and the backlash base. But Barbour was a legendary D.C. lobbyist for the most powerful vested interests, from tobacco to oil. Perhaps he could run on the slogan: ‘Remove the Middleman.’ For Republicans, payback could come as early as November, with Democrats keeping the Senate – maybe even the House. But 2012, I believe, will provide the ultimate irony: The people who most revile President Obama – and the Republican leaders who enlisted them only to see their party hijacked by them – may assure an Obama re-election.”

To say that this analysis displays astonishing naivete would be an unfair and unkind cut on simpletons the world over. This is pure lunacy, and it shows both the self-interested narrowness and the analytical imbecility of Democratic strategists (to abuse a term) and pundits. Maybe these folks haven’t noticed lately, but in American politics “pandering to both prejudice and extremism” is not exactly a losing strategy. Maybe these people (and there’s a lot more of them than just Shrum) aren’t paying real close attention, but most American voters don’t even have a clue who Teddy Roosevelt was or what he did. And they don’t exactly shrink from the idea of slashing taxes just because some dude had a different approach a hundred years ago. Or was it a thousand?

Most importantly, Shrum’s assumption of rationality amongst voters leads him to conclude that the nomination of Palin in 2012 would result in the “ironic” “farce” of her Goldwater-like crushing defeat at the polls. It is no surprise this guy keeps booting presidential campaigns. The twin wonders are why anyone continues to hire him, and why anyone publishes his analysis of politics. For all I know, he could be a world-class expert at philately or the intricacies of nineteenth century cricket, but, meanwhile, opinion journal publishers might want to take note of the increasingly inconvenient fact that the

This is pure lunacy, and it shows both the self-interested narrowness and the analytical imbecility of Democratic strategists (to abuse a term) and pundits

PRIMARY MADNESS

Their plan for health care is to repeal Obama's. Their plan for global warming is to pretend it doesn't exist and support fossil fuel related industries such that the problem gets worse. Their foreign policy is war

guy clearly knows nothing about politics.

Here's the deal, Bob (et al.), and feel free to take notes: This is not 1964. The country is not flush. The middle class is not robust, thriving and expanding. The incumbent party is not riding a wave of peace and prosperity, nor is it benefitting from public sympathy for the young, handsome, witty and beloved leader just recently tragically cut down in his prime. Okay? Which means that, unlike Lyndon Johnson and crew, Democrats are not gonna get a lot of votes from people happy with the magic of our moment, and therefore especially uninterested in a taking a gamble on a self-described extremist like Barry Goldwater. Indeed, precisely the opposite logic applies here, which will produce precisely the opposite outcome. Democrats should be familiar with this – it's exactly the reverse of what transpired not even two years ago: Very unhappy voters in 2012 will choose the candidate of the party not in the White House, because those voters will desperately crave change. You remember “change”, don't you, Bob? Thus, the real race will be for the Republican nomination – decided exclusively by Republican primary voters, who are merely certifiably insane on a good day – not the general election, which will be a sure thing for the GOP. And thus the next president of the United States will be Sarah Palin.

It would be nice if that were the bad part. But, sadly, as ugly as that prospect is, it's only the warm-up act for the real fun. Republicans – tea party variant or not (and, ideologically, there ain't much difference between the two) – have absolutely zero solutions for the crises the country faces (not to mention the irony of them being responsible for creating those crises, of course). Their only plan for economic recovery is more tax cuts for the rich. That will do nothing for the economy, other than plunging the country deeper into debt and exacerbating already dramatic disparities in the country's distribution of wealth. Their plan for health care is to repeal Obama's. Their plan for global warming is to pretend it doesn't exist and support fossil fuel related industries such that the problem

gets worse. Their foreign policy is war. Their plan for Middle East peace is to support Israel no matter what it does, thus guaranteeing no peace agreement. Their plan for the financial crisis is to slash any restrictions that might meaningfully control the behavior of Wall Street predators. And so on. They have no solutions, and can only succeed in making the bad situation they created worse.

And now here is where it starts to get really scary. Imagine us in 2014, the same distance into a Republican government (on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue) that we are today into a Democratic one. Except that there are two big differences. The first is that the public has had four more years – four years! – of decline, demoralization and economic terrorism under their belts by this time, with no solutions remotely in sight. What is their likely disposition? They will be turning on Republicans and showing their canines in a way that makes 2010 look like a friendly game of Scrabble by comparison.

The second difference will be in the nature of those inhabiting a government which at that point will be firmly backed up against the wall. About the only positive thing I can say regarding Democrats is that they have some limitations on what they are willing to do out of self-interest. Not much, but some. Not so the animals of the GOP, least of all the tea party sociopathic freaks. These people are not going to go down lightly. These people will be faced with a choice between humiliation and destruction on the one hand, and generating a diversionary, and probably jingoistic feel-good, catastrophe on the other. They would not be the first failing government in history to choose the annihilation of others in order to sustain a bit longer the unsustainable. They would not even be the first to take out tens of millions in such a quest.

People often scoff at me when I tell them that I think Sarah Palin is likely to be the next American president. Or they think I wax a bit apocalyptic when I start talking about outcomes that smell all too much like Germany in the 1930s. So let me review the bidding in summary form to explain why we

should be very afraid. Jump in anywhere you see a chink in the chain of logic.

- The first question is, Will Barack Obama preside over economic recovery substantial and early enough to be reelected in 2012? Perhaps, of course. But not likely as things look now.

- Second, will voters conform with nearly universal past practice and choose to go with the alternative to the status quo under conditions of economic (and other) duress? Highly likely.

- Third, will they be willing to elect somebody whose ideas are extreme and who quite recently was widely portrayed in the media as a dummy and a clown, if that is their only realistic alternative to the failed sitting president and his party? I dunno – can you say “Ronald Reagan in 1980”?

- Fourth, given the composition of Republican primary voters who are already choosing candidates so extreme that even Karl Rove is describing them as “nutty”, and given what we saw from these people in 2008, who is most likely to be the 2012 GOP nominee, and therefore shoe-in winner of the general election in November of that year? You know her name.

- Fifth, will a Republican program of tax cuts for the rich, reduced standard of living for everyone else, increased economic insecurity, more war, environmental wreckage, a Wall Street bacchanal and unfettered corporate pillage give Americans in 2013 and 2014 the solutions they were looking for when they desperately voted out the incumbent in 2012? Of course not.

- And, finally, and most grimly of all, Would a Sarah Palin administration or its equivalent stand by and watch itself go down in flames of complete destruction – sorta like what Barack Obama is now doing – when it had at its disposal a way to instead change the channel of public dissatisfaction?

I think we all know the answer to that one too. Each of these questions has more than one possible answer, and I am far from claiming any outcome as inevitable. However, I will say that I think the sequence of

events I've outlined above – not just individually, but the more daunting probability of all these things happening – is more likely than not. I have a hard time seeing this country recover in two years time. I have a hard time seeing Obama winning reelection. I not only cannot imagine a non-radical GOP nominee in 2012, I can't even name one such person in the party considering a presidential bid. I know for sure that their 'solutions' don't work – indeed, I, like you, am living the consequences of those very policies as we speak. And, finally, I also know that the people who did Iraq and debt hemorrhaging tax cuts and Katrina and torture and the rest are capable of anything. Anything. And these weren't even the tea partiers, who are even sicker than the Bushes and Roves out there.

People like Bob Shrum or perhaps Barack Obama and the strategists around him would merely be insane to applaud tea party successes this year, if all that was at stake was their own worthless careers. (And it is, of course, a measure of their utter failure as politicians that the best thing they have going in this election cycle is the hope that their opponents will choose lunatics as candidates.) Yes, yes, Bob and Barack and Rahm and David and David, this may be good news six weeks from now for a Democratic Party that is so pathetic it depends on the GOP to implode in order to only get partially devastated in the coming election. But even that won't stop scads of tea baggers from winning seats in the United States Congress this year. And – far more importantly – it won't stop the rise of this movement that is so disastrous for the country going forward.

Far, far more is at stake here than one failed president's second term, or the careers of a bunch of party hacks and media retreats. The truth is, we stand now on the edge of a precipice. And it is a very long way down to the bottom.

CT

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

We stand now on the edge of a precipice. And it is a very long way down to the bottom.

Show me your heroes . . .

. . . And I'll show you your society, writes **Michael I. Niman**

As our wheels screeched against the runway, I started thinking about who else deserved my applause

Recently, on a commercial air flight, just before landing, the pilot came on the PA system and admonished us to all give a round of applause to our armed forces, in particular to any “veterans or active-duty military members who might be on the plane.” It was an awkward moment. Some folks clapped, some looked confused or annoyed, and some both clapped and glanced with scorn at the non-clappers.

Our culture hasn't really evolved a common response for orders to applaud on command – especially for arbitrary reasons. I mean, this wasn't really an armed services moment. It was a routine public transit experience, like a train pulling into a station.

But hey, I slapped my hands together for a few rounds. There are idealists among those who join the military, and they risk their life for their beliefs. That's commendable. But as our wheels screeched against the runway, I started thinking about who else deserved my applause. Hell, what about the flight attendants? They had just nursed us through some turbulence, continuing to make their rounds even when the ride got bumpy and the “fasten seat belt” icons lit. They regularly work under hellacious conditions for far less pay than they deserve, making our whole air transportation system possible. And, like members of the armed forces, they're prone to real heroism when

things go awry. They sit among us on the plane, their heroism unrecognized and their service habitually unthanked. How about a round of applause for the flight attendants?

As we taxied around the airport, my mind kept racing. What about line cooks and dishwashers? Their jobs suck, but they soldier on, keeping many of us fed, while barely making enough to feed their own families. There are some heroics: a single parent raising children on an Applebee's salary. I'd clap for her.

More saluting

In the terminal was a billboard “saluting” the military – the folks we'd just applauded. Sure, they're passing through the terminal and could use some recognition. But so are elementary school teachers, social workers, snow plow drivers, dental hygienists, bus drivers, plumbers, DMV clerks, toll collectors, welders, highway pavers, census takers, garbage collectors, grocery store clerks, eldercare and childcare providers, licensed practical nurses, hospital orderlies, janitors, utility line workers, payroll clerks, house painters, and workers in a thousand other underappreciated professions.

Their unrecognized toil, like a soldier's heroism, keeps our society functioning. Where are the billboards welcoming them to their rushed sojourn through the Atlanta airport?

Then there are the taxi drivers, slaughterhouse workers, hourly construction helpers, and migrant farm workers who can't afford air travel and will never pass through this terminal, but who die on the job or contract chronic, work-related injuries or diseases with alarming frequency.

When are we going to command a plane load of travelers to applaud for these people, who literally give their lives in service to a society that will use them up and toss them aside without so much as a "thank you"? Who nailed the roof onto your house?

I don't want to wax on here, but we're surrounded with daily heroics: a battered spouse who survives abuse and raises a family; someone surviving hate and war, yet maintaining their compassion and humanity; people who overcome a plethora of personal adversities but still manage to care for and inspire their neighbors.

We're surrounded every day by heroes from whose sacrifices we all benefit, but no pilot ever makes an announcement to recognize them and no airport ever erects a sign to welcome them.

Fireworks

Earlier this summer I went to see a fireworks display at a small Central New York village's annual festival. A band played before the show, entertaining a small crowd sprawled out on a lawn, drinking beer, eating barbecue, and chatting up each other. Midway through the band's last set, seemingly after they'd struggled through every other song they knew, the vocalist dedicated the next song to "the troops." It was the "The Star-spangled Banner."

And it was a mega-awkward moment as folks jumped up to attention from their lazy sprawls like toast suddenly popping out of the toaster. Some spun around with their hands on their hearts, but alas, there was no flag to salute.

About half the audience eventually froze, standing at attention. Half of those folks had their hands on their hearts, facing every which way. We know what to do when the

national anthem comes on at the beginning of a hockey game, for instance, but it's not fair to spring it on a bunch of unsuspecting people relaxing and listening to music. Simon says, "Salute the troops now!" But how? What are we supposed to do? Then the divisive anger sets in, with bewildered saluters, twirling in search of a flag, scowling at those who just kept drinking beer and chatting, like they did during the last song and will do during the next. Why do we need to suffer these moments?

A few years ago in Buffalo, the city government erected metal street signs memorializing the spots where police officers died in the line of duty – died as civil servants serving the citizens of Buffalo. The single largest cause of these deaths was vehicular accidents.

Other city workers have died in vehicular accidents while on the job, but we don't memorialize them. The second largest cause of death for police officers was violent assault. Likewise, we've got a running death toll for murdered taxi drivers, convenience store clerks, pizza delivery drivers, and other private sector workers, who, like the slain officers, also gave their lives serving the residents of Buffalo. But we don't erect signs memorializing them, either. So why do we have this double standard?

The problem isn't memorializing fallen police officers or celebrating the troops. They deserve recognition for their sacrifices and their contributions.

The problem lies with the rest of us – with a society whose definition of hero seems narrowly limited to those who wear uniforms, carry guns, or have quasi-military ranks.

This elevation of the police and military above all other forms of heroism is called militarism. To date, no democratic society has been able to exist in harmony with such a value system. **CT**

Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York.

Other city workers have died in vehicular accidents while on the job, but we don't memorialize them

What do empires do?

American occupation is not a force for good, writes **Michael Parenti** – its aim is profit and the means of accumulation are bloody

How is it that so many people feel free to talk about empire when they mean a United States empire? The ideological orthodoxy had always been that, unlike other countries, the USA did not indulge in colonization and conquest

When I wrote my book *Against Empire* in 1995, some of my US compatriots thought it was wrong of me to call the United States an empire. It was widely believed that US rulers did not pursue empire; they intervened abroad only out of self-defense or for humanitarian rescue operations or to restore order in a troubled region or overthrow tyranny, fight terrorism, and propagate democracy.

But by the year 2000, everyone started talking about the United States as an empire and writing books with titles like *Sorrows of Empire*, *Follies of Empire*, *Twilight of Empire*, or *Empire of Illusions* – all referring to the United States when they spoke of empire.

Even conservatives started using the word. Amazing. One could hear right-wing pundits announcing on US television, “We’re an empire, with all the responsibilities and opportunities of empire and we better get used to it”; and “We are the strongest nation in the world and have every right to act as such” – as if having the power gives US leaders an inherent entitlement to exercise it upon others as they might wish.

“What is going on here?” I asked myself at the time. How is it that so many people feel free to talk about empire when they mean a United States empire? The ideological orthodoxy had always been that, unlike other countries, the USA did not indulge in

colonization and conquest.

The answer, I realized, is that the word has been divested of its full meaning. “Empire” seems nowadays to mean simply dominion and control. Empire – for most of these late-coming critics – is concerned almost exclusively with power and prestige. What is usually missing from the public discourse is the process of empire and its politico-economic content. In other words, while we hear a lot about empire, we hear very little about imperialism.

Now that is strange, for imperialism is what empires are all about. Imperialism is what empires do. And by imperialism I do not mean the process of extending power and dominion without regard to material and financial interests. Indeed “imperialism” has been used by some authors in the same empty way that they use the word “empire,” to simply denote dominion and control with little attention given to political economic realities.

But I define imperialism as follows: the process whereby the dominant investor interests in one country bring to bear their economic and military power upon another nation or region in order to expropriate its land, labor, natural resources, capital, and markets – in such a manner as to enrich the investor interests. In a word, empires do not just pursue “power for power’s sake.” There are real and enormous material interests

at stake, fortunes to be made many times over.

So for centuries the ruling interests of Western Europe and later on North America and Japan went forth with their financiers – and when necessary their armies – to lay claim to most of planet Earth, including the labor of indigenous peoples (both as workers and slaves), their markets, their incomes (through colonial taxation or debt control or other means), and the abundant treasures of their lands: their gold, silver, diamonds, copper, rum, molasses, hemp, flax, ebony, timber, sugar, tobacco, ivory, iron, tin, nickel, coal, cotton, corn, and more recently: uranium, manganese, titanium, bauxite, oil, and – say it again – oil (hardly a complete listing).

Empires are enormously profitable for the dominant economic interests of the imperial nation but enormously costly to the people of the colonized country. In addition to suffering the pillage of their lands and natural resources, the people of these targeted countries are frequently killed in large numbers by the intruders.

This is another thing that empires do which too often goes unmentioned in the historical and political literature of countries like the United States, Britain, and France. Empires impoverish whole populations and kill lots and lots of innocent people.

As I write this, President Obama and the national security state for which he works are waging two and a half wars (Iraq, Afghanistan, and northern Pakistan), and leveling military threats against Yemen, Iran, and, on a slow day, North Korea. Instead

of sending medical and rescue aid to Haiti, Our Bomber sent in the Marines, the same Marines who engaged in years of repression and killings in Haiti decades ago and supported more recent massacres by proxy forces.

The purpose of all this killing is to prevent alternative, independent, self-defining nations from emerging. So the empire uses its state power to gather private wealth for its investor class. And it uses its public wealth to shore up its state power and prevent other nations from self-developing.

Sooner or later this arrangement begins to wilt under the weight of its own contradictions. As the empire grows more menacing and more murderous toward others, it grows sick and impoverished within itself.

From ancient times to today, empires have always been involved in the bloody accumulation of wealth. If you don't think this is true of the United States then stop calling it "Empire."

And when you write a book about how it wraps its arms around the planet, entitle it "Global Bully" or "Bossy Busybody," but be aware that you're not telling us much about imperialism. **CT**

Michael Parenti's recent books include: God and His Demons (Prometheus 2010); Contrary Notions: The Michael Parenti Reader (City Lights); The Assassination of Julius Caesar (New Press), Superpatriotism (City Lights), The Culture Struggle (Seven Stories Press). For further information, visit his website: www.michaelparenti.org

Empires are enormously profitable for the dominant economic interests of the imperial nation but enormously costly to the people of the colonized country

READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT
<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

The dark curtain of totalitarianism

Sherwood Ross has a warning for US citizens as the FBI renews its raids on antiwar activists

Uncle Sam here might be a trifle jealous of private citizens' backing violent entities when it has always assumed it had a superpower's exclusive franchise to fund violence

You might give the FBI the benefit of the doubt that it had some incriminating evidence when it raided the homes of eight antiwar activists in Minneapolis and Chicago September 24th except for the fact that its past record in such cases is stinko. The FBI broke down Mick Kelly's door around 7 a.m., and it wasn't to get an early cup of coffee from a man employed as a food service worker at the University of Minnesota. The agents were probing to see if the occupants of any of the homes they burst into were supporting "terror organizations." Uncle Sam here might be a trifle jealous of private citizens' backing violent entities when it has always assumed it had a superpower's exclusive franchise to fund violence.

The Midwest raids are correctly seen as "a US government attempt to silence those who support resistance to oppression and violence in the Middle East and Latin America," by the International Action Center of New York, an anti-militarist group. Kelly, after all, was a key figure in organizing the successful 2008 anti-war street protests that embarrassed the Republican National Convention in St. Paul. In today's America, standing up for peace automatically makes you a terror suspect.

Concerning the FBI's record of past transgressions, the *Chicago Tribune* reported Sept. 21, "FBI agents improperly opened investiga-

tions into Greenpeace and several other domestic advocacy groups after the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, and put the names of some members on terrorist watch lists based on evidence that turned out to be 'factually weak,' the Justice Department said Monday." The evidence against the 1-million other Americans on the no-fly lists likely is equally flimsy.

Last year, Justice Department's own Inspector General (IG) found many subjects of closed FBI investigations "were not taken off the list in a timely manner, and tens of thousands of names were placed on the list without appropriate basis," the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported. And *The Tribune* added that an internal review by the IG concluded that the FBI was guilty of improprieties but did not purposely target the groups or their members. (See, it *wasn't on purpose. The FBI just makes tens of thousands of mistakes with other people's lives and reputations.*)

The travails of Mick Kelly increasingly are being repeated across the US against many others in a variety of unconstitutional ways, according to a review of President Obama's first 18 months in office by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which fears Obama is "normalizing" some of the egregious practices of predecessor George W. ("The Invader") Bush. There is a very "real danger," the ACLU says, Obama "will enshrine perma-

nently within the law policies and practices that were widely considered extreme and unlawful” during the Bush regime. These include denying the very rights of torture victims to bring suit in the US Court, the refusal to release torture photos and refusing to prosecute the torturers, plus keeping secret the records of his predecessor’s policies on rendition, detention and interrogation. Like any odious dictator of the past, Obama claims he can hold 48 Guantanamo detainees indefinitely without charge or trial; and that, like Russia’s Joseph Stalin who had rival Leon Trotsky assassinated in Mexico, he can reach out and kill any of his citizens anywhere in the world without trial.

Obama’s regime has manufactured “kill lists” of suspected terrorists, including US citizens, he claims he can eradicate with impunity. The creation of these lists, as far as we know, is done without judicial review, totally in secret. As the ACLU points out, “Such a program of long-premeditated and bureaucratized killing is plainly not limited to targeting genuinely imminent threats.” It is “far more sweeping than the law allows and raises grave constitutional and human rights concerns. As applied to US citizens, it is a grave violation of the constitutional guarantee of due process.”

The ACLU further notes over the past eight years the US has repeatedly detained persons as “terrorists” only to discover later the evidence was “weak, wrong, or non-existent.” The very idea of killing terror “suspects,” therefore, is chilling.

Besides dispatching the FBI to break down the doors of peacemongers, Obama has expanded the warrantless electronic eavesdropping on American citizens and has told border agents they can “engage in suspicionless searching of Americans’ laptops and cell phones at the border,” the ACLU says. Its report adds that Americans’ returning home “may now find themselves confronted with a border agent who...insists on copying their electronic records – including emails, address books, photos, and videos – before allowing them to enter the country.”

What’s more, the ACLU has learned, border agents have used this power “thousands of times.” And rather than reform the watch lists, Obama’s regime “has expanded their use and resisted the introduction of minimal due process safeguards” while adding “thousands of names to the No Fly List, sweeping up many innocent individuals,” ACLU says.

As a result, the watchdog organization warns, “US citizens and lawful permanent residents have been stranded abroad, unable to return to the United States. Others are unable to visit family on the opposite end of the country or abroad. Individuals on the list are not told why they are on the list and thus have no meaningful opportunity to object or to rebut the government’s allegations.” ACLU calls this “an unconstitutional scheme under which an individual’s right to travel...is under the complete control of entirely unaccountable bureaucrats relying on secret evidence and using secret standards.”

And is the US public outraged over these denials of their basic liberties as the Colonists were outraged by the transgressions of King George? Apparently, not that much. A poll early this year by McClatchy News Service-Ipsos found “51 percent of Americans agreeing that ‘it is necessary to give up some civil liberties in order to make the country safe from terrorism.’” With President Obama following Stalin’s lead in claiming his right to kill citizens overseas without trial, in controlling citizens’ right to travel, in asserting citizens’ can be arrested and held indefinitely, and that citizens’ homes can be broken into on the flimsiest pretexts, maybe the Treasury Department should issue a two-dollar bill with Stalin’s picture on the far left and Obama’s on the far right, portrayed shaking hands. They seem to have more in common every day. **CT**

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Is the US public outraged over these denials of their basic liberties as the Colonists were outraged by the transgressions of King George? Apparently, not that much

Why George Mitchell said 'No' to Hamas

Ramzy Baroud tells why the US won't find a place for Hamas and Gaza in the Middle Eastern peace talks with Israel

The Gaza Strip was placed under siege due to the Hamas' victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections, which robbed Abbas and his movement from any legitimacy in holding negotiations with Israel

One key difference between Hamas and its rival, the Fatah movement in the West Bank, is that Hamas is accountable to a much more complex set of priorities and expectations. While Fatah is effortlessly co-opted, Hamas remains confined by ideological standards and the stringiest political space. Although, on one hand this represents Hamas' greatest strength, on the other it shows just how truly arduous is its political undertaking.

The difference is relevant in light of the resumption of talks between Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington, followed by another round of talks in the Middle East. Both once more raised the question: can Israel and Fatah achieve peace without Hamas' involvement?

The question itself can be interpreted in more ways than one. Dan Murphy, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor* on September 16, asked: Can ignoring Hamas lead to Israeli-Palestinian peace? Murphy, unlike many in the US media, had enough insight to see the issue as worthy of discussion. His use of the word 'ignoring', however, is greatly misguided.

"But there's a crucial missing element that will undoubtedly trouble the Israeli-Palestinian talks as they move ahead. Gaza, the Palestinian enclave ruled by the Islamist Hamas movement, is not at the table," Mur-

phy wrote. With that he offered his version of what not 'ignoring' Hamas requires. Far from 'engaging' the party, it simply means placing Gaza, that lonely enclave ruled by Islamic Hamas, on the table.

Gaza, however, is not merely one issue among many. It represents the heart of the matter. The Gaza Strip was placed under siege due to the Hamas' victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections, which robbed Abbas and his movement from any legitimacy in holding negotiations with Israel.

The suffocating siege on that resilient and overcrowded strip was Israel's attempt at quashing what could have been a promising democratic experience, with the potential to inspire many more democratic revolutions in the Middle East. Israel's action was supported by the US and much of Europe, as well as some Arab countries.

Yet, considering the layers of meaning that Gaza and Hamas represent in any future settlement in the Middle East, it seems utterly bizarre that US President Obama's Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, answered with a simple "no" when he was recently asked whether Washington will reach out to Hamas.

"No" seems both too simple and too harsh, considering the gravity of the situation. Even if the US administration wishes to write off Palestinian democracy altogether, one would think that a sensible foreign policy would

at least wrangle with the Hamas dilemma. The Obama administration cannot be serious about a lasting peace while continuing to play the same nonsensical good guys/bad guys, carrot and stick political games that were also employed by Bush.

On the other hand, the resumption of talks between Fatah's Abbas and Israel is a blessing in disguise for Hamas. Very few in the Middle East, and even fewer Palestinians will see in Abbas a legitimate and representative leader. If anything, Abbas' constant appearance with the very Israeli leader who is robbing Palestine's land and subjugating and exacting racist laws against its population will further diminish his discredited profile. Naturally, Abbas' political loss is Hamas' gain.

In fact, it was this very 'peace process' that destroyed late Palestinian leader Yasser's Arafat's political resume. It tarnished his reputation and split his party. Arafat is remembered fondly because of his last stance and death under Israeli siege in Ramallah. His political failure through the years, however, gave Hamas its real birth as a mainstream political movement. Abbas is simply boosting Hamas' already high political stocks. His future failures will deposit even more credit into Hamas' account.

But that too represents a serious challenge to Hamas. Politically isolated abroad, physically besieged and constantly derided by the media, Hamas can hardly use its rising political profile among Palestinians, or translate its gains into any tangible returns in or outside Palestine. Abbas knows this fully, which explains his interest in Israel maintaining its siege on Hamas and Gaza. Netanyahu understands this as well, which explains his government's insistence on holding still, despite the PR disaster that Gaza has earned his country. The US also fully agrees, thus Mitchell's callous, yet telling "no" regarding a possible engagement with Hamas.

Abbas, despite his authority's lack of legitimacy and shrinking popularity among Palestinians, remains the best option of a 'Palestinian leadership' as far as the US is

concerned. He is flexible, both morally and politically. His Authority's bread and butter are US funds and US-Western political validation. Abbas gleaned from the Gaza experience that popular democracy is worthless in the age of draconian sieges and Blitzkriegs. In fact he used both the siege and the Israel war on Gaza to strengthen his political stance and to bargain with the US. But his language and action will remain predictable.

While 'engaging' Hamas, however that is interpreted, is the only right option if the US is truly interested in locating a legitimate Palestinian leadership, Hamas is likely to prove a much tougher bargainer.

Not only is Hamas ideologically grounded – based on firm nationalistic and religious dictates – but its target audience is not just a few heads of states. Hamas' audience is Palestinians at home and abroad, Arab and Muslim populations and to lesser degree civil societies elsewhere. This is a complex demographic, which requires an articulate political thinking and language, which Hamas is not yet able to offer.

Fatah under Arafat was held accountable largely to Arab governments, and later to the US and Western donors. At the same time, it valiantly resented Israeli pressures. Under Abbas, Fatah is held accountable to all the above with little resentment. While Hamas factors all of these players into its political calculation, it is also liable to its commitment to its Palestinian constituency as incorruptible, uncompromising and committed to resistance.

In order for Hamas to become politically manageable, from the US point of view, it would have to depart from these commitments, and become as politically flexible, predictable and controllable as Fatah and Abbas. The US can only work with a weak Palestinian leadership which it can easily manipulate. Hamas, thus far, doesn't fit the criterion, thus the lack of any prospect of 'engagement', and the continued betting on Abbas and Netanyahu, despite the predictable - and possibly disastrous - outcome of their talks.

CT

This is a complex demographic, which requires an articulate political thinking and language, which Hamas is not yet able to offer

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Which way to the revolution?

Is there a need for violent revolt to bring change to society? Ted Rall says ‘Yes’, but **David Swanson** is not so sure

From these statements, scattered throughout the manifesto, one would have no idea that anyone else believed there was a third choice beyond violence or doing nothing

Ted Rall’s *The Anti-American Manifesto* advocates for violent revolution, even if we have to join with rightwingers and racists to do it, and even if we have no control over the outcome which could easily be something worse than what we’ve got. We have a moral duty, Rall argues, to kill some people.

Now, I much prefer a debate over what radical steps to take to a debate over whether it’s really appropriate for President Obama to whine about people’s lack of enthusiasm for voting. Should we try to pep people up for him or gently nudge him to appoint a new chief of staff who’s not a vicious warmongering corporatist? Rall’s book is packed with great analysis of our current state and appropriate moral outrage. I highly recommend it for the clear-eyed survey of the tides in this giant pot of slowly boiling water where we float and kick about like frogs. To an Obama proposal to create 17,000 jobs, Rall replies: “The U.S. economy needs to add one hundred thousand new jobs a month to keep up with population growth and keep the unemployment

rate even. At this writing, in March 2010, it would require four hundred thousand new jobs each month for three years to get back to December 2007.

“Seventeen thousand jobs? Was Obama still using drugs?”

I recommend Rall’s manifesto as a call to action. The only question is what action?

There, the book is much weaker. As people come to terms with the need for radical action, we need to provide them with a serious debate of the alternatives. Many will drift inevitably toward violence, unaware of any choice. To not present the alternatives, whether to argue for or against them, is less than helpful.

According to Rall, “no meaningful political change has ever taken place without violence or the credible threat of violence.” And, “without violence, the powerful will never stop exploiting the weak.” From these statements, scattered throughout the manifesto, one would have no idea that anyone else believed there was a third choice beyond violence or doing nothing. There is no indication here of the role of nonviolence in evict-



ing the British from India or overthrowing the ruler of El Salvador in 1944, or even in ending Jim Crow in the United States and Apartheid in South Africa, in the popular removal of the ruler of the Philippines in 1986, in the largely nonviolent Iranian Revolution of 1979, in the dismantling of the Soviet Union in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, in the resistance to a stolen election in the Ukraine in 2004-2005, and in hundreds of other examples from around the world.

Rall makes this claim about U.S. political struggles: “[P]acifism has been the state religion of the official Left since the end of the Vietnam War. Can it be a coincidence that progressives cannot point to a single significant political victory since the early 1970s?” It could be a coincidence, yes, or it could be that what we have lacked since the early 1970s has been serious resistance to power – which does not answer the question of which would have been more effective and which still could be, violent or nonviolent resistance.

The two points I found most persuasive in Rall’s case for violence were points he may not have intended as planks in that argument, an argument that – again – he does not so much make as assume. The first point is that, even as people are refraining from killing CEOs and politicians, they are not refraining from killing. In increasing numbers, they are killing themselves. They are losing their homes, their health-care, their savings. They are being forced into debt-slavery, humiliating misery, and hopelessness, and – for lack of any other approach – are killing themselves. It’s not clear that assassinating the powerful wouldn’t make things even worse, but it is worth noting that people are killing the innocent and not the guilty.

The second point is that people are not just killing themselves. They are killing random innocents as well, former coworkers, family members, and strangers. We are perfectly capable of ending such violence. Redirecting it is not our only available op-

tion. But in contemplating violence, we are not starting from a nonviolent state.

And, of course, the impoverishment of millions of people has resulted in a shortened life expectancy in the wealthiest place on earth, a place where some are able to indulge in the greatest and most wasteful luxury ever seen. But Rall makes no argument for his root assumption that our choices are to kill people or “sit on our asses.” Rall wants jobs created at a rate that approaches the actual need. He wants corporations nationalized and brought under control. He wants an end to eight-figure bonuses on Wall Street. His solution is “a hundred thousand angry New Yorkers armed with bricks (or guns).”

Now, I’m not suggesting you have to know something will go perfectly before you try it, but shouldn’t you try the approach most likely to work the best? And shouldn’t we know what has and has not worked before? Rall claims that the 1999 Battle of Seattle slowed corporate globalization because a few people broke a few windows. Yet, many people who were there and engaged in that struggle point to the nonviolent blocking of the streets that prevented the conference from being held, and the moral force of the broad coalition that took over the city and won allies even within the halls of corporate power. This was done despite, not because of, a few jerks smashing windows.

I share with Rall his concern that people think they have no choices and his conviction that something must be done. If it were impossible to organize committed, independent, uncorrupted nonviolent resistance with the dedication necessary to succeed, if violence were our only option, we’d have to look into it. But I suspect organized violence would be harder to bring forth than organized nonviolence. Rall attempts no argument to the contrary. He predicts a hellish nightmare with or without his violent revolution. I predict peace, sustainability, and justice if we nonviolently resist. A deeper debate is needed. **CT**

It’s not clear that assassinating the powerful wouldn’t make things even worse, but it is worth noting that people are killing the innocent and not the guilty

David Swanson
is the author of
*Daybreak: Undoing
the Imperial
Presidency and
Forming a More
Perfect Union*

Time to dismantle the empire

We should take note of Chalmers Johnson's thoughts about the future of the American empire, writes **Jim Miles**

The numbers are somewhat astounding for their significance with both foreign and domestic policy

That the empire has caused much trouble and is in trouble itself has been well documented and well explained by many current authors. Chalmers Johnson, who wrote *Blowback* – at the time an unheralded piece of research – and two more volumes, *Sorrows of Empire* and *Nemesis* that became the *Blowback* trilogy, has since written a series of essays that are concise, clear, hard-hitting, and undeniably for *Dismantling the Empire*.

The essential theme of the book is that the US must dismantle its empire or face a future of poverty and strife within a divided nation. As these essays were written over a period of five years, there is some reiteration of information – particularly on the military bases and their costs and effects on the economy (not to mention all the other costs to the ‘host’ countries). Yet that only reinforces the significance of Johnson’s thesis, as the numbers are somewhat astounding for their significance with both foreign and domestic policy. As the title indicates, to save the US as a democratic republic, the empire must be dismantled. If not....

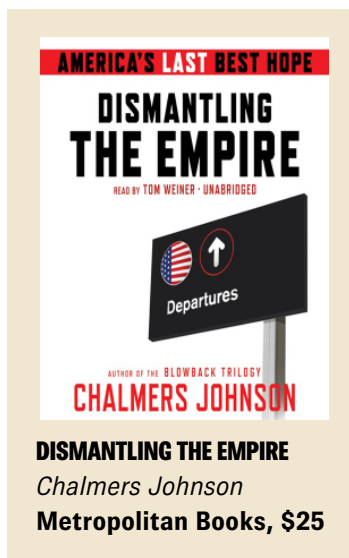
There are three main points that Johnson presents his arguments on:

- 1) the CIA should be shut down.
- 2) the overseas military bases need to be dismantled.
- 3) economy – the pork-barrelling of politicians within the military-industrial complex also needs to be shut down.

Straight forward. Basic. Logical. Not elegant, but very simple – at least for conception. If these actions are not taken, Johnson argues, the “long-standing reliance on imperialism and militarism in our relations with other countries and the vast, potentially ruinous global empire of bases that goes with it” will lead to “a devastating trio of consequences: imperial overstretch, perpetual war, and insolvency, leading to a likely collapse similar to that of the former Soviet Union.”

For anyone following current events covering the environment, the economy, and the “war on terror” or

the “long war”, these conclusions should be obvious. The introduction ends, commenting, “None of this [is] inevitable, although it may [be] unavoidable given the hubris and arrogance of our national leadership.”



The CIA is covered in three of the essays, two directly related to its ineptitude. The first essay, “Blowback World,” focuses on events that led into US involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, beginning with the CIA’s introduction into covert actions in Afghanistan six months before the Soviet invasion. The CIA was supposedly an intelligence gathering and assessment operation, but included “a vaguely worded passage that allowed the CIA to “perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct” – that turned the CIA into the personal, secret, unaccountable army of the president.”

The CIA’s ineptitude is evident in many areas, from 9/11 through the war on Iraq, and the current imbroglios in Afghanistan and Pakistan (from imbroglio: a complicated and embarrassing state of things; a serious misunderstanding, Webster’s Dictionary). Johnson says of the analysis and sharing of information, “the early-warning functions of the CIA were upstaged decades ago by covert operations.” Even then, the main ‘successes’ of the CIA derived not from skill or intelligence but handfuls of greenbacks. His conclusion: “I believe the CIA has outlived any Cold War justification it once might have had and should simply be abolished.”

This is reiterated in the second essay on the CIA, a review of Tim Weiner’s book *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, where the conclusion is “the CIA has failed badly... and it would be an important step... simply to abolish it.” As for the security of the country being enhanced, after the ‘blowback’ effects of the Mossadegh coup, all the coups and para-military police training in torture and assassination at the School of the Americas, and the Afghanistan mujahideen assistance against the Soviets indicates, the lesson is “that an incompetent or unscrupulous intelligence agency can be as great a threat to national security as not having one at all.”

Johnson’s prime target has been the extensive military bases that encircle the globe. The reason for these bases “is to expand our

empire and reinforce our military domination of the world.” The question then is, why dominate the world militarily? Consumption. Money. Resources. “Our empire exists so we can exploit a much greater share of the world’s wealth than we are entitled to, and so we can prevent other nations from combining against us to take their rightful share.”

After all his arguments about the costs of the bases, their effects on other nations and their people, Johnson is even more direct with his evaluation of the outcome if the bases are not dismantled:

“hanging on to our military empire and all the bases that go with it will ultimately spell the end of the United States as we know it.”

The third factor that is the basic one for all the arguments about the decline and fall of the empire is economic. This concern can be sub-texted in several ways: the costs of the mercenary armies; the pork-barrel economy of a Congress that “is no longer responsive to the people;” the military bases as introduced above; and the industrial economy based within the Pentagon.

Johnson reiterates that the military economy of the US is more than that of all the other world militaries combined, with many unknowns including the black hole of the unaccountable Pentagon. Another factor is the money used for the military is money not used for infrastructure of anything else like hospitals, transportation, education, or a social safety net, all of which would be much more highly beneficial to the people of the United States. It is impossible to know what ‘innovations’ would or would not have risen from technological knowledge, although previous histories would indicate that technology that has helped humans has operated more or less independently of the various imperial armies of the past. Money spent on the military – in spite of the pork-barrel politics that disperses the money around every state in many different industries from Lockheed Martin and Boeing to Kodak and Intel to garner leverage for votes in congress – does not help the economy, but hinders its growth.

“Our empire exists so we can exploit a much greater share of the world’s wealth than we are entitled to, and so we can prevent other nations from combining against us to take their rightful share”

BOOK REVIEW

China and Japan are major owners of US debt and could sink the US dollar in an instant if that were required due to unexpected military adventurism that appeared to be endangering their rising prosperity

One of the largest factors for the economy is the sheer size of the budget for the military, estimated at over a trillion dollars a year, all of which needs to be borrowed from foreign countries. China and Japan are major owners of US debt and could sink the US dollar in an instant if that were required due to unexpected military adventurism that appeared to be endangering their rising prosperity. The consequences of the US military economy is “we face probable national insolvency and a long depression....the bankruptcy of the United States is inevitable.”

The military economy is also affected by the current trend in privatization of garrisoning the bases, the employment of private security firms, and the ‘public-private’ partnerships in US corporate structures that are “a convenient cover for the perpetuation of corporate interests.”

The corporate sector has become a “dominant partner with the state,” fulfilling the argument that fascism should be called corporatism “because it was a merger of state and corporate power.” Because “a corporation [is] less amenable to public or congressional scrutiny,” these relationships “afford the private sector an added measure of security from [public] scrutiny.” The main motive of big business is “to replace democratic institutions with those representing the interests of capital.” This latter point is obvious when the institutions of the ‘Washington consensus’ – the IMF, World Bank – and other more obvious corporate entities such as the WTO

and the OECD are deciding many of the rules of international economic interaction.

All of which means that democracy is taking a hit. Johnson is quite clear and explicit in the matter – the United States can either be an empire, or it can be a democracy, it cannot be both. The “consequences for democratic governance” of “military and intelligence functions....may prove irreparable.”

Could it be made any more clear? Chalmers Johnson has not pulled any punches, nor worded his arguments in polite academic arguments or obscure wording. It seems so simple and obvious to some that serious changes are required if the US is to be a democracy and a model to the rest of the world rather than an imperial overlord extracting resources at the expense of many lives, the democratic ideal, and much anger and hatred directed at the US. Using examples of the British and Soviet empires, Johnson concludes “If we do not learn from their examples, our decline and fall is foreordained.”

Johnson’s longer works provide ample evidence and arguments to back up his shorter essays (which are also well referenced). *Dismantle the Empire* is a must read for anyone looking for a quick, concise, and meaningful information concerning the future of the American Empire. **CT**

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Heavy on atmosphere, light on anger

Film maker **Danny Schechter** takes a critical look at *Wall Street 2*, Oliver Stone's new take on Wall Street

The lead headline in the *New York Times* is “Extensive Fraud Appears To Mar Afghan Election.” The line below, “A Blow To Credibility,” as if anyone who follows Afghanistan, a country known for blatant and notorious corruption was at all surprised by this latest “blow.” This “blow” followed an earlier “blow” a few weeks back with the disclosure of the crash of the Kabul Bank with \$300 billion still unaccounted for.

In America, another fraud: CNN reported the next morning that the pathetic blonde beauty-celebrity Lindsay Lohan put up \$300,000 to get out of jail. That's the kind of story American media considers worthy of constant “Breaking News” attention.

When will we see headlines like “Extensive Fraud Appears To Mar Economic Recovery” or “Extensive Fraud Led To Financial Collapse?” I ask this question knowing the answer, after two recent back-to-back film experiences.

On September 23, I spoke at a packed screening of my film *Plunder: The Crime Of Our Time* that indicts financial crimes and corruption behind the financial crisis. The audience seemed overwhelmingly positive except for one Wall Streeter in the house who insisted that while there may have been “ethical lapses,” no crimes were committed, an expression of a conventional wisdom that most of the media has reinforced without in-

vestigating any evidence.

At a reception after the film in suburban Long Island's Cinema Arts Center, several people told me that one impact the crisis has had on them is sleeplessness because of anxiety over whether will can pay their bills and avoid joblessness or foreclosure.

Ironically, film director Oliver Stone also had sleep on his mind. “Money Never Sleeps” is the subtitle of his remake of the movie *Wall Street*. To my surprise, the theater was not packed on opening night for a film distributed, ironically, by the money-mad mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corpse. You would think that the outspoken Stone, known for conspiracizing, would be slaying some dragons.

Think again.

After watching the movie, I realized why the right-wing Rupert Murdoch could be comfortable enough releasing the latest from the nominally left-wing Oliver Stone. The movie built an “explainer” around a love story that in the end was as much as about child-parent conflicts and pretentious philosophizing as the collapse of Wall Street which is treated, ultimately, with a “we are all to blame” viewpoint. In many ways the movie celebrates the brash culture of greed and excess of our era while we watch the return of Michael Douglas' portrayal of Gordon Gekko, infamous in earlier times for the slogan “Greed Is Good.”

In many ways the movie celebrates the brash culture of greed and excess of our era while we watch the return of Michael Douglas' portrayal of Gordon Gekko, infamous in earlier times for the slogan “Greed Is Good”

FILM REVIEW

More disturbing was the film's failure to call for any action. It starts with Gekko getting out of jail and getting back in the industry. So jail, in the end means nothing

Now, Stone sees greed everywhere, and suggests there ain't much we can do about it. A Wall Street insider writes on the Self-evident blog, "the film somehow lacks any relatable misery. The human costs of the larger crisis remain abstract. The traders that the film revolves around talk about the market crash as if they are spectators and not participants." He concludes, "we produce some beautiful art, but do we ever butcher the facts." Facts, for example, about mortgages designed to fail and an epidemic of fraud encouraged by Wall Street. The film reinforces impressions, but offers no revelations.

Gekko does offer up some good lines but the movie is more about personal redemption than financial crime. He says, "The mother of all evils is speculation – leveraged debt." He claims the economy is merely moving money around in circles and the business model itself is like a "cancer."

True, but he's more concerned with winning back his daughter's love.

I saw many of the stories I report in my film turn up in his, with the same lines. These led to a few uncharitable suspicions as I had given him a copy of my film with a request for his help months earlier. Then again, maybe great minds think alike.

In an interview on CNN, Stone seemed to argue that free speech is more of an issue than the insolvency of the banks. He became totally obsessed with the rumors that brought down Bear Stearns, an issue my film explores in depth.

In it, he said, "What shocked me back in 2009, was that Goldman Sachs and those type of banks were really going long and short at the same time and were actually selling out on their clients. I thought that was shocking information to me, **as well** as the power of rumor, which, amazing. We show the power of that and how it can destroy a company. ... I'm not so sure that's good for the system, although it's more transparent. But it does lead to circles of viciousness and rumor and hype and a stock, as you know, drops. I mean, look at what happened a few months ago, right? The market just crashed. So what's going to

happen? It does scare me, and I think it's the nature of the modern world, I suppose."

The website Ml-implode.com commented: "There you go, "rumor," mentioned as a causative factor 4 or 5 times; insolvency/leverage? Zero. Those poor, poor Wall Street banks – they're victims, you know."

The movie dances on all sides of the issues actually featuring an on camera cameo by Stone, of course, and Grayon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair*, whom I quote in the my film and book, *The Crime Of Our Time*, because he labeled the crisis "the greatest non-violent crime in history" Stone feints towards that view but ultimately rejects it.

Wall Street 2 features a father-son subtext as the young banker played by Shia LaBeouff watches as his mentor at a firm made to resemble Bear Stearns, or is it Lehman Brothers, commits suicide after the company is brought down by rumors and dirty tricks. In the end, he marries and has a son with Gekko's daughter who, natch, runs a left-wing website.

Their kid is named Louie after the banker who died. Undisclosed is that Stone's dad who worked on Wall Street was also a Lou. Clearly this movie was as much about the personal psychodrama of Stone's life as are many of his earlier films about the ghosts of Vietnam. His movies about Nixon and W also featured father-son conflicts. The banker who died by jumping into the subway, Frank Langella, recently played Nixon in the movie about David Frost's interview.

More disturbing was the film's failure to call for any action. It starts with Gekko getting out of jail and getting back in the industry. So jail, in the end means nothing.

Many Wall Streeters interviewed about the film seemed confused about its message and meandering plot points. Most (including myself) liked the luscious cinematography of New York that even profiled Bernie Madoff's former office, and featured David Byrne's great music.

The pro-free market Daily Bell wrote; "Always, Oliver Stone seems a propagandist and apologist... Would it be any news to him that

the United States is over-extended from a monetary and military standpoint? Or that Fed money printing was the proximate cause of the economic crash. It should not be too hard to figure this out.”

Critic Roger Ebert liked the film but added, “I wish it had been angrier. I wish it had been outraged. Maybe Stone’s instincts are correct, and American audiences aren’t ready for that. They haven’t had enough of Greed.”

Was it those “instincts” that led to the pandering, or was it just the logic of the market or Murdoch’s neutering its critical edge with an insistence to “Just tell us an entertaining story if you want this to be big.” He was going to make the film before the crash – when it might have warned us – but waited to try to become the ultimate word. Alas, he isn’t.

In my experience, audiences are furious

about what’s happened to them and the country. And near the month’s end Paul Volker warned that the financial system is still broken.

Others fear another crash is only just a matter of time. This reality is not evident on Oliver Stone’s radar screen.

After my screening, a man named Milton told me he is active in The Democratic Party but that the Dems will not really act against Wall Street. “They don’t have the guts,” he said. Can the same be said about Oliver Stone, who loves the Hugo Chavez’s of the world *South Of The Border*, but echoes CNBC here at home?

CT

News Dissector Danny Schechter directed *Plunder The Crime of Our Time*. details at www.plunderthecrimeofourtime.com

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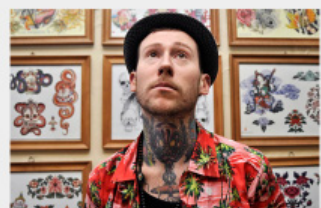
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