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**COVID-SPREADING FARTS OF DEATH** | *Tony Sutton*  
**THE 21ST-CENTURY'S NEW GREAT GAME** | *Conn Hallinan*  
**TECH ANTS ON A TOURBUS** | *Joe Allen*

ISSUE 213

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

September 2020



Woman the Republicans call a Marxist

**WHEN PARENTS FEAR THEIR CHILDREN**

**Covid 19: Who could have known?**

www.coldtype.net  
TIPPING THE NUCLEAR DOMINOES | Conn Hallinan  
SLAUGHTER OF THE OTHER INNOCENTS | Trevor Grundy  
THE VOLCANOS ARE ALIVE ... | Joe Allen

ISSUE 209  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
July 2020

# The Great Purge

The US Presidential Election will be decided in just four months. But the fix is already in, and millions of young, poor, and minorities will be robbed of their votes

An excerpt from Greg Palast's new book, **HOW TRUMP STOLE 2020**



www.coldtype.net  
LET'S NOT FALL INTO THE AUSTERITY TRAP | Linda McQuay  
PHILIP K. DICK AND ENGLISH MASS MURDERERS | Trevor Hoyle  
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, BILLIONAIRE-STYLE | Sam Pizzigati

ISSUE 207  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
June 2020



# Facing the Future

Just a few months ago wearing a mask in a supermarket would have led to a police callout. Now it's normal. **Devon Walker** | Page 12

www.coldtype.net  
ABOVE THE LAW: RISE OF THE WARRIOR-COPS | William J. Astore  
FORGOTTEN COUP AGAINST 'THE MOST LOYAL ALLY' | John Pilger  
REVERSING ORWELL'S MOST FAMOUS ROUTE | Trevor Hoyle

ISSUE 208  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
Mid-June 2020



# NO TRUE FRIENDS IN A RACE WAR

"By the time I arrived in downtown Oakland, California, the protests were peaceful. Young people marched and chanted against a backdrop of fresh graffiti and boarded-up windows. Most of their signs were scrawled with "DEFUND THE COPS" or "WHITE SILENCE IS VIOLENCE" or "BLACK LIVES MATTER". Perhaps a month's power really does lie in repetition. A woman in a slow-welling Eldorado convertible, flanked by marchers, held up a sign that read: "POLICE BRUTALITY IS SMALL DICK ENERGY". Her phrase cuts to the heart of the issue - the male drive for dominance yields endless cruelty." **- JOE ALLEN** | PAGE 13

www.coldtype.net  
OVERWHELMED BY PROPAGANDA | Caitlin Johnstone  
SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES | George Monbiot  
PLAYING GAMES WITH PRISON LIFE | Alan MacLeod

ISSUE 210  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
Mid-July 2020

# The place where Heaven meets Hell

On the path from Mt. Hood to Portland / Joe Allen



ISSUE 200  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
Mid-February 2020



A stronger, more committed, and more determined global peace movement could tame the US war machine / Moshe Benjamin & Nicholas JS Davis - PAGE 33

www.coldtype.net  
OPPRESSION, CENSORSHIP AND FEAR | Trevor Grundy  
PERSECUTED FOR TELLING THE TRUTH | Alan MacLeod  
HOLDING PENS FOR THE HOPE



Andrea Mazzarino tells how war has targeted kids in the post-9/11 years, and asks: isn't it time we provided learning opportunities that are less likely to kill or maim them?

**READ COLDTYPE'S BACK ISSUES**

www.coldtype.net  
TIME TO END WAR PROFITTEERING | Sarah Anderson  
2019 - STUPID, EXPENSIVE AND IDIOTIC | Conn Hallinan  
THE GLOBAL WAR OF ERROR | Tom Engelhardt

ISSUE 198  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
Mid-January 2020



Worried that this month's Iran-US confrontation could herald an all-out fight that will end in global annihilation? Forget it! We've had that war and global capitalism won, writes CJ Hopkins

www.coldtype.net  
NEW YORK: A TALE OF TWO SURGES | Bill Van Auken  
LEADERS AREN'T SCARED OF A VIRUS, BUT OF US! | Jonathan Cook  
A LETTER FROM THE END OF THE WORLD | Tim Knight

ISSUE 205  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
April 2020



**THE WAR ON DEATH**  
For those of us who remember the War on Terror, the new war is just like that, except now the enemy is Death. **C.J. Hopkins** - Page 12

**HOARDERS vs. GOUGERS**  
Andrea Fischer

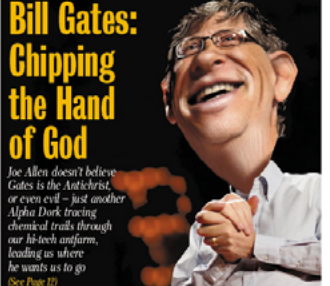
**CELEBRITY P51-CPS**  
Caitlin Johnstone

**THE OTHER AFRICANS**  
David Goldblatt

**STAY HOME, STAY ANGRY**  
Jill Richardson

www.coldtype.net  
WELCOME TO THE GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT | Jonathan Cook  
JUST LIKE LIVING UNDER THE BUBONIC PLAGUE | Ute Lotz-Heumann  
COME IN, NUMBER THREE | Philip A. Farruggio

ISSUE 205  
**ColdType**  
WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING  
May 2020



# Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

Joe Allen doesn't believe Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil - just another Alpha Dark training chemical trails through our hi-tech uniforms, leading us where he wants us to go. (See Page 12)

at [www.coldtype.net/reader.html](http://www.coldtype.net/reader.html)  
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Issue 213 September 2020

# Contents

Writing Worth Reading | Photos Worth Seeing

## Insights

- 5 **The fox is still in the Post Office henhouse**  
*Sarah Anderson*
- 7 **Covid-spreading farts of death**  
*Tony Sutton*
- 8 **Finding our feet, regaining our freedom**  
*George Monbiot*
- 10 **Attack of the tomato killers**  
*John W. Whitehead*

## Issues

- 12 **Tech ants on a tourbus** / *Joe Allen*
- 18 **Stagecraft: A labour of love** / *Joe Allen*
- 23 **Trapped in the shadow of war** / *Beverly Gologorsky*
- 26 **Why Cuban doctors deserve the Nobel Prize**  
*V.J. Prashad*
- 29 **China & the US: The 21st-century's Great Game**  
*Conn Hallinan*
- 32 **When parents fear their changeling children**  
*Amy Binns*
- 34 **Heritage is home** / *Linh Dinh*
- 38 **Covid-19: Ready for 'no one could have known?'**  
*Thomas S. Harrington*
- 42 **Israel wages war on Palestine history**  
*Jonathan Cook*
- 44 **The woman Republicans call a Marxist**  
*W. Stephen Gilbert*
- 48 **The magical roots of modern science** / *Chris Gosden*
- 51 **Hurwitt's Eye** / *Mark Hurwitt*
- 52 **Moment of reckoning for gridiron greed**  
*Sam Pizzigati*
- 55 **Random Thoughts** / *Andrew Fischer*



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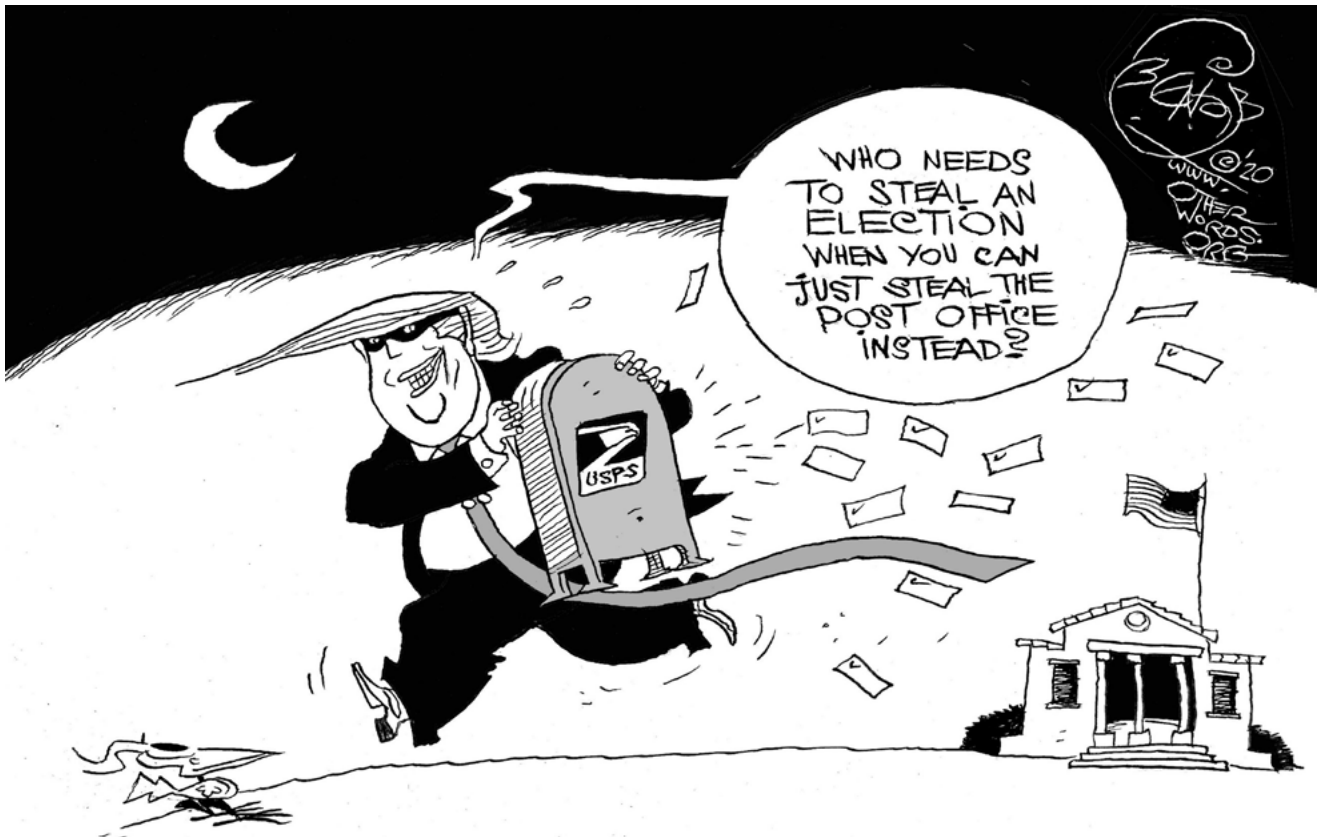
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News | Views | Opinions

# Insights

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Sarah Anderson

## The fox is still in the Post Office henhouse

**S**kyleigh Heinen, a US Army veteran who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis and anxiety, relies on the Postal Service for timely delivery of her meds to be able to function. She is one of thousands of Ameri-

cans who spoke out recently to demand an end to a forced slow-down in mail delivery.

The level of public outcry in defence of the public Postal Service is historic – and it’s having an impact.

Shortly after Postmaster General Louis DeJoy took the helm in June, it became clear that the fox had entered the henhouse. President Trump had gained a powerful ally in his efforts to decimate the Postal Service.

Instead of supporting his frontline workforce, DeJoy has made it harder for them to do their job. For example, he banned overtime, ordering employees to leave mail and packages behind if they could

# Insights

not deliver them during their regular schedule. Until this point, postal workers had been putting in extra hours to fill in for sick colleagues and handle a dramatic increase in shipments.

As the mail delays worsened, more than 600 high-volume mail sorting machines disappeared from postal facilities. Blue collection boxes vanished from neighbourhoods across the country. Postal managers faced a hiring freeze.

President Trump threw gas on the fire by gloating that, without the emergency relief he opposes, USPS couldn't handle the crisis-level demand for mail-in voting.

Outraged protestors converged outside DeJoy's ornate Washington, DC condo building and North Carolina mansion, and flooded congressional phone lines and social media. Political candidates held pop-up press conferences outside post offices.

At least 21 states filed lawsuits

to block DeJoy's actions, while singer Taylor Swift charged that Trump has "chosen to blatantly cheat and put millions of Americans' lives at risk in an effort to hold on to power".

After all this, DeJoy said that he's suspending his "initiatives" until after the election. This is a victory, but it's not enough. DeJoy's temporary move does not address concerns about the threats to the essential, affordable delivery services that USPS provides to every US home and business, or the decent postal jobs that support families in every US community. These needs will continue long past November 3.

Second, DeJoy has made no commitment to undo the damage he's already done. And he promised only to restore overtime "as needed". Will he replace all the missing mail-

sorting machines and blue boxes? Will he expand staff capacity to handle the backlog he's created and restore delivery standards?

Third, DeJoy makes no mention of the need for pandemic-related financial relief. USPS has not received a dime of the type of emergency cash assistance that Congress has awarded the airlines, Amtrak, and thousands of other private corporations.

While the pandemic has been a temporary boon to USPS package business, the recession has caused a serious drop in first-class mail, their most profitable product. Postal economic forecasters predict that Covid-related losses could amount to \$50-billion over the next decade.

DeJoy has proved he cannot be trusted to do the right thing on his own. Congress must step in and approve at least \$25-billion in postal relief – and legally block actions that undercut the ability of the Postal Service to serve all Americans, both today and beyond the election.

This is not a partisan fight. We will all be stronger if we can continue to rely on our public Postal Service for essential services, family-supporting jobs, and a fair and safe election. **CT**

*Sarah Anderson directs the Global Economy Project at the Institute for Policy Studies. More research on the Postal Service can be found on IPS site [www.Inequality.org](http://www.Inequality.org). This article was distributed by [www.OtherWords.org](http://www.OtherWords.org).*

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# Insights

Tony Sutton

## The Covid-spreading farts of death ...

August 18, 2019

10 a.m. – Before the Covid-19 smackdown, coffee was a mid-morning ritual. Jools and I would drive to our local cafe, order coffee, chat to the server, read the papers, and indulge in mindless banter with acquaintances for half an hour before fleeing when the ravenous lunchtime horde of schoolkids stormed in. Now the cafe has re-opened, so we decide it's time to slide gently into the New Normal.

Uh, oh, it's like walking into a crime scene. Most of the tables are taped off with black and yellow hazard tape. The staff wear masks and plastic face shields, the cashier sheltering behind the additional security of a large plexiglass screen. Jools attempts small talk as she orders, but it's impossible without shouting, so communication is limited to raised eyebrows and shrugged shoulders. As we find a space to sit, the floor manager jots Jools's name and telephone number into her notebook. "Contact tracing! In case we need to track you down later ..."

Another associate shuffles past, his broom pushing unseen germs away from our path.

"Bugger this!", mutters Jools, scanning the newly-sterile en-



Art: David Anderson / dandersonillustration.com

vironment. "It's a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Let's get outta here before Nurse Ratched comes in with her bloody needles". She nudges me towards the exit and freedom.

Outside, we sit at the only table not taped off. There's a large blob of concealed filling from a muffin congealing on the table. I cover it with serviettes that keep blowing away. Cars idle, their exhausts spewing noxious fumes, within touching distance in the adjacent drive-through lane. A driver stares, unfathomable eyes peering over tightly-fitted mask.

We drink quickly and leave.

11:30 a.m. – We're driving past an old people's retirement warehouse, where eight unfor-

tunates died at the height of the pandemic. "Hold your breath", I tell Jools, reminding her of how, as kids, we tried not to breathe the germs that might be escaping from the hospital close to our home in England. We laugh as we realise how those childhood fears refuse to die ...

1 p.m. – I'm walking to the shopping mall. Halfway along the route, detouring down a narrow path, I spot an elderly woman walking, head down, towards me. A few metres before we meet, she looks up, sees me, and dashes to one side, her back against the fence. Stunned by her reaction, I spin around. Zombie attack? Big dog with dripping fangs? Nope. Then I realise, it's me she's scared of. Well, perhaps not me – just my breath! ...

1:15 p.m. – The mall is almost deserted. I nose around a few shops, avoiding the large bottles of sanitiser at every entrance. Then I spot a sign in the bookstore welcoming back customers. That's nice, I think, before reading a big poster with seven instructions explaining how to be a considerate shopper. Rule Number Three advises that, once inside, "Please do not remain in the store longer than necessary". I give it a miss.

Instead, I head to the food court for another coffee. I'm not thirsty, but it's the only place I'm allowed to sit down, remove my mask, and breathe freely. There are a dozen or so mainly-unoccupied tables, each separated by

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# Insights

a self-isolation chasm, in a space where there used to be 50. A guy stands up to leave, whereupon a cleaning lady, masked and visored, swoops in, disinfectant spray in one hand, paper towel in the other. She smears gunge on everything, finishing with a vigorous scrub of the seat. Clearing away the Covid-spreading farts of death, I assume. We make eye contact. A small shrug of the shoulders, her mask twitches slightly. Was that a smile?

**2:15 p.m.** – Walking home, there's hardly any traffic, and not a soul in sight. I wonder what happened to the kids who are on holiday from school and their parents who aren't allowed to go to work. Where are they? Are they all sequestered in their home jails, hiding behind locked doors and tightly-drawn curtains awaiting that fateful Covid attack? Turning a corner, there's a family of four ambling in front of me. Slowing down, I dodge into the lane where I'd met the old lady earlier. Must be careful – perhaps *they* are the zombies she was so afraid of . . .

**5:00 p.m.** – Cameron, our teenage grandson arrives to stay for a couple of days. After a curry dinner, he digs into his backpack, retrieves his PS4, and hooks it into a big-screen computer monitor. The rest of the evening and half the night will reverberate with laughter as he plays *Fortnite* with his on-line pals. He'll crawl out of bed at 3 p.m. tomorrow, ready for breakfast. We don't judge: What else is a 13-year-old

expected to do after months of lockdown, daily scare stories and forced isolation?

**6:00 p.m.** – The TV news tells us Ontario has fewer than 100 new cases of Covid-19 and no deaths. Our town (population 40,000) has, according to the local paper's website, just three remaining cases, and a total of 11 deaths, including those eight oldies who died at the end of March. The figures couldn't really be any lower, but fear, not logic, is now the great emotional driver.

The kids are due to go back to school in three weeks, but terrified parents are adamant that

they will stay at home until the government slashes class sizes. Ontario premier Doug Ford blames the leaders of the teachers' unions, whom he accuses of "playing politics". The teachers, whose series of rolling strikes was interrupted by the pandemic, respond by charging Ford's government with "playing with children's lives".

Immovable object meets unstoppable force. Crashing impasse awaits inevitable compromise. Old Normal. New Normal. Some things just don't change. **CT**

*Tony Sutton is the editor of ColdType. – editor@coldtype.net.*

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*George Monbiot*

## *Finding our feet, regaining our freedom*

**B**oris Johnson's attack on planning laws is both very new and very old. It is new because it scraps the English system for deciding how land should be used, replacing it with something closer to the US model. It is old because it represents yet another transfer of power from the rest of us to the lords of the land, a process that has been happening, with occasional reversals, since 1066.

A power that in 1947 was secured for the public – the democratic right to influence the building that affects our lives – is now being retrieved by building

companies, developers and the people who profit most from development, the landowners. This is part of England's long tradition of enclosure: seizing a common good and giving it to the rich and powerful. Democracy is replaced with the power of money.

Almost all of us, in England and many other nations, are born on the wrong side of the law. The disproportionate weight the law gives to property rights makes nearly everyone a second-class citizen before they draw their first breath, fenced out of the good life we could lead.



# Insights

Our legislation's failure to moderate the claims of property denies other fundamental rights. Among them is equality before the law. If you own large tracts of land, a great weight of law sits on your side, defending your inordinate privileges from those who don't. We are forbidden to exercise a crucial democratic right – the right to protest – on all but the diminishing pockets of publicly-owned land. If we try to express dissent anywhere else, we can be arrested immediately.

The freedom to walk is as fundamental a right as freedom of speech, but in England it is denied across 92 percent of the land. Though we give landowners £3-billion a year from our own pockets in the form of farm subsidies, we are banned from most of what we pay for. The big estates have seized and walled off the most beautiful vistas in England. In many parts of the country, we are confined to narrow footpaths across depressing landscapes, surrounded by barbed wire. Those who cannot afford to travel and stay in the regions with greater access (mostly in the north-west) have nowhere else to go.

The pandemic has reminded us that access to land is critical to our mental and physical well-being. Children in particular desperately need wild and interesting places in which they can freely roam. A large body of research, endorsed by the government, suggests that our mental health is greatly enhanced by

connection to nature. Yet we are forced to skulk around the edges of our nation, unwelcome anywhere but in a few green cages and places we must pay to enter, while vast estates are reserved for single families to enjoy.

This government seeks not to redress the imbalance, but to exacerbate it. Its proposal to criminalise trespass would deny the rights of travelling people (Gypsies, Roma and Travellers) to pursue their lives. It also threatens to turn landowners'



Photo: Justin Vorbach

fences into prison walls.

The government's proposed award to landowners and builders, of blanket planning permission across great tracts of England, will tilt the law even further towards property. Housing estates will be designed not for the benefit of those who live in them, but for the benefit of those who build them. We will see more vertical slums as office blocks are turned into housing, and more depressing suburbs without schools, shops, public transport or green spaces, entirely dependent on the car. It will do nothing to solve our housing crisis, which is not caused by delays in the planning system but by developers hoarding land to keep prices high, homes used for

investment rather than living, and the government's lack of interest in social housing.

By shutting down our objections, Johnson's proposal is a direct attack on our freedoms. It is a gift to the property tycoons who have poured £11-million into the Conservative party since he became prime minister: a gift seized from the rest of US

But we will not watch passively as we are turned into even more inferior citizens. Launched in the middle of last month, a new book seeks to challenge and expose the mesmerising power that land ownership exerts on this country, and to show how we can challenge its presumptions. *The Book of Trespass*, by Nick Hayes, is massively researched but lightly delivered, a remarkable and truly radical work, loaded with resonant truths and stunningly illustrated by the author.

It shows how the great estates, from which we are excluded, were created by a combination of theft from the people of Britain (the enclosure of our commons) and theft from the people of other nations, as profits from the slave trade, colonial looting and much of the \$45-trillion bled from India were invested into grand houses and miles of wall: blood money translated into neoclassical architecture.

It reveals how the "decorative pomp and verbose flummery" with which the great estates are surrounded disguises this theft, and disguises the rentier capital-

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# Insights

ism they continue to practice. It explains how the landowners' walls divide the nation, not only physically but also socially and politically. It shows how the law was tilted away from the defence of people and towards the defence of things. It shows how trespass helps to breach the mental walls that keep us apart.

Accompanying the book is a new campaign, calling for the right to roam in England to be extended to rivers, woodland, downland and uncultivated land in the greenbelt, and to include camping, kayaking, swimming and climbing. This is less comprehensive than the rights in Scotland, which has caused little friction and a massive improvement in public enjoyment. But it would greatly enhance the sense that the nation belongs to all of us rather than a select few.

A petition to parliament launched by Guy Shrubsole, author of another crucial book, *Who Owns England*, seeks to stop the criminalisation of trespass. Please sign it.

We can expect these efforts to be aggressively opposed in the billionaire press. This is what happened when a group of us launched the *Land for the Many* report last year: it was greeted by furious attacks and outrageous falsehoods across the rightwing papers. Even the mildest attempts to rebalance our rights are treated as an existential threat by those whose privilege is ratified by law. But we cannot allow their fury to deter US. It is time to decolonise the land. **CT**

*George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).*

at the gardening store and then investigated them for possible marijuana possession.

By “investigated”, I mean that police searched through the family’s trash. Finding “wet glob vegetation” in the garbage, the cops managed to convince themselves – and a judge – that it was marijuana. In fact, it was loose-leaf tea, but those details don’t usually bother the cops when they’re conducting field tests.

Indeed, field tests routinely read positive for illegal drugs even when no drugs are present. According to investigative journalist Radley Balko, “A partial list of substances that the tests have mistaken for illegal drugs would include sage, chocolate chip cookies, motor oil, spearmint, soap, tortilla dough, deodorant, billiard’s chalk, patchouli, flour, eucalyptus, breath mints, Jolly Ranchers and vitamins”.

From there, these so-called “investigations” follow a script: judge issues a warrant for a SWAT raid based on botched data, cops raid the home and terrorise the family at gunpoint, cops find no drugs, family sues over a violation of their Fourth Amendment rights, then the courts protect the cops and their raid on the basis of qualified immunity.

As Balko reports, “Police have broken down doors, screamed obscenities, and held innocent people at gunpoint only to discover that what they thought were marijuana plants were really sunflowers, hibiscus, ragweed, tomatoes, or elderberry bushes. (It’s happened with all five.)”

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John W. Whitehead

## Attack of the tomato killers

**B**ackyard gardeners, beware: tomato plants have become collateral damage in the US government’s war on drugs.

In fact, merely growing a vegetable garden on your own property, or in a greenhouse on your property, or shopping at a gardening store for gardening supplies – incredibly enough –

could set you up for a drug raid sanctioned by the courts.

After shopping for hydroponic tomatoes at their local gardening store, a Kansas family found themselves subjected to a SWAT team raid as part of a multi-state, annual campaign dubbed “Operation Constant Gardener”, in which police collected the license plates of hundreds of customers

# Insights

Surely, you might think, the government has enough on its hands right now – policing a novel coronavirus pandemic, instituting nationwide lockdowns, quelling civil unrests over police brutality – that it doesn't need to waste time and resources ferreting out pot farmers. Wrong!

This is a government that excels at make-work projects in which it assigns at-times unnecessary jobs to government agents to keep them busy or employed.

In this case, however, the make-work principle is being used to justify sending police and expensive military helicopters likely equipped with sophisticated surveillance and thermal imaging devices on exploratory sorties every summer – again at taxpayer expense – in order to uncover illegal marijuana growing operations.

Often, however, what these air and ground searches end up targeting are backyard gardeners. Just recently, in fact, eyewitnesses in Virginia reported low-flying black helicopters buzzing over rural and suburban neighbourhoods as part of a multi-agency operation to search for marijuana growers. Often these joint operations involve local police, state police and the Army National Guard.

One woman reported having her “tomato plants complimented by the seven cops that pulled up in my yard in unmarked SUVs, after a helicopter hovered over our house for 20 minutes this morning”.

These aerial and ground sweeps have become regular

occurrences, part of the government's multi-million dollar Domestic Cannabis Eradication Program.

Started in 1979 as a way to fund efforts to crack down on marijuana growers in California and Hawaii, the Eradication Program went national in 1985, around the time the Reagan Administration enabled the armed forces to get more involved in the domestic “war on drugs”.

In the mid-1980s, the federal government started handing out grants to local police departments to assist with their local boots-on-the-ground “war on drugs,” thereby incentivising SWAT team raids.

This is how you go from a “war on drugs” to SWAT-style raids on vegetable gardens.

Connect the dots, starting with the government's war on marijuana, the emergence of SWAT teams, the militarisation of local police forces through the federal 1033 Program, which allows the Pentagon to transfer “vast amounts of military equipment – machine guns and ammunition, helicopters, night-vision gear, armoured cars – to local police departments,” and the transformation of American communities into battlefields: as always, it comes back to the make work principle, which starts with local police finding ways to justify the use of military equipment and federal funding.

Although growing numbers of states continue to decriminalise marijuana use and nine out of 10 Americans favour the legalisa-

tion of either medical or recreational/adult-use marijuana, the government's profit-driven “War on Drugs” – waged with state and local police officers dressed in SWAT gear, armed to the hilt, and trained to act like soldiers on a battlefield, all thanks to funding provided by the US government, particularly the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – has not abated.

“You take the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, all the rights you expect to have – when they come in like that, the only right you have is not to get shot if you cooperate. They open that door, your life is on the line”, concluded Bob Harte, whose home was raided by a SWAT team simply because the family was seen shopping at a garden store, cops found loose tea in the family's trash and mistook it for marijuana.

It didn't matter that no drugs were found – nothing but a hydroponic tomato garden and loose tea leaves. The search and SWAT raid were reasonable, according to the courts.

There's a lesson here for the rest of us. As Bob Harte concluded: “If this can happen to us, everybody in the country needs to be afraid”. **CT**

**John W. Whitehead** is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of the Rutherford Institute. His new book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Whitehead can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org)

Joe Allen

# Tech ants on a tourbus

*If you wanna understand a rock tour,  
you've gotta get to know the roadies.  
If you wanna know the roadies, you've  
gotta understand the ants and apes*

What would I say if Studs Terkel rose from the grave and asked me about my job?

Being a roadie ain't half bad. If you don't have the chops to be a rockstar, you might as well tour with one. Yeah, it requires a brutal initiation to get backstage, but if you pass that trial by fire, you become part of a tight, worldwide tribe. It's like a blood pact without borders, except with chain grease instead of blood.

The top tour guys are the wittiest, hardest working men and women to ever pick up a wrench. Visualise a towering commie memorial, erected in honour of working people – one guy with a rope, another with a hammer, another pointing forward with a donut in hand. Keep the square faces, take away the totalitarian economy, add some smartass inscription about “your mama”, and there you have a true image of roadiekind.

These wild animals taught me the meaning of common cause.

They taught me that accurate ideas, communicated clearly, produce effective results. They taught me the necessity of hierarchy and intelligent social organisation. And they taught me respect for superior knowledge. I may never attain my mentors' status or skill levels, but they've given me something to aspire to.

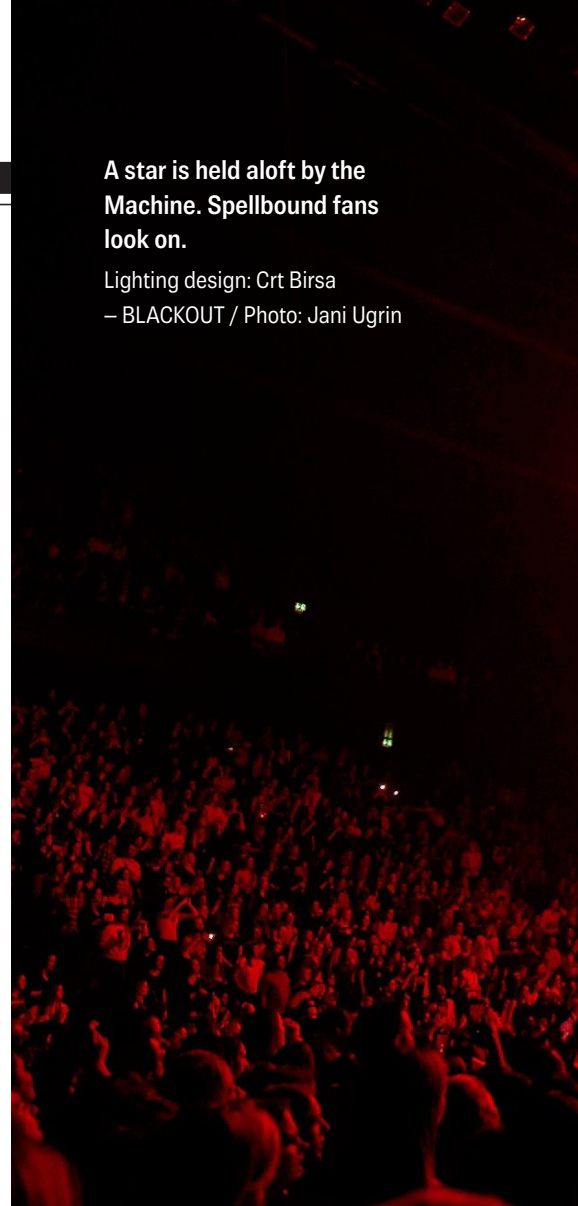
The touring gig also offers world travel, free booze, sweet hotels, Dionysian dance parties, and for those with a talent for it, the occasional wayward groupie. Your crew laminate might not pull 'em like a gold record, but hey, it beats a fast food hat.

My first tour was a blast. By sheer luck, I got hired as an automation tech for a cornbread synth-country band. It gave me an eye-opening panorama of podunk America. For instance, during one heartland hootenany, me and the hottest catering girl this side of Kansas watched a mass of mud-covered cowpokes re-enact Wood-

A star is held aloft by the Machine. Spellbound fans look on.

Lighting design: Crt Birsa

– BLACKOUT / Photo: Jani Ugrin



stock. They were happy as pigs in shit, raising cups of Bud Lite to the sky, totally unaware that leaky port-o-potties were feeding their sappy wallow.

On my second tour, our team ran an aerialist system for the world's #1 dysgenic hip hop act. That gig took me to the far shores of Japan and Oceania. As our road crew travelled from city to city, visiting various Buddhist temples and one karaoke strip club, I came to perceive a dark Oversoul moving within the gears of our Machine. It could be that my brain's agency detection circuits were acting up again. But from what I could tell, this voracious entity ate individual minds by the thousands, then



whipped the physical husks into a synchronous whirlwind.

That whirlwind kicked up millions of dollar bills, and a few landed in my pocket. So I can't get too preachy. Still, the underlying pattern struck me as sinister. Corporate entertainment is manufacturing consent on an industrial scale. Case in point, the same talented set designer who created these two hypno-pop spectacles also designed sets for Barack Obama's major speeches. Beneath the diversity of synthetic joy, I heard a single, auto-tuned call of Cthulu.

Don't get me wrong. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to that sleek mechanical god. The pay was good, and for a class con-

scious prole from the dirty South, the education was priceless. What better way to learn about human nature than watching the masses get seduced and consumed, night after night, in a vortex of moving lights?

**B**ackstage labour is a fascinating microcosm of the wider human species. I came to see the global working class as a series of intricate ecosystems, some independent and some overlapping. Rigging may not be "rocket science", as our employers like to point out, but our trade does require expertise in primatology and entomology. Every show, we command troops of tool-

slinging apes in a hi-tech antfarm. My own feet-hands are calloused from the effort.

Up in the steel, high riggers are well-positioned to see the human swarm as a bipedal insect colony. From the arena's rafters, touring techs and their subservient stagehands look like tiny, hardworking ants. A steel-climber can extend his forefinger and thumb, and squash them one by one. Like any other ant, bee, or termite, these eusocial ground-pounders go about their specific tasks – each according to his or her own caste – building an elaborate structure that will host their glittering queen.

Why this obsession with ants and apes? Because you can't un-

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derstand the human condition without getting to know our predecessors and analogues in the natural world. Our lives are shaped by the same underlying principles, as are our gods.

In his landmark 2008 book, *The Righteous Mind*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt grounds his theory of moral foundations on an older idea: “We humans have a dual nature – we are selfish primates who long to be a part of something larger and nobler than ourselves. We are 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee.” This ratio is not a genetic analysis, of course. It’s a metaphor for our conflicted psyches – our “primate minds with a hivish overlay”. (For a more ancient analogy, see the angels and demons on either shoulder.)

Haidt details the evolutionary origins of this duality: “Human nature was produced by natural selection working at two levels simultaneously. Individuals compete with individuals within every group, and we are the descendants of primates who excelled at that competition.”

Anyone who’s witnessed a big dude bully his smaller coworkers, swelling up with alpha energy, knows this is true. Roadies are notorious for that behaviour. Ironically, that same will to power inspires a pack’s envious beta pups to undercut the top-dog at every turn. It drives ambitious subordinates to suck up to their bosses, go over their heads, and then stab them in the back.

Cruel as it appears to the innocent observer, this viciousness actually makes people feel good about themselves. As Haidt puts

## **Before Covid, there were more than 3,500 shows on the road, burning enough dinosaur blood to melt 100 glaciers**

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it, “This [primate competition] gives us the ugly side of our nature. ... We are indeed selfish hypocrites so skilled at putting on a show of virtue that we fool even ourselves”.

But human evolution also produced a strong tendency toward groupthink and teamwork. This glues our puny monkey minds into a unified superorganism, if only periodically. Haidt explains this oddity by way of group selection: “[H]uman nature was also shaped as groups competed with other groups. As Darwin said long ago, the most cohesive and cooperative groups generally beat the groups of selfish individualists. ... Our bee-like nature facilitates altruism, heroism, war, and genocide”.

It also facilitates rock tours and labour unions.

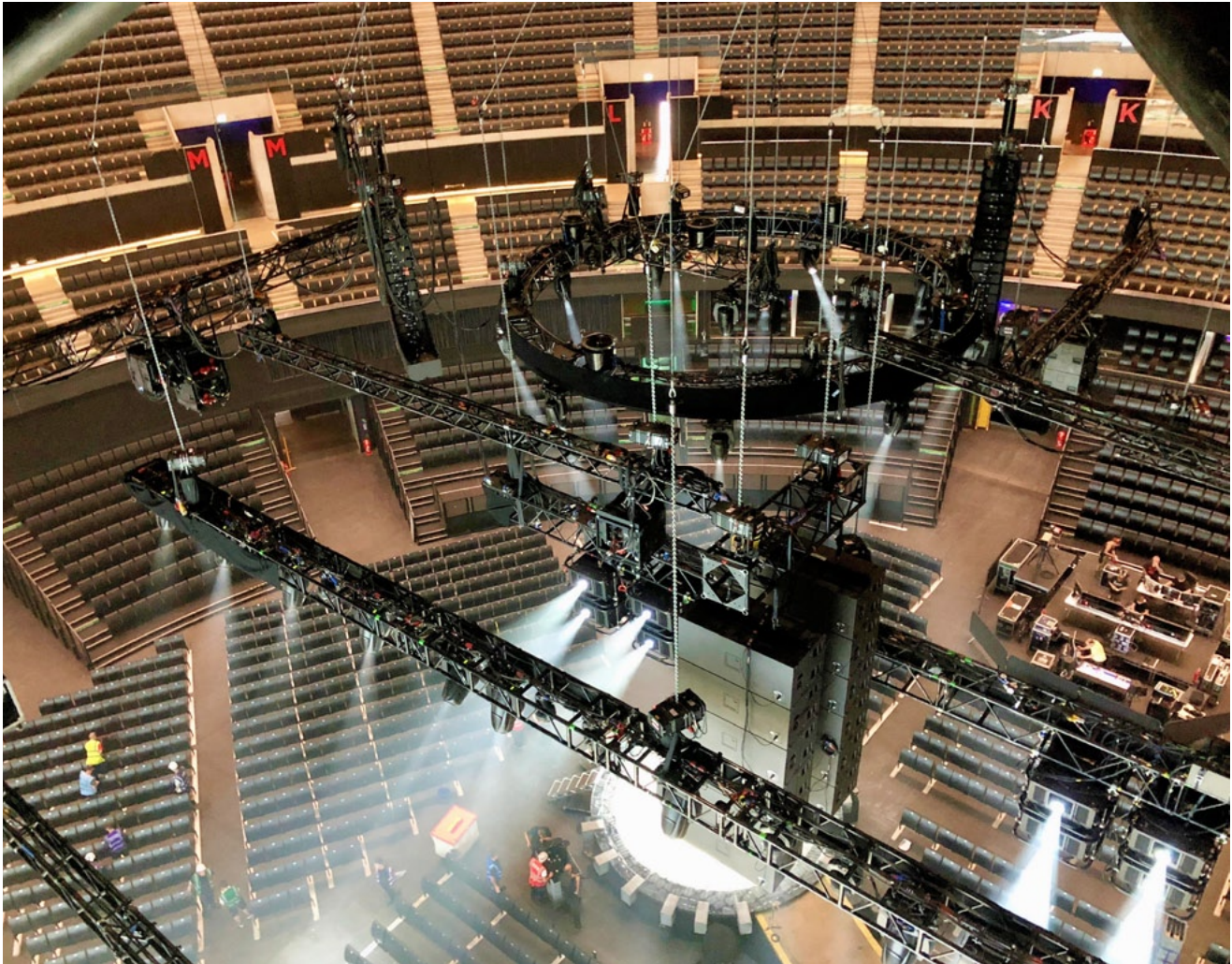
Before the Great Germ Panic of 2020, there were more than 3,500 shows on the road. The smallest were one-bus acts pulling a single trailer. The largest were self-contained societies that travelled with more than a dozen tourbuses – twelve bunks each – followed by two dozen semi trucks loaded with expensive gear. All together, they burned enough dinosaur blood to melt a hundred glaciers.

These productions featured as many genres as consumer taste would allow: trad rock ‘n’ roll, futuristic hypno-pop, country, blues, Latin, R&B, hip hop, K-pop, techno, jazz, gospel, death metal, kids’ shows – you name it – not to mention the Broadway plays, political rallies, sporting events, televangelists, corporate boosters and, more recently, pro video game tournaments. All of these productions used the same equipment, more or less, and drew from the same labour pool. Each was a portable incubator of mass consent, rolling across the globe.

These huge Machines were made possible by the hard work of professional technicians, aka “roadies”, who spent months of their lives, or sometimes years, dedicated to a single production. As with the wider human hive, the structure of this tech hierarchy – organised by the managerial brain and supported by local muscle – resembles the various eusocial societies found in nature: ants, bees, termites, naked mole rats, and a few amicable species of shrimp.

Teamwork is an ancient survival strategy. Bug scientists say the first insect colonies coalesced around 100-million years ago, after the emergence of flowering plants. According to the archaeological record, humankind began forming elaborate hierarchies around 10,000 years ago, with the development of agriculture. Pyramids and ziggurats were soon to follow.

In the 20th-century, Babylon hit the big time. The first major rock tours took off in the ‘60s, coinciding with the British Invasion. Well-preserved specimens of the primitive roadie can be observed in the 1970 documentary, Wood-



**PERSPECTIVE IS EVERYTHING:** Riggers can't help but look down their noses at the world.

stock, during the precarious stage-building scenes. By the mid-'80s, most chart-topping acts were playing under massive lighting rigs. By the 2000s, tour culture was a well-established way of life – a long line of tech ants on a tourbus.

Monkeys are mischievous, but any entomologist will tell you that ants can be real assholes. These hive-minded insects pick on their nestmates and regularly make war on their neighbours. Down in the tunnels, collectivist workers call this “allyship”. Their behaviour is

well documented in the 2009 compendium *The Superorganism* by Bert Hölldobler and E.O. Wilson.

A few ant species are known to kidnap the pupae of neighbouring colonies and force them into slavery. Many species will capture and enslave innocent aphids. The worker ants herd the aphids toward a flower, let them feed, and then slurp the honeydew secreted in their rumps. Some will bite the aphids' wings off to keep them from flying away. The ants repay their slaves by protecting them from bigger jerks out in the wild.

Each ant colony's sterile work-

ers are beholden to a horny queen. In many species, larger soldier ants actually produce eggs, only to have them gobbled up by their fat, decadent monarch. This pecking order goes all the way down. Every society has its shit-kickers, and myrmecologists have observed strong worker ants pushing their smaller sisters to collect garbage and haul it to the dump. Obviously, labour unions are crushed before they ever hold their first committee.

Nature abounds in paradox,

though. Despite their occasional bitchiness, ants are some of the nicest creatures you'll ever meet. They'll fight to the death for their sisters, and if you've ever seen these ladies lug a dead beetle back home, you know their work ethic is second to none. They're also charming conversationalists. When two ants meet on a trail, they'll tickle each other's feelers, speaking with a rich vocabulary of biochemical flavours. As with humans, expert communication is the key to their collective intelligence.

Take an ultra-cooperative ant colony and break it up into its constituent parts. At the centre is the egg-laying queen, who's had her fun with foreign gigalos on the wing. From there, it's a working girl's world: the young brood-tenders and older foragers, the leaf-cutters and fungus cultivators, the tunnel-diggers and hulking soldiers on patrol. At the bottom of the totem pole, the morticians and trash-collectors do all the dirty work.

Following the flow of life, an ant's soul lies between her DNA and the "rain or shine" of the environment. In more primitive species, there are multiple queens, free-wheeling males, and greater genetic diversity. Each worker will perform various functions as needed – sort of like a small indie rock tour where the audio engineer also tunes the instruments and runs the lights. The only other roadie sells t-shirts and flirts with the fans. Both of them load the trailer after the show.

In the most complex colonies, however, each ant has a single queen, and for the most part, identical genes. Incredibly, this unity produces a stark division of labour

## ***The purpose is to attract the fans, pry open their third eyes, and project this queen into their consciousness***

– a rigid caste system – that isn't the product of genetic differentiation. By the luck of the draw, each individual is slightly larger or smaller, a bit older or younger, etc. From these small differences emerge the elaborate roles and duties that add up to a single, astoundingly clever superorganism.

Once you understand ant behaviour, you're halfway to understanding a rock tour's road crew.

The late Bon Scott – AC/DC's original frontman – was the first rockstar to reveal how the infernal Creator organised tours in the beginning:

*Let there light...*

*Let there be sound...*

*Let there be guitar...*

*Let there be drums...*

*Let there be rock!*

It's unclear whether these directives came from above or below, but as technology advanced and adoring crowds gathered, they certainly came true. All the Logos needed was apes and elbow grease.

Every tour is an intricate sensory Machine that's assembled, operated, and disassembled by an army of technicians. People imagine a bunch of fuzzy dudes pushing roadcases around and scratching

their balls. That's not untrue, exactly, but there's more to it.

Here's how it works. The most complex shows employ discrete teams who specialise in rigging, audio, carpentry, lighting, video, pyro, automation, backline, wardrobe, merchandise, catering, trucking, and security, all of whom are directed and harmonised – within reason – by stage managers, tour coordinators, and ultimately, the production manager. Talk about "primate minds with a hivish overlay". These touring techs are supported by legions of local stagehands, riggers, and van runners. International tours employ translators. Some locals double as unlicensed pharmacologists.

These workers crawl through an arena's tunnels, animated by urgency and guided by a single purpose – they must prepare the central chamber for the queen's arrival.

Their jobs ain't easy, bro. Each workday starts at dawn and ends long after midnight. Every morning, the trucks arrive, rigging points go up, speakers get flown, the stage is built, lights are focused, video walls are calibrated, explosives are wired, winch motors are tested, instruments are tuned, costumes are prepared, bowls are packed, and dinner is served. Almost time for showcall. At the end of the night, the stands are cleaned by penniless trash-collectors.

At the pinnacle of this pyramid is the star. The purpose of every production is to attract the multitudes into a venue, pry open their third eyes, and project this queen into their collective consciousness. Her beauty is tuned to the human psyche – as it exists at present – but warped ever so slightly in the



direction of progress, whatever that may be.

The crowd is immersed in the Creator's dream. If the show's a success, they'll squeal with delight and come back for more. Their consent has been manufactured. "Go, house lights".

For more than a decade and a half – up until the Global Lockdown – I functioned as a cell in various hi-tech superorganisms. It's been an honour. This career allowed me to meet the loveliest human beings in the world, and one or two of the nastiest. None of them look like bugs to my eyes – at least, not up close. A few resemble apes, but for me, that's a compliment. After all, I'm one of them.

As we sit here twiddling our foot-thumbs, waiting for doctors to find a cure for germaphobia, I've had a moment to remember the good times. Charcuterie and wine with the Crusader in Barcelona. Philosophy jokes with the Queen's astrophysicist at Chicago's House of Blues. Tropical trees and dragons in Thailand's green lung. A sunrise on still water in Portland, Maine. Slow motion and whispers, legs interlaced in my tourbus bunk.

The roadies who've passed on are still close to my heart. Jamie Lupinetti was among the finest men to crisscross this earth – lost to lymphoma as spring dawned. He was surrounded by fellow rig-



An American rigger climbs up to say "Salaam!" to the fellas in Indonesia.

gers with steel hands and hearts of gold. We miss you, Pops.

It's a thrilling job behind the curtain, but it can wear you down to nothing. Of the thirty techs on my first tour, at least six are gone.

The bass tech was found in his HVAC duct, dead of a broken heart. One of the carpenters – a legendary stage manager in a past life – drank himself under the soil. Our lighting crew chief, solid as a rock, took a final motorcycle ride. My own automation crew chief buried himself with coke and booze after losing his girlfriend to cancer. Our head rigger, a kung fu master and one funny mother-fucker, died young at 47, the day after his birthday. Our production manager recently suffered

a fatal heart attack, but was relieved to learn that everyone smokes cigars in the afterlife.

What did these men die for? That's a pointless question to wild souls who live for the moment.

These days, the moments drag on as our savings evaporate. Sometimes I imagine all those massive arenas sitting empty around the world. A pin drop would shatter the silence and ripple through the dead air, with no one but ghosts to hear it.

I can still see the throbbing crowds, their faces rippling under the moving lights, who for six decades filled these techno-domes and stuffed promoters' pockets with filthy lucre. At least we got our cut.

Every night you'd hear the fans scream like a flock of grackles, singing along with the brightly plumed demi-god onstage. Their heads are still bobbing out there, somewhere, hidden behind closed doors – blue screens reflected in their eyes – a billion balloons just bouncing off the walls.

Here in the New Normal, we find ourselves frozen in place, together apart. Either the queen lost control of the antfarm, and the workers have lost their minds – or the workers have lost their minds, and she's never been more powerful. **CT**

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he's based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels. His website is [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz).*



ABOVE: "No time for mountain-climbing, boys. We've got a show to do!"

Photo: Wendyl Le Goonie

BELOW RIGHT: Stagehands and riggers grind out another load-in, with the weight of the world on their shoulders.

Photo: Oskra Manuki

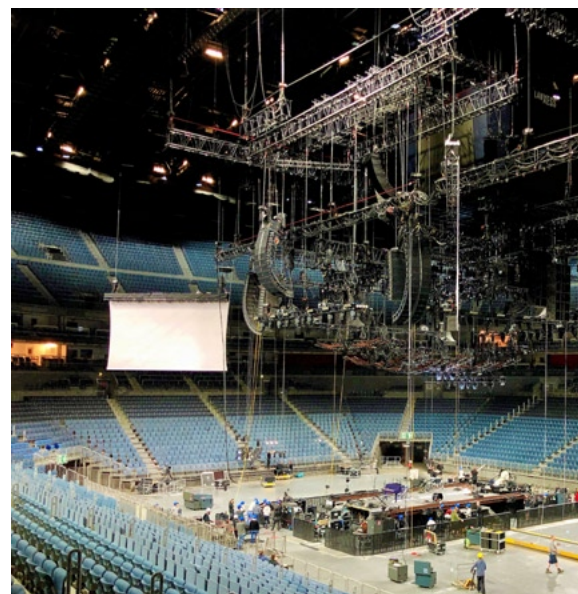
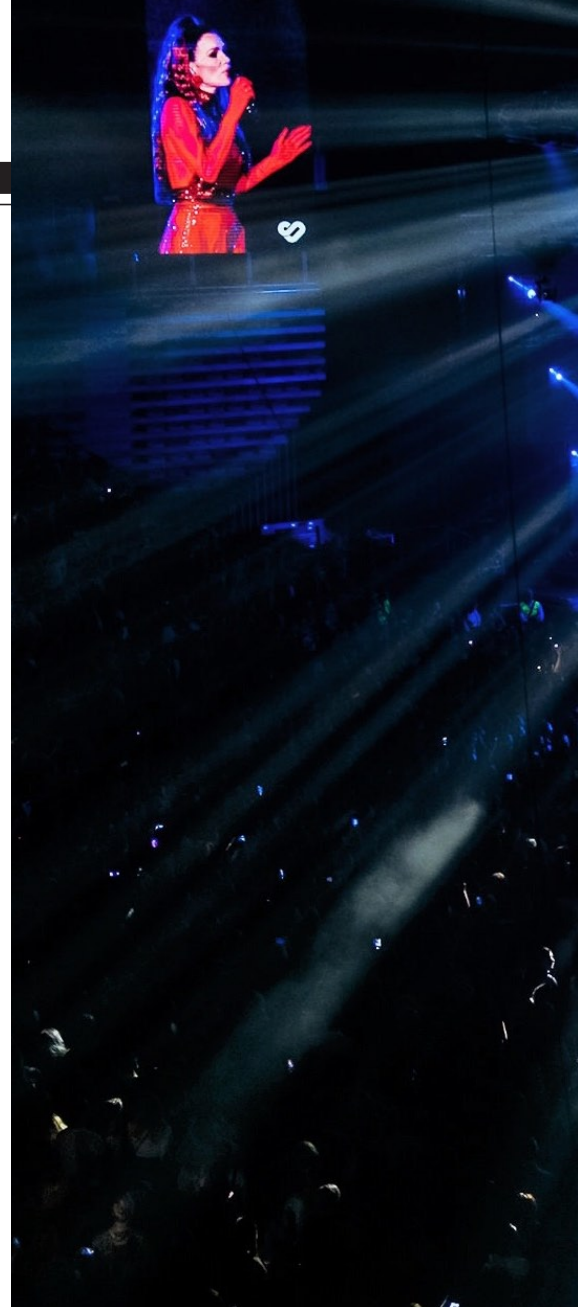
# Stagecraft: A labour of love

A backstage worker is employed to create beauty. It's a high-pressure job — one that too often goes without thanks. Despite their crass jokes and occasional bickering, these men and women achieve that goal every night. Otherwise, they're shown the stage door.

Every backstage worker is suffering in the wake of COVID-19 and the subsequent decision to lock down. Without a crowd, there is no show. Without a show, there is no work.

As these men and women watch the horizon anxiously, hoping to resume their careers, we'd like to take a moment to appreciate the fruits of their labor. No matter how many times a roadie has growled, "I shoulda been a fuggin' architect!," we know how much they love what they do.

— Joe Allen





**ABOVE:** If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an army of technicians to transform a girl into a goddess.

Lighting design: Crt Birsa – BLACKOUT / Photo: Jani Ugrin

**LEFT:** In Elysium, the lesser dieties would lounge, drink wine, and enjoy the Muses' song. For a few hundred bucks, the Average Joe can take a date to the same.

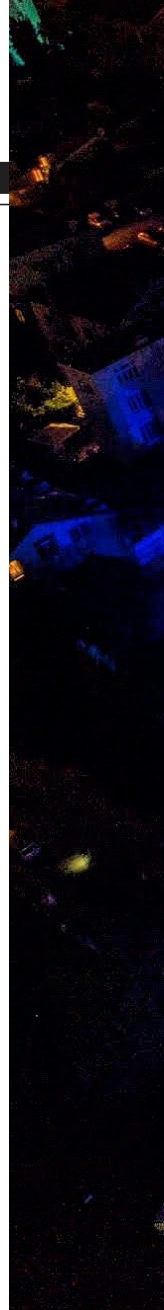
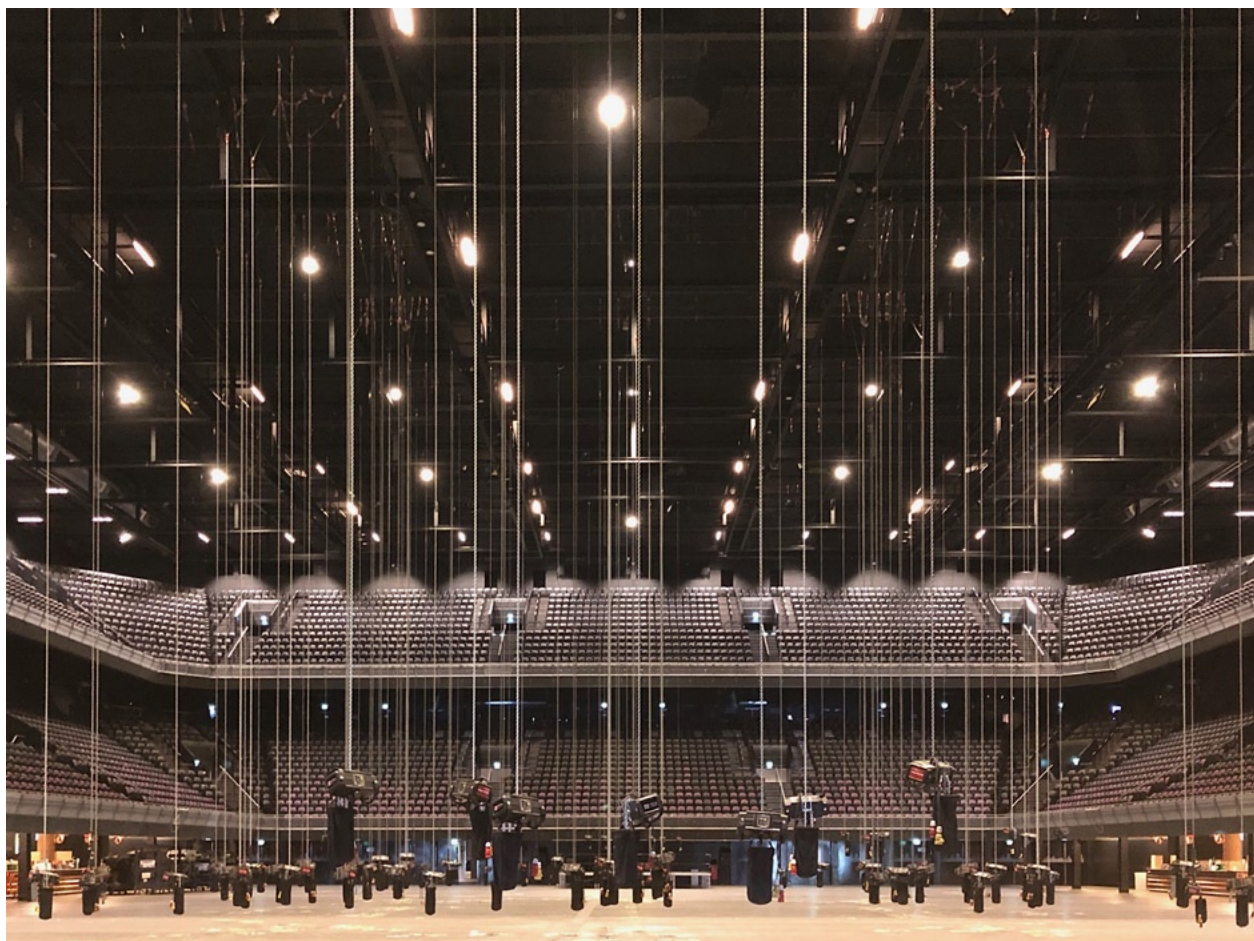
Lighting design: Crt Birsa -- BLACKOUT / Photo: Simone Di Luca

**RIGHT: Man is a mere mortal without the power of the Machine. But with a sharp set design and enough voltage to cook a herd of elephants, he can become something more than a naked ape. If only for a moment, he becomes transhuman.**

Lighting design: Crt Birsa – BLACKOUT / Photo: Jani Ugrin

**BELOW: The motor chains are up. The coffee is drained. The riggers are on the bus. "We're ready for lift off."**

Photo: Oskra Manuki





**ABOVE:** The first entertainment riggers were the sailors of antiquity, who employed ropes and pulleys to hoist awnings over the Roman Coliseum, providing shade. Early stagehands would push cages full of beasts into the arena. They cleaned up the blood when the sport was finished. Over the years, this ancient tradition has evolved into GMO bread served at cybernetic circuses. But it's still bread and circuses.

Lighting design: Crt Birsa - BLACKOUT / Photo: Daniel Bartolic

**LEFT:** Cavemen fashioned clay figurines of portly, headless women. The ancients bowed to Ishtar, Isis, and Aphrodite. In medieval times, the throne of Heaven was held by Mother Mary. In the postmodern era, our hive is held together by an electric queen.

Lighting design: Crt Birsa - BLACKOUT / Photo: Jani Ugrin



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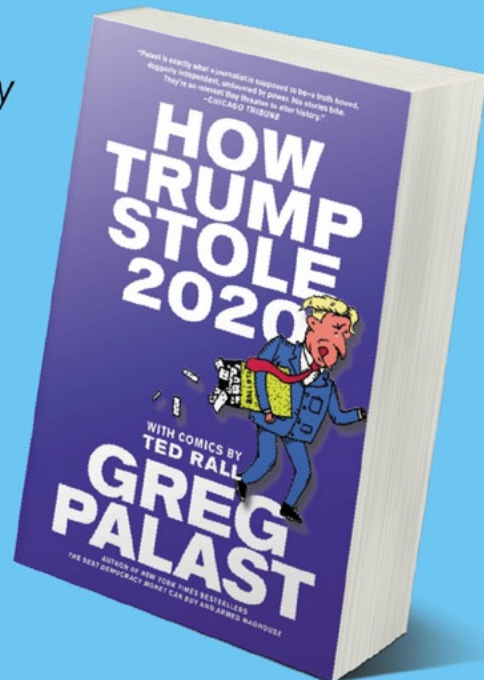
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*Beverly Gologorsky*

# Trapped in the shadow of war

*Life and fiction in 21st-century America*

I'm a voracious reader of American fiction and I've noticed something odd in recent years. This country has been eternally "at war" and you just wouldn't know that – a small amount of veteran's fiction aside – from the novels that are generally published. For at least a decade, Americans have been living in the shadow of war and yet, except in pop fiction of the Tom Clancy variety (where, in the end, we always win), there's remarkably little evidence of it.

As for myself – I'm a novelist – I find that no matter what I chose to write about, I can't seem to avoid that shadow. My first novel was about Vietnam vets coming

home and my second is permeated with a shadowy sense of what the Iraq and Afghan wars have done to us. And yet I've never been to, or near, a war, and nothing about it attracts me. So why is it always lurking there? Recently, I haven't been able to stop thinking about just why that might be and I may finally have a very partial answer, very modestly encapsulated in one rather un-American word: class.

I come from – to use an old-fashioned phrase – a *working class* immigrant family. The middle child of four siblings, not counting the foster children my mother cared for, I grew up in the post-World War II years in the basement of

a building in the South Bronx in New York City.

In my neighbourhood, war – or at least the military – was the norm. Young men (boys, really) generally didn't make it through life without serving in some military capacity. Soldiers and veterans were ubiquitous. Except to us, to me, none of them were "soldiers" or "veterans". They were Ernie, Charlie, Danny, Tommy, Jamal, Vito, Frank. In our neck of the urban woods – multi-ethnic, diverse, low-income – it was the way things were and you never thought to question that, in just about every apartment on every floor, there was a young man

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who had been in, would go into, or was at that moment in the military and, given the conflicts of that era, had often been to war as well.

Many of the boys I knew joined the Marines before they could be drafted for some of the same reasons men and women volunteer now. (Remember that there was still a draft army then, not the all-volunteer force of 2013.) However clichéd they may sound today, they reflected a reality I knew well. Then as now, the military held out the promise of a potentially meaningful future instead of the often depressing adult futures that surrounded us as we grew up.

Then as now, however, too many of those boys returned home with little or nothing to show for the turmoil they endured. And then as now, they often returned filled with an inner chaos, a lost-ness from which many searched in vain for relief.

When I was seven, the Korean War began. I was 18 when our first armed advisers arrived in Vietnam. After that disaster finally ended, a lull ensued, broken by a series of “skirmishes” from Grenada to Panama to Somalia to Bosnia, followed by the First Gulf War, and then, of course, the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

I dated, worked with, or was related to men who participated in some of these wars and conflicts. One of my earliest memories, in fact – I must have been three – is of my anxious 19-year-old sister waiting for her soldier-fiancé to make his way home from World War II. Demobilised, he finally arrived with no outward signs that war had taken a toll on him. Like

## ***Young men from neighbourhoods like mine who had gone to war came home feeling like murderers***

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so many of those “greatest generation” vets, though, he wouldn’t or couldn’t talk about his experiences, and remained hard to reach about most things for years afterwards. His army hat was my first military souvenir.

When I was eight or nine, my brother was drafted into the Korean War and I can still remember my constant worries about his well-being. I wrote my childish letters to him nearly every day. He had been assigned to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, given a pair of lace-up boots, and told he’d be training as a paratrooper. He could never get past the anxiety that assignment bestowed on him. Discharged, many pounds thinner and with a bad case of mononucleosis, he came home with a need to have guns around, guns he kept close at hand for the rest of his life.

My first “serious” boyfriend was a sailor on the USS Warrington. I was 15. Not surprisingly, he was away more than home. He mustered out with an addiction to alcohol.

I was 18 when my second boyfriend was drafted. John F. Kennedy was president and the Vietnam War was, then, just a blip on the American horizon. He didn’t serve overseas, but afterwards he,

too, couldn’t figure out what to do with the rest of his life. And so it went.

Today, I no longer live in the South Bronx where, I have no doubt, women as well as men volunteer for the military with similar mindsets to those of my youth, and unfortunately return home with problems similar to those suffered by generations of soldiers before them. Suffice it to say that veterans of whatever war returned having experienced the sharp edge of death and nothing that followed in civilian life could or would be as intense.

It’s in the nature of militaries to train their soldiers to hate, maim, and kill the enemy, but in the midst of the Vietnam War – I had, by then, made it out of my neighbourhood and my world – something challenged this trained-to-kill belief system and it began to break down in a way previously unknown in our history. With that mindset suddenly in ruins, many young men refused to fight, while others who had gone to war, ones from neighbourhoods like mine, came home feeling like murderers.

In those years, thinking of those boys and many others, I joined the student antiwar movement, though I was often the only one in any group not regularly on campus. (Working class women worked at paying jobs!) As I learned more about that war, my anger grew at the way my country was devastating a land and a people who had done nothing to us. The loss of American and Vietnamese lives, the terrible wounds, all of it felt like both a waste and a tragedy. From 1964 on, ending that war sooner rather than later became my 24/7 job



(when, that is, I wasn't at my paying job).

During those years, two events remain vivid in my memory. I was part of a group that opened an anti-war storefront coffee shop near Fort Dix in New Jersey, a camp where thousands of recruits received basic training before being shipped out to Vietnam. We served up coffee, cake, music, posters, magazines, and antiwar conversation to any soldiers who came in during their off-hours – and come in they did. I met young men from as far away as Nebraska and Iowa, as close by as Queens and Brooklyn. I have no idea if any of them ever refused to deploy to Vietnam as some soldiers did in those years. However, that coffee house gave me an education in just how vulnerable, scared, excited, unprepared, and uninformed they were about what they would be facing and, above all, about the country they were invading.

Our storefront hours ran from 5 pm to whenever. On the inevitable night bus back to the Port Authority terminal, I would be unable to shake my sadness. Night after night, on that ride home I remember thinking: if only I had the power to do something more to save their lives, for I knew that some of them would come back in body bags and others would return wounded physically or emotionally in ways that I remembered well. And for what? That was why talking with them has remained in my memory as both a burden and a blessing.

The second event that stays with me occurred in May 1971 in Washington, DC. A large group of Vietnam veterans, men who had been in the thick of it and

## ***That war shadows me is a difficult truth, and for that I have my old neighbourhood to thank***

seen it all, decided they needed to do something that would bring national attention to the goal of ending the war. The method they chose was to act out their repudiation of their previous participation in it. Snaking past the Capitol, an extremely long line of men in uniform threw purple hearts and medals of every sort into a trash bin. Most then made a brief statement about why they hated the war and could no longer bear to keep those medals. I was there and I'll never forget their faces. One soldier, resisting the visible urge to cry, simply walked off without saying a word, only to collapse on a fellow soldier's shoulder. Many of us watched, sobbing.

In those years, I penned political articles, but never fiction. Reality overwhelmed me. Only after that war ended did I begin to write my world, the one that was – always – shadowed by war, in fiction.

Why doesn't war appear more often in American novels? Novelist Dorothy Allison once wrote, "Literature is the lie that tells the truth". Yet in a society where war is ever-present, that truth manages to go missing in much of fiction. These days, the novels I come across have many reference points, cultural or

political, to mark their stories, but war is generally not among them.

My suspicion: it has something to do with class. If war is all around us and yet, for so many non-working-class Americans, increasingly not part of our everyday lives, if war is the thing that other people do elsewhere in our name and we reflect our world in our fiction, then that thing is somehow not us.

My own urge is to weave war into our world, the way Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer, once wove apartheid into her novels – without, that is, speechifying or pontificating or even pointing to it. When American fiction ignores the fact of war and its effects remain hidden, without even brief mentions as simple markers of time and place, it also accepts peace as the background for the stories we tell. And that is, in its own way, the lie that denial tells.

That war shadows me is a difficult truth, and for that I have my old neighbourhood to thank. If war is the background to my novels about everyday life, it's because it's been in the air I breathed, which naturally means my characters breathe it, too. **CT**

*Beverly Gologorsky is the author of the recently published novel **Every Body Has a Story**. Her first novel, **The Things We Do to Make it Home**, was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Fiction Book. In the Vietnam years, she was an editor of two political journals, *Viet-Report* and *Leviathan*. Her new book, **Can You See the Wind?** (Seven Stories Press), will be published in the spring of 2021. This essay was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

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V.J. Prashad

# Why Cuban doctors deserve Nobel Prize

*Since the start of Cuban medical internationalism in 1960, more than 400,000 medical workers have worked in more than 40 countries*

Five years ago, I read the story of Dr Félix Báez, a Cuban doctor who had worked in West Africa to stop the spread of Ebola. Dr Báez was one of 165 Cuban doctors of the Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade who went to Sierra Leone to fight a terrible outbreak in 2014 of a disease first detected in 1976. During his time there, Dr Báez contracted Ebola.

The World Health Organization and the Cuban government rushed Dr Báez to Geneva, where he was treated at the Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève. He struggled with the disease, but thanks to the superb care he received, his Ebola receded. He was flown to Cuba. At the airport in Havana, he was received by his wife Vania Ferrer and his sons Alejandro and Félix Luis as well as Health Minister Roberto Morales.

At the website Cubasí, Alejandro – a medical student – had written, “Cuba is waiting for you”. In Liberia, the other Cuban doctors also fighting Ebola cheered for Dr Báez. A Facebook page was started called Cuba Is With Félix Báez, while on other social media



Photo: VOA

**RECOVERED:** Dr Félix Báez contracted Ebola in West Africa, then returned to continue the fight against the disease.

forums the hashtag #FélixContigo and #FuerzaFélix went viral.

Dr. Báez recovered slowly, and then, miraculously, decided to return to West Africa to continue to fight against Ebola.

No wonder that there is an international campaign to have the Cuban doctors be honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize. This aspect

of Cuba’s work is essential to its socialist project of international solidarity through care work.

When Dr Báez returned to West Africa, his colleague Dr Ronald Hernández Torres, based in Liberia, wrote on Facebook, “We are here by our decision and we will only withdraw when Ebola is not a health problem for Africa and the world”. This is an important statement, a reaction to the offensive campaign led by the United States government against Cuban internationalism.

The US Congressional Research Service reported that “In June 2019, the [US] State Department downgraded Cuba to Tier 3 in its 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report, “for, among other reasons, not taking “action to address forced labour in the foreign medical mission programme.” This policy came alongside pressure by the US government on its allies to expel the Cuban missions from their countries.

Strikingly, the UN Human Rights Council – under pressure from Washington – said it would investigate Cuban doctors. Urmila Bhoola (UN special rapporteur on



**HELPING HANDS:** Cuban doctors arrive in South Africa to help the country's fight against Covid-19.

contemporary forms of slavery) and Maria Grazia Giammarinaro (UN special rapporteur on trafficking in persons) wrote a letter to the Cuban government in November 2019. The letter made grand statements – such as alleging that the Cuban doctors suffered from forced labour; but there was no evidence in the letter. Even their statement of concern seemed plainly ideological rather than forensic.

In early 2020, the US government intensified its attempt to delegitimise the Cuban medical mission program. On January 12, 2020, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted, “We urge host countries to end contractual agreements with the Castro regime that facilitate the #humanrights abuses occurring in these programmes”.

US allies in Latin America, such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador, expelled the Cuban medical missions. This would become a catastrophic decision for these countries as the

COVID-19 pandemic developed across Latin America.

In July 2020, the New York-based Human Rights Watch published a document accusing the Cuban government of formulating “repressive rules for doctors working abroad”. It focuses on Resolution 168, adopted in 2010, that provides a code of conduct for Cuban doctors, including ensuring that the medical workers honour the laws of their hosts and do not exceed the remit of their mission, which is to take care of the medical needs of the population.

Human Rights Watch merely offers this resolution – and other regulations – as evidence; it accepts that it cannot prove that these regulations have ever been implemented: “Human Rights Watch has not been able to determine the extent to which Cuban health workers have broken the rules

and law, or whether the Cuban government has enforced criminal or disciplinary sanctions against them”. It is stunning that a human rights organisation would spend so much time with so little evidence assaulting a programme that is widely recognised for bringing an improvement of living standards for people.

The organising committee for the group Nobel Peace Prize for Cuban Doctors responded to Human Rights Watch with a stinging rebuttal. It pointed out that the HRW report said nothing about the attacks on the Cuban medical programme, including the official US government attempt to bribe Cuban doctors to defect to the United States and the expenditure by USAID of millions of dollars to create disinformation against the program.

Even more egregious, the HRW document misreads the evidence it does offer, including the transcript

of a dialogue between the Cuban ministry of health and medical workers. The HRW report uses as factual a text by Prisoners Defenders, a Spain-based NGO led by an anti-Cuban activist; HRW does not declare the political opinions of this highly controversial source.

The HRW report reads less like a credible account by a human rights organisation and more like a press release from the three Republican senators – Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Rick Scott – who recently introduced a bill to scuttle Cuba’s medical mission programme.

In a study published in April 2020, the Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde found that Mais Médicos (More Doctors) programme of the Cuban doctors in Brazil improved health indicators of the population; this programme brought medical care to remote areas, often for the first time.

Alexandre Padilha of the Workers Party (PT) was a minister of health under President Dilma Rousseff and a member of the team that created the Mais Médicos programme. He said that after the Cuban doctors had been ejected, there was an increase in infant mortality and increased pneumonia among the Indigenous communities where they worked; all this was catastrophic during

## ***Cuban scientists say that their vaccine will not be treated as private property but will be shared with the world***

the COVID-19 pandemic.

In June 2020, President Jair Bolsonaro, who had expelled the Cuban doctors in December 2019, asked for them to start work again in Brazil; they were needed to compensate for Brazil’s catastrophic reaction to the COVID-19 virus. Even USAID money to compensate for the loss of the Cuban doctors was not sufficient; Bolsonaro wanted the Cuban doctors to stay.

Cuban medical workers are risking their health to break the chain of the COVID-19 infection. Cuban scientists developed drugs – such as interferon alpha-2b – to help fight the disease. Now Cuban scientists have announced that their vaccine is in trials; this vaccine will not be treated as private property but will be shared with the peoples of the world. This is the fidelity of Cuban medical internationalism.

On August 21, Raúl Castro – the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba – spoke at an event for the

60th anniversary of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). At the meeting, Castro mentioned that 61 percent of the medical workers in the Henry Reeve Brigade were women; since the start of Cuban medical internationalism in 1960, over 400,000 medical workers have worked in more than 40 countries. These medical workers believe in the twin missions of medical care and internationalism; it is a lesson that they learned from the teachings of Che Guevara, a doctor and an internationalist.

It is a lesson that should be learned in Oslo, Norway, as they adjudicate this year’s Nobel Peace Prize. **CT**

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**READ THE BEST OF EDWARD S. HERMAN**

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"SAVE ME FROM MY FRIENDS": Great Game cartoon from 1878 shows the Afghan Emir Sher Ali Khan with his "friends" Russia and Great Britain

*Conn Hallinan*

# China and the US: The 21st-century's Great Game

*The danger of war is real, especially since polls in China and the United States show there is growing hostility between both groups of people*

From 1830 to 1895, the British and Russian empires schemed and plotted over control of Central and South Asia. At the heart of the "Great Game" was England's certainty that the Russians had designs on India. So wars were fought, borders drawn, and generations of young met death in desolate passes and

lonely outposts.

In the end, it was all illusion. Russia never planned to challenge British rule in India and the bloody wars settled nothing, although the arbitrary borders and ethnic tensions stoked by colonialism's strategy of divide and conquer live on today. Thus China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nepal

battle over lines drawn in London, while Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul vie for tiny uninhabited islands, remnants of Imperial Japan.

That history is important to keep in mind when one begins to unpack the rationales behind the increasingly dangerous standoff between China and the United States in the South China Sea.

To the Americans, China is a fast rising competitor that doesn't play by the rules and threatens one of the most important trade routes on the globe in a region long dominated by Washington. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has essentially called for regime change.

According to Ryan Hass, former China director on the National Security Council, the Trump administration is trying to "reorient the US-China relationship toward an all-encompassing systemic rivalry that cannot be reversed" by administrations that follow. In short, a cold war not unlike that between the US and the Soviet Union.

To the Chinese, the last 200 years – China does tend to think in centuries, not decades – has been an anomaly in their long history. Once the richest country on the globe that introduced the world to everything from silk to gunpowder, 19th-century China became a dumping ground for British opium, incapable of even controlling its own coastlines.

China has never forgotten those years of humiliation or the damage colonialism helped inflict on its people. Those memories are an ingredient in the current crisis.

**B**ut China is not the only country with memories.

The US has dominated the Pacific Ocean – sometimes called an "American lake" – since the end of World War II. Suddenly Americans have a competitor, although it is a rivalry that routinely gets overblown.

An example is conservative *New York Times* columnist, Bret Stephens, who recently warned that

## ***The World Bank and the IMF have been particularly stingy about lending for infrastructure development***

China's Navy has more ships than the US Navy, ignoring the fact that most of China's ships are small Coast Guard frigates and corvettes. China's major strategic concern is the defence of its coasts, where several invasions in the 19th- and 20th-centuries have come.

The Chinese strategy is "area denial": keeping American aircraft carriers at arm's length. To this end, Beijing has illegally seized numerous small islands and reefs in the South China Sea to create a barrier to the US Navy.

But China's major thrust is economic through its massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), not military, and is currently targeting South Asia as an area for development.

South Asia is enormously complex, comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Its 1.6-billion people constitute almost a quarter of the world's population, but it only accounts for 2 percent of the global GDP and 1.3 percent of world trade.

Those figures translate into a poverty level of 44 percent, just 2 percent higher than the world's most impoverished region, sub-Saharan Africa. Close to 85 percent of South Asia's population makes less than \$2 a day.

Much of this is a result of coloni-

alism, which derailed local economies, suppressed manufacturing, and forced countries to adopt monocrop cultures focused on export. The globalisation of capital in the 1980s accelerated the economic inequality that colonialism had bequeathed the region.

Development in South Asia has been beholden to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which require borrowers to open their markets to western capital and reduce debts through severe austerity measures, throttling everything from health care to transportation.

This economic strategy – sometimes called the "Washington Consensus" – generates "debt traps": countries cut back on public spending, which depresses their economies and increases debt, which leads to yet more rounds of borrowing and austerity.

**T**he World Bank and the IMF have been particularly stingy about lending for infrastructure development, an essential part of building a modern economy. It is "the inadequacy and rigidity of the various western monetary institutions that have driven South Asia into the arms of China", says economist Anthony Howell in the *South Asia Journal*.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) takes a different tack. Through a combination of infrastructure development, trade and financial aid, countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe are linked into what is essentially a new "Silk Road." Some 138 countries have signed up.

Using a variety of institutions – the China Development Bank, the

Silk Road Fund, the Export-Import Bank of China, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank – Beijing has been building roads, rail systems and ports throughout South Asia.

For decades, western lenders have either ignored South Asia – with the exception of India – or put so many restrictions on development funds that the region has stagnated economically. The Chinese Initiative has the potential to reverse this, alarming the West and India, the only nation in the region not to join the BRI.

The European Union has also been resistant to the Initiative, although Italy has signed on. A number of Middle East countries have also joined the BRI and the China-Arab Cooperation Forum. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt have signed on to China's Digital Silk Road, a network of navigation satellites that compete with America's GPS, Russia's GLONASS and European Union's Galileo. China also recently signed a \$400-billion, 25-year trade and military partnership with Iran.

Needless to say, Washington is hardly happy about China elbowing its way into a US-dominated region that contains a significant portion of the world's energy supplies.

In a worldwide competition for markets and influence, China is demonstrating considerable strengths. That, of course, creates friction. The US, and to a certain extent the EU, have launched a campaign to freeze China out of markets and restrict its access to advanced technology. The White House successfully lobbied Great

## ***The White House might pull off an “October surprise” and initiate some kind of military clash with China***

Britain and Australia to bar the Chinese company, Huawei, from installing a 5G digital network, and is pressuring Israel and Brazil to do the same.

Not all of the current tensions are economic. The Trump administration needs a diversion from its massive failure to control the pandemic, and the Republican Party has made China bashing a centrepiece of its election strategy. There is even the possibility that the White House might pull off an “October surprise” and initiate some kind of military clash with China.

It is unlikely that Trump wants a full-scale war, but an incident in the South China Sea might rally Americans behind the White House. The danger is real, especially since polls in China and the United States show there is growing hostility between both groups of people.

But the tensions go beyond President Trump's desperate need to be re-elected. China is re-asserting itself as a regional power and a force to be reckoned with worldwide. That the US and its allies view that with enmity is hardly a surprise. Britain did its

best to block the rise of Germany before World War I, and the US did much the same with Japan in the lead up to the Pacific War.

Germany and Japan were great military powers with a willingness to use violence to get their way. China is not a great military power and is more interested in creating profits than empires. In any case, a war between nuclear-armed powers is almost unimaginable (which is not to say it can't happen).

China recently softened its language toward the US, stressing peaceful co-existence. “We should not let nationalism and hotheadness somehow kidnap our foreign policy”, says Xu Quinduo of the state-run China Radio. “Tough rhetoric should not replace rational diplomacy”.

The new tone suggests that China has no enthusiasm for competing with the US military, but would rather take the long view and let initiatives like the Belt and Road work for it. Unlike the Russians, the Chinese don't want to see Trump re-elected and they clearly have decided not to give him any excuse to ratchet up the tensions as an election year ploy.

China's recent clash with India, and its bullying of countries in the South China Sea, including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei, have isolated Beijing, and the Chinese leadership may be waking to the fact that they need allies, not adversaries.

And patience.

**CT**

*Conn Hallinan can be read at [dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com](https://dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com) and at [middleempireseries.wordpress.com](https://middleempireseries.wordpress.com)*

Amy Binns

# When parents fear their changeling children

*The kids in Village of the Damned are not terrifying because they are aliens. They are terrifying because they are truly our children*

How can you be sure your child is really your child? Could that innocent-seeming baby be a changeling – a cuckoo in your nest? There is something about the evil elf child, reborn as the alien walking among us, that continues to fascinate and terrify US So much so, the broadcaster Sky has announced it has commissioned a third version of *Village of the Damned* from David Farr, the writer of *The Night Manager*.

The first, filmed in 1960, is a cult classic of understated British horror. The 1995 version, starring Christopher Reeves, translated the nightmare to small-town America.

Both were based on John Wyndham's book *The Midwich Cuckoos*, in which a whole village briefly loses consciousness. Nine months later, eerily identical alien babies with telepathic powers are born to the women. They are smarter and grow faster than normal – and are soon threatening not just their “parents”, but all humankind.

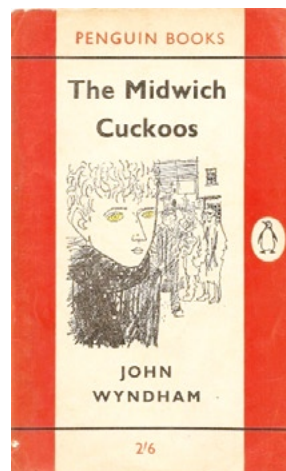
Originally published in 1957, the story is based on myths of changeling babies swapped by fairies. The

idea of otherworldly children masquerading as human has resonated down the centuries, and still speaks to our anxieties today.

All stories, however far-fetched, speak to both our internal and societal fears. That's why monsters are almost always only a step away from human: zombies, giants, werewolves. Even dragons – malicious and vengeful – are more human than animal, such as the dragon in *Beowulf*, which is an allegory for miserly greed.

As CS Lewis wrote: “When you meet anything that's going to be human and isn't yet, or used to be human once and isn't now, or ought to be human and isn't, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet”.

Confronting these monsters allows us to confront our own, lesser selves. So the un-child, who goes a step further and simulates the purity of the innocent, is even more



WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: John Wyndham's novel, *The Midwich Cuckoos*.

disturbing and can be brutally punished.

The “hungries” of MR Carey's ecological zombie tale *The Girl with All the Gifts* grow, learn and love stories like all children, but are dissected without anaesthetic. Even the gentle clones of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, created to save humans, are shunned as monsters until they give their lives.

More terrifying is the changeling, who can slip under our radar. The changeling myth plays on deep fears of the subversion of the adult/child relationship, in which the preternaturally intelligent changeling hides behind a cloak of innocence while controlling everything.

Secured from harm by our loving instincts, the changeling can even look out from behind the mask to mock our assumptions.

As the literature academic Karen Renner wrote in her work on evil children in the popular imagination: “More disturbing is the



changeling who no longer feels the need to pretend and reveals that the relationship between adult and child is actually an elaborate dance, which the child has been leading all along”.

Wyndham’s 1957 book and his mirror image story from the mutants’ viewpoint, *The Chrysalids* (1955), played on adults’ fears of their children.

The Baby Boom infants were growing up. These children were taller, heavier and faster growing than any previous generation. The idea of the teenager was establishing itself with the rise of the first youth cultures: the rebellious Teddy Boys in mock Edwardian clothes, who were the forerunners of the Mods and Rockers.

The first grammar school boys, who had won free places at selective schools after the 1944 Education Act, were now growing up into the Angry Young Men. These were British novelists and playwrights, including John Osborne and Kingsley Amis, who were disillusioned by the established sociopolitical order. They were intent on change, rendering their parents’ beliefs and traditions obsolete.

Wyndham was writing while the memory of the Holocaust was still fresh. Wyndham himself had been a cypher operator in the liberating army that fought from Normandy through the Reichswald



Art: Wikipedia

FIRST TAKE: Poster for the 1966 version of *Village of the Damned*.

forest. In both stories the new race is telepathic, and the menace of the children’s “hive mind” mirrors the strength of the communist threat compared to the liberal, individualistic West.

This gives us a clue as to why we are again turning to these unsettling stories.

Teenagers are again euphorically embracing revolution, literally toppling statues in joyful Black Lives Matter protest and skipping school to protest climate change.

Meanwhile, the widespread use of social media in itself can produce a hive mind effect. Although social media was intended to support free speech and allow anyone to share their opinion, the effect of a Twitter pile-on can be to crush

nuance, doubt or divergence. Commentators, such as Gavin Haynes, have highlighted the resulting purity spirals in which nobody can stand alone.

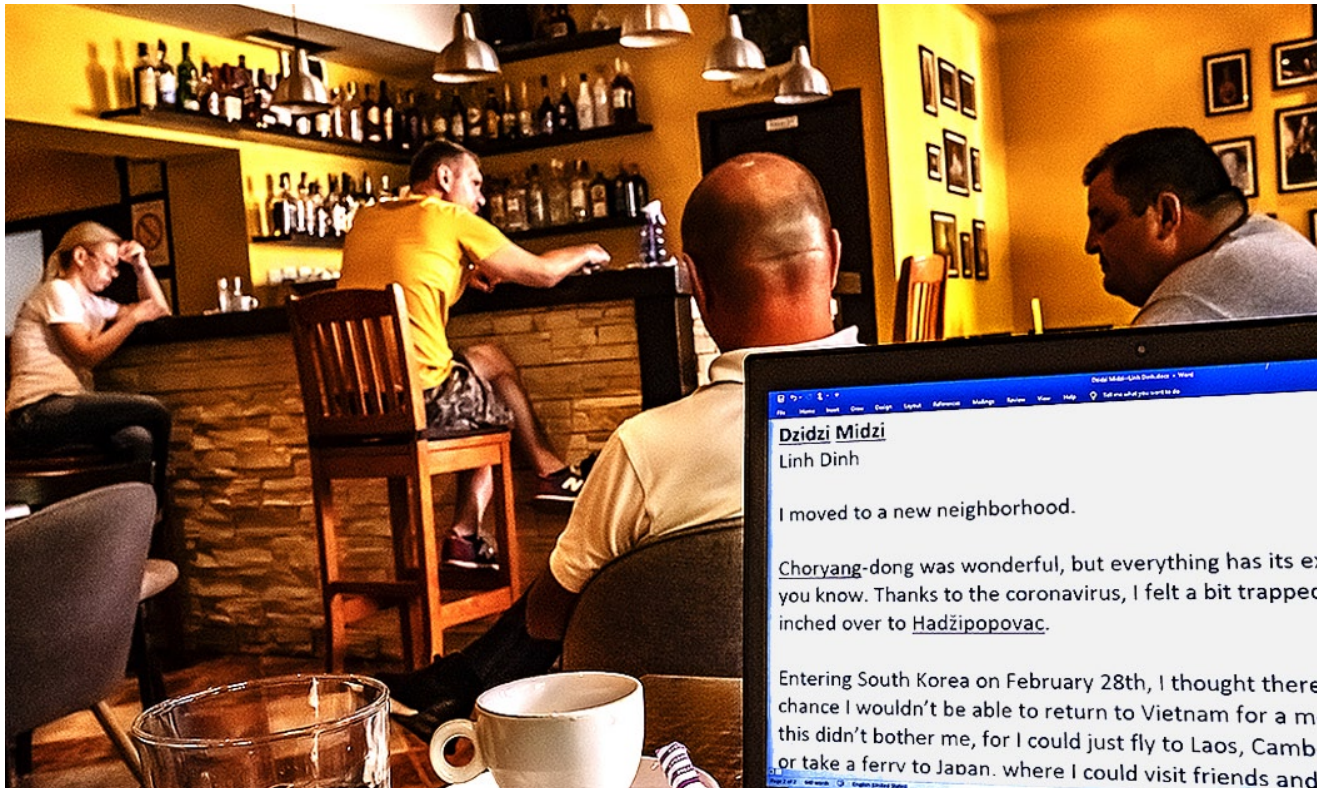
For the first time since the end of the Cold War, we are also seeing blunt power on a global stage – similar to that Wyndham knew. Communist China has clamped down hard on its people, disregarded individual freedom and appears to have largely got past COVID-19. By contrast, in the USA, activists protest for their rights and coronavirus continues to rage.

Both the single-minded power of the Chinese state and the collective force of an online horde echo the strength of the Midwich aliens versus the fragmented, conflicted arguments of the humans opposing them. The aliens’ power was that they were not individuals – they were parts of a single entity with a single idea – to survive. As in Wyndham’s time, we again face a real contrast between individualism and groupthink.

Once again, an older generation is disturbed by a sudden change in a new and powerful generation so unexpected that it begs the question: can these really be our offspring? In short, changelings are not terrifying because they are aliens. Changelings are terrifying because they are truly our children.

CT

*Amy Binns is Senior Lecturer, Journalism and Digital Communication, at the University of Central Lancashire. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*



DEAR READER: The Dzidzi Midzi's balcony is calming. More important, it's quiet enough for a man to write his essays.

Linh Dinh

# Heritage is home

*When you're steeped in your own heritage, just about every act has meaning*

*Our end drifts nearer,  
the moon lifts,  
radiant with terror.  
The state  
is a diver under a glass bell.  
— Robert Lowell, “Fall 1961”*

Even in strange places, you establish routines, so I've been going to Belgrade's Dzidzi Midzi bar to write. Its balcony overlooking the street is calming, and even more importantly, it's quiet.

It has four bartenders. One is

hook nosed, chubby, stubby, glum, swarthy, honest and speaks English quite comfortably. Frowning, he said to me, “This is too much”, when I accidentally gave him a ten-dollar tip, thinking it was just a buck.

I've done stupid shit all over, and it's a miracle I'm still in one piece. Falling asleep on a Polish train, I had to get off at some empty, rural station. Following the snow dusted tracks, I trekked back to my intended destination in the cold. Passing each rare house with its yellow lit windows, I felt like an

idiot alright.

Sweating up and down a winding dirt road in the mountainous mist, I finally reached a scraggly, unmapped village of ten dwellings, but before I could step into China, which was right in front of me, a Vietnamese soldier suddenly appeared, “What are you doing, uncle?!”

Like everybody else in Candelaria, Texas, I crossed a supposedly illegal footbridge into San Antonio del Bravo, Mexico. I got slapped by a thug in Istanbul, but in the same



**ANIMAL CRACKERS:** Linh Dinh and new friend at Hunters. "It's a perfect pub, except for its noise pollution".

city, a restaurant owner refused to charge me, so delighted was he to have such an exotic client.

I fell off a motorbike in Luang Prabang, but at least it wasn't moving. In Munich, I gushed to a new acquaintance, "I'm very happy to be in Berlin!"

Walking around this morning, I heard church bells, because it's Sunday, but this also means the Dzidzi Midzi is closed. Woe is me, but at least I'm not in a locked down city or country, where life itself has been put on hold, indefinitely. How is that possible? It's just the new normal, suckers, so just suck it up. Sinisterly derailed, entire societies must lie in the ditch, with casualties piling up, from suicides, fights, misdirected anger and anger.

So, I'm in Hunters. This was ac-

tually my first Belgrade bar, where I landed straight from the airport, still with my luggage. Cheap and true, it's a perfect pub, except for its noise pollution, though sometimes a curious song does come on, such as, just now, Manu Chao's *Me Gustas Tu*, "Qué voy a hacer / Je ne sais pas / Qué voy a hacer / Je ne sais plus / Qué voy a hacer / Je suis perdu / Qué hora son, mi corazón." Oh, shut up already! Music should always be occasioned, with actual lungs and fingers. Silence is best.

The Hunters' walls are lined with horned skulls; in the men's room, there's this large message in English on the wall, "How can a MAN who can hit a DEER at 250 yards keep missing the TOILET?" Just a mile from here in 2003, Serbia's prime minister was fatally shot by a sniper, so I'm guessing folks here have pretty steady

nerves and aim.

Their sense of humour is also unflinching. In a satirical article about Serbia's dreadful international image, Momo Kapor suggested that even its reputation for mass rape could be turned into an attraction, "Maybe that could be used in a positive way, for certain Western women who might want to get to know Serbian macho guys, and in light of the growing gay movement, they might see Serbia as an exceptional oasis of masculinity in an effeminate world. They might come in hordes to be raped in an exotic location".

Kapor's love letters to Belgrade and Serbia are translated into English and published as *A Guide to the Serbian Mentality*. This witty and informative book was given to me by a lovely lady, Jelena, who also paid for my dinner and beer.

Now that's hospitality! A wonderful couple spared hours from their busy schedules to show me Novi Sad. Together, we admired statues of five literary men, all within easy walking distance. "I've never seen anything like this", I told them. "There is certainly nothing like this in Vietnam".

On the way to The Hunters, I passed a wise yet obvious T-shirt, "MY HERITAGE IS MY FUTURE". To have a future is to possess a home, or vice versa, and heritage as home is also the central message of Kapor's book. Like any mature love, it's complicated by disappointment and even distaste, if not hatred. Kapor, "Wherever I go in Belgrade, I see gray people. Gray is our favourite colour." Much less picturesque than Paris, London, Rome, Vienna, Moscow, Berlin, Budapest, Istanbul or Athens, etc, his city is blighted by "a ubiquitous grayness", with "concrete ramparts of the new architecture, uniform Corbusieresque dwellings deprived of any beauty and any desire to build a house as a work of art". Repeatedly levelled by foreigners, Belgrade has also been "demolished by pretentious architects eager to wipe out all traces of antiquity".

So what is there to love, exactly? Your people, of course, and not just because your women are exceptionally beautiful and graceful, "Watching these women on the city streets is like seeing a fantastic modern ballet with no other sound than striking heels! Pale city girls who grow up suddenly, accustomed to city life and the yearning looks of passersby; independent, cynical, audacious and polite at the same

## ***Even if your homegirls are chimp ugly, you must love them, because they're your mothers, sisters, girlfriends and wives***

time, with the innate elegance of millionaires behind cunningly concealed poverty – it is upon them that newcomers feast their eyes until they disappear from sight, as if upon some secret signal, leaving the streets inconsolably barren and bare".

Like flowers, these women explode with beauty come spring, so that "bringing your wife to Belgrade in May is like taking rice to China – and sleeping with her is pure incest!" Not too PC, is it? In America, Kapor would be lynched on the nearest college campus.

Even if your homegirls are chimp ugly, you must love them, because they're your mothers, sisters, girlfriends and wives. You're an ape, too. They're your heritage, flesh, language and meaning, what you tumbled out of.

Having endured a million calamities together, each nation has evolved a million customs to assert its distinctiveness, so Kapor rapturously celebrates the Serbian plum brandy, grog-like tea, love of beans, three greeting kisses and šajkača cap, the last of which I've seen no evidence of during my one month here. The greeting kisses are in abeyance because of the coronavirus, I'm assuming.

In Busan, I was immersed in an intact society, despite the

coronavirus, and here in Belgrade, I'm again among people who proudly, defiantly, yet calmly, know themselves, and what they must protect. Reading Kapor, I'm reminded of certain Vietnamese writers who infuse readers with just as deep a love for their society. America doesn't have that.

As the country is torn apart, Stacy Schiff in the *New York Times*, dismisses the statue toppling, media-triggered racial rioting and Main Street looting as no different from, and just as necessary, as what occurred during the Boston Tea Party, "No one was hurt. No gun was fired. No property other than the tea was damaged. The perpetrators cleaned up after themselves. In the aftermath, the surgical strike was referred to plainly as 'the destruction of the tea.' To the indignant Massachusetts governor, it constituted nothing less than a 'high handed riot.'" Only hysterics and reactionaries can mischaracterise such righteous and surgical protests as riots, in short.

Millions of businesses being wrecked will only make for a better strolling and dining experience, claims the *New York Post*. You won't be crowded. Steve Cuozzo, "Pre-Covid, restaurant-going had become a chore to endure. Whether at 300-seat Cathedrale in the East Village or at 50-seat Ernesto's on the Lower East Side, bodies were scrunched together without mercy. And did I mention loud? But today's expanded al-fresco dining scene with safely-spaced tables is a joyful, high-summer antidote to the 'dead city' narrative. It's less pretentious and less rowdy than



**STRONG DEFENCE:** "Outside Red Star's stadium, there's even a tank and a missile launcher".

scene- and trend-driven indoor eating ever was."

Another day, I'm sitting outside a Pašino Brdo cafe, just across the street from Obilić Stadium. It's named after a Serbian knight who's credited with killing the Turkish Murad I, during or just after the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

Since Miloš Obilić was mentioned in no contemporary account, some doubt he even existed, but Murad I certainly had his neck and belly slashed from a Serbian sword that day. Obilić personifies that inspiring feat. Even during the Serbs' darkest hour, they could vanquish a prized enemy, so they can certainly do it again, and again, whatever it takes.

In 1998, FK Obilić miraculously won the national football cham-

pionship by besting much more storied squads, such as Red Star, Partizan and Vojvodina, etc. On the stadium's outside wall, a commemorative mural of this team is flanked by depictions of Miloš Obilić and the Church of Saint Sava, for in Serbia, sport, religion, history, myth and defence of home turf are all woven together. Outside Red Star's stadium, there's even a tank and a missile launcher.

Though no fan of clear liquor, I order a glass of šljivovica, for when in Rome, you know... Pouring mine from a generic bottle, the white moustached owner decides to join me, but with a glass of vodka. Kapor, "Apart from Russian vodka, šljivovica is the only drink that prompts Serb farmers to piously cross themselves before drinking". Sure enough, the old fellow crosses himself before

pouring comforting heat down his gullet.

Kapor, "When the Turks began to withdraw from these regions, rakija became the symbol of freedom and victory over Islam, which prohibited alcohol".

When you're steeped in your own heritage, just about every act has meaning, and for this reason alone, Serbs, Koreans and Vietnamese, etc, will outlast those whose most sacred heroes, symbols and customs have become meaningless, if not despised.

As the American state goes under inside a glass bell, its citizens must sink or swim on their own. **CT**

*Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. He maintains a photoblog at [www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com](http://www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com).*

Thomas S. Harrington

# Covid-19: Are you ready for the ‘no one could have known’ story?

*If so, check to see, as citizens of Oceania, whether you are supposed to be worried this week about the threat from Eurasia or Eastasia*

Ready for another rendition of the “no one could have known” routine made famous by all the self-proclaimed liberals who shamelessly went along with the neocons planned and lie-supported destruction of the Middle East nearly two decades ago?

As in “no one could have known”, or foreseen that by shutting down life as we know it to focus obsessively on a virus mostly affecting what is still a relatively small number of people at the end of their lives (yes, oh squeamish ones, we must summon the courage to talk about Quality Adjusted Life Years when making public policy) we probably would:

1. Cause economic devastation

and hence excess deaths, suicides, divorces depressions in much larger numbers than those killed by the virus.

2. Provide an already monopolistic and predatory online retailing establishment with competitive advantages in terms of capital reserves and market share that will make it virtually impossible at any time in the near or medium future for the country’s and the world’s small and even medium-sized businesses to ever catch up to them, and that this will plunge huge sectors of the world-wide economy into serf-like ruin, with all that this portends in terms of additional death and human suffering.

3. Cause greatly increased mis-

ery and countless additional deaths in the so-called Global South where many people, rightly or wrongly, depend on the consumption patterns of us relatively fortunate sit-at-homers to make it through the week.

4. Destroy much of what was attractive about urban life as we know it and lead to a real estate collapse of extraordinary proportions, turning even our few remaining showplace cities into crime-ridden reserves of ever more desperate people

5. Force state and local governments, already struggling before the crisis, and unable to print at money at will like the Feds to cut





bending to diktats “to keep them safe”, (no matter how empirically dubious the actual threat to them might be), rather than the courageous pursuit of joy and human fullness, as the key goal in life.

We will also no doubt be told that could have imagined or known at the time:

- Governments often make policy on the basis of information they know to be largely unsubstantiated or flat-out false because they know. Karl Rove spilled the beans in his famous interview with Ron Susskind that by the time the few conscientious researchers out there get around looking past the hype to debunk their initial story lines, the structures favourable to them put into place on the basis of the false narrative will have been normalised, and thus be in no danger of being dismantled.

- That our educational institutions, already failing miserably in the essential democratic task of educating the young to engage in productive conflict with those whose ideas are different than their own, will only further promote dehumanisation of “the other” through ever-greater reliance on the disembodied practices of remote learning. This, in turn, will only encourage the further growth of the “drive-by shooting” approach to “coping” with new and challenging ideas seen so often in our public “discussions” in recent years.

- That further fomenting the alienated and alienating educational practices mentioned above will make than it easier than it

already is for our oligarchs to enhance their already obscene levels control over our daily lives and long-term destinies through divide and rule tactics.

That, according to the Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance (IDEA), fully two-thirds of elections scheduled to be held since February have been postponed due to Covid. This does much to accustom citizens populations to the idea that one of their few remaining democratic rights can essentially be taken away on the basis of bureaucratic whims, creating a dangerous “new normal” that obviously favours the interests of established centres of power.

- That Sweden and other countries developed much more proportionate, culture-saving and dignity-saving ways to live safely and much more fully with the virus.

- That Anthony Fauci has a well-documented tendency to see health problems as being amenable to expensive pharmaceutical solutions, even when other less intrusive, less expensive, and equally effective therapies are available.

- That the recent history of using vaccines to fight respiratory infections has been ineffective when not grotesquely counterproductive.

- That during the first half of the 20th century the infectious disease of polio was a constant danger, culminating in 1952 with a devastating toll of 3,145 deaths and 21,269 cases of paralysis in a US population of 162,000,000, almost all of the victims being children and young adults. The danger then to the under-24 population (some 34-million) of being infected (0.169%) paralysed (0.044%) or

their already insufficient budgets at a time when their broke and stressed constituents

need those services more than ever.

6. Push “smart” monitoring of our lives, already intolerable for anyone still clinging to memories of freedom in the pre-September 11th world, to the point where most people will no longer understand what people used to know as privacy, intimacy or the simple dignity of being left alone.

7. Train a generation of children to be fearful and distrustful of others from day one, and to view

killed (0.0092% ) far outstripped in percentages and, obviously, severity anything Covid is doing to the same age group. And yet there was no talk of blanket school closures, cancelled high school, college and pro sports or, needless to say, lockdowns or masking for the entire society.

- That the world lost 1.1 million people in the 1957-58 Asian flu epidemic (more than the present Covid number of 760,000), with some 116,000 in the US (0.064% of the population) and the world similarly did not stop.

- That the Hong Kong flu of 1968-69 killed between 1- and 4-million worldwide and some 100,000 in the US (0.048% of population killed) and that life similarly was not stopped. Indeed, Woodstock took place in the middle of it.

- That the decisions to get on with life in all of these cases were probably not the result, as some today might be tempted suggest, of a lack of scientific knowledge or lesser concern for the value of life, but rather a keener understanding in the more historically-minded heads of that time that risk is always part of life and that aggressive attempts to eliminate this most ubiquitous human reality can often lead to severe unwanted consequences.

- That there were many scientists, including Nobel prize winners, who told us as early as March that this virus, while new, would in greater or lesser measure behave much like all viruses and fade away, and that, therefore, the best way to deal with it was to let it run its course while protecting the most vulnerable people in society and letting everyone else live their lives.

- That significant information

## **Scientists said in March that this virus, while new, would behave much like all viruses and fade away**

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platforms banned or sidelined the views of these high-prestige scientists while aggressively circulating the words of others such as Neil Ferguson at Imperial College, whose stupid and alarmist predictions of Covid mortality (the latest in a career full of stupid and alarmist, but not, coincidentally, pharmaceutical-industry-friendly predictions), gave politicians the pretext for setting in motion perhaps the most aggressive experiment in social engineering in the history of the world.

- That just as the levels of mortality from the virus were diminishing rapidly in the late spring and early summer of 2020, thus raising hope for a much-needed return to normality, there was a seamless bait and switch in the major media from a discourse centring on the logical and laudable goal of “flattening the curve” to one centred on the absurdly utopian (and not coincidentally vaccine-oriented) goal of eliminating new “cases”.

- That having the news media focus narrowly and obsessively on the growth of “cases” when 99percent+ of them are completely non-life-threatening was journalistic malpractice of the highest order, comparable to, if not exceeding in its sinister effect, that which was

generated by the media’s wholly unsubstantiated talk of mushroom clouds and WMD two decades ago, talk that led (so sorry brown people) to the deaths of millions and the destruction of entire civilizations in the Middle East.

- That government and corporate power holders, having successfully habituated people to engage in major solidarity-destroying social changes through the repetition of the largely meaningless term “case”, will surely come to rely on it and other breathlessly repeated, albeit largely empty, signifiers to paralyse society at will, especially at those times when the people appear to be coming together to demand a change in the existing balance of social power.

- That as numerous existing and emerging studies seem to demonstrate, hydroxychloroquine is, when combined with other similarly affordable drugs, a safe and rather effective early stage treatment for Covid-19.

- That negative studies on the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine published at *The Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and which were adduced time and again at a key moment in the early debate of possible Covid treatments to debunk the drug’s effectiveness, were found to be based on forged data sets.

- That suggesting world-class professional athletes in their 20s and 30s, or even their less talented and less fit high school and college counterparts, were running a risk of mortal consequences in even minimal numbers by playing in the midst of the Covid spread was, in light of known age-related numbers on the disease’s lethality



ty, at best ridiculous and, at worst, a very cynical fear-mongering ploy.

Repeat after me, “no one could have possibly known these things” and then check your screen to see, as citizens of Oceania, whether you are supposed to be worried this week about the threat from Eurasia or Eastasia.

And, of course, I’d be remiss if I didn’t remind you to mask up real tight especially in light of the CDC numbers you’ll have to forgive here for breaking with the rich tradition of pure panic-driven narrative and moving to the realm of empirical figures – which tell us that up until this point in our “everything must change” crisis:

- 0.011% of the US population under 65 have died of Covid
- 0.005% of the US population

## ***They’ve tried to see it otherwise, but this has very little, if anything, to do with great-grandma’s Spanish flu of 1918***

- under 55 have died of Covid
    - 0.0009% of the US population
  - under 35 have died of Covid
    - 0.0002% of the US population
  - under 25 have died of Covid
    - 0.00008% of the US population
  - under 15 have died of Covid
- And as for the most “high risk” people?
- 0.23% of the US population over 65 have died of Covid

Though they’ve tried to sell it otherwise, this thing has very little, if anything, to do with great-grandma’s Spanish flu of 1918. Indeed, it not even completely clear if it is cumulatively worse in terms of loss of life than the influenza outbreaks of 1957-58 or 1968-69 that most everyone slept through. But, I guess that doesn’t matter when there’s a narrative to keep. Might it be time to ask if there might be something else afoot with all this? **CT**

*Thomas S. Harrington is a professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut and the author of the recently published book, *Living la Vida Barroca: American Culture in a Time of Imperial Orthodoxies.**

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Jonathan Cook

# How Israel wages war on Palestinian history

*Palestinians are denied a voice. They are silent witnesses to their own and their people's suffering and abuse*

When the Palestinian actor Mohammed Bakri made a documentary about Jenin in 2002 – filming immediately after the Israeli army had completed rampaging through the West Bank city, leaving death and destruction in its wake – he chose an unusual narrator for the opening scene: a mute Palestinian youth.

Jenin had been sealed off from the world for nearly three weeks as the Israeli army razed the neighbouring refugee camp and terrorised its population.

Bakri's film *Jenin, Jenin* shows the young man hurrying silently between wrecked buildings, using his nervous body to illustrate where Israeli soldiers shot Palestinians and where bulldozers collapsed homes, sometimes on their inhabitants.

It was not hard to infer Bakri's larger meaning: when it comes to their own story, Palestinians are denied a voice. They are silent witnesses to their own and their people's suffering and abuse.

The irony is that Bakri has faced just such a fate himself

since *Jenin, Jenin* was released 18 years ago. Today, little is remembered of his film, or the shocking crimes it recorded, except for the endless legal battles to keep it off screens.

Bakri has been tied up in Israel's courts ever since, accused of defaming the soldiers who carried out the attack. He has paid a high personal price. Deaths threats, loss of work and endless legal bills that have near-bankrupted him. A verdict in the latest suit against him – this time backed by the Israeli attorney general – is expected in the next few weeks.

Bakri is a particularly prominent victim of Israel's long-running war on Palestinian history. But there are innumerable other examples.

For decades, many hundreds of Palestinian residents in the southern West Bank have been fighting their expulsion as Israeli officials characterise them as "squatters". According to Israel, the Palestinians are nomads who recklessly built homes on land they seized inside an army firing zone.

The villagers' counter-claims were ignored until the truth was

unearthed recently in Israel's archives. These Palestinian communities are, in fact, marked on maps predating Israel. Official Israeli documents presented in court show that Ariel Sharon, a general-turned-politician, devised a policy of establishing firing zones in the occupied territories to justify mass evictions of Palestinians like these communities in the Hebron Hills.

The residents are fortunate that their claims have been officially verified, even if they still depend on uncertain justice from an Israeli occupiers' court.

Israel's archives are being hurriedly sealed, precisely to prevent any danger that records might confirm long-sidelined and discounted Palestinian history.

Last month Israel's state controller, a watchdog body, revealed that more than a million archived documents were still inaccessible, although they had passed their declassification date. Nonetheless, some have slipped through the net.

The archives have, for example, confirmed some of the large-scale massacres of Palestinian civilians carried out in 1948 – the year Israel

was established by dispossessing Palestinians of their homeland.

In one such massacre at Daymech, near where Palestinians are today fighting against their expulsion from the firing zone, hundreds were executed, even as they offered no resistance, to encourage the wider population to flee.

Other files have corroborated Palestinian claims that Israel destroyed more than 500 Palestinian villages during a wave of mass expulsions that same year to dissuade the refugees from trying to return.

Official documents have disproved, too, Israel's claim that it pleaded with the 750,000 Palestinian refugees to return home. In fact, as the archives reveal, Israel obscured its role in the ethnic cleansing of 1948 by inventing a cover story that it was Arab leaders who commanded Palestinians to leave.

The battle to eradicate Palestinian history does not just take place in the courts and archives. It begins in Israeli schools.

A new study by Avner Ben-Amos, a history professor at Tel Aviv University, shows that Israeli pupils learn almost nothing truthful about the occupation, even though many will soon enforce it as soldiers in a supposedly "moral" army that rules over Palestinians.

Maps in geography textbooks strip out the so-called "Green Line" – the borders demarcating the occupied territories – to present a Greater Israel long desired by the settlers. History and civics classes evade all discussion of the occupation, human rights violations, the

## Israel's erasure of Palestinians and their history is echoed by digital behemoths such as Google and Apple

role of international law, or apartheid-like local laws that treat Palestinians differently from Jewish settlers living illegally next door.

Instead, the West Bank is known by the Biblical names of "Judea and Samaria", and its occupation in 1967 is referred to as a "liberation".

Sadly, Israel's erasure of Palestinians and their history is echoed outside by digital behemoths such as Google and Apple.

Palestinian solidarity activists have spent years battling to get both platforms to include hundreds of Palestinian communities in the West Bank missed off their maps, under the hashtag #HeresMyVillage. Illegal Jewish settlements, meanwhile, are prioritised on these digital maps.

#ShowTheWall, another campaign, has lobbied the tech giants to mark on their maps the path of Israel's 700-kilometre-long steel and concrete barrier, effectively used by Israel to annex occupied Palestinian territory in violation of international law.

And last month Palestinian groups launched yet another campaign, #GoogleMapsPalestine, demanding that the occupied territories be labelled "Palestine", not just the West Bank and Gaza. The UN recognised the state of Pales-

tine back in 2012, but Google and Apple refused to follow suit.

Palestinians rightly argue that these firms are replicating the kind of disappearance of Palestinians familiar from Israeli textbooks, and that they uphold "mapping segregation" that mirrors Israel's apartheid laws in the occupied territories.

Today's crimes of occupation – house demolitions, arrests of activists and children, violence from soldiers, and settlement expansion – are being documented by Israel, just as its earlier crimes were.

Future historians may one day unearth those papers from the Israeli archives and learn the truth. That Israeli policies were not driven, as Israel claims now, by security concerns, but by a colonial desire to destroy Palestinian society and pressure Palestinians to leave their homeland, to be replaced by Jews.

The lessons for future researchers will be no different from the lessons learnt by their predecessors, who discovered the 1948 documents.

But, in truth, we do not need to wait all those years hence. We can understand what is happening to Palestinians right now – simply by refusing to conspire in their silencing. It is time to listen. **CT**

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



*W. Stephen Gilbert*

# The woman Republicans call a Marxist

*Trump's aides will rake over the career of Kamala Harris to find useful ammunition to upset the election campaign of her and Joe Biden*

Joe Biden's choice of Senator Kamala Harris of California – a woman his Republican opponents call a Marxist – as his vice-presidential running mate has not been universally well-received on the left. Harris is seen by some as a conventional hawk, a Netanyahu apologist and a lawyer who punished African Americans. A debate may be had as to whether these charges really stack up; certainly Harris's record is diverse rather than monochrome.

In her time in the Senate, Harris has voted for six out of eight military spending bills. This July, unlike her former rivals for the Democratic candidacy – Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar, Cory Booker and Kirsten Gillibrand – she voted with her other senatorial rival Michael Bennet against Bernie Sanders' amendment “to reduce the bloated Pentagon budget by 10 percent and invest that money in jobs, education, health care, and housing in communities in the United States in which the

poverty rate is not less than 25 percent”.

On the other hand, last December, in one of her pair of rebellions, she joined Sanders in not voting for the 2020 military spending bill; this was two weeks after she had withdrawn her candidacy. Those named above also did not vote (making up the only members of the Senate so to do), save Gillibrand, one of six senators who voted against, and Bennet who voted for.

When it came to specific issues, Harris opposed the Saudi war in Yemen and argued for rejoining the Iran nuclear pact, like all the other Democrat runners for the nomination.

Regarding Israel, Harris was excoriated for meeting officials of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in her office. However, she did not join the AIPAC's vehement attack on allegedly antisemitic remarks by Rep Ilhan Omar who is Somali-American, declaring that “like some of my colleagues in the

Congressional Black Caucus, I am concerned that the spotlight being put on Congresswoman Omar may put her at risk” [quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, July 12 2019]. Harris opposes the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that targets Israel, but she is on record as speaking out against the annexation of West Bank settlements [interview for PodSaveAmerica April 17 2019] and, along with her Democrat rivals, supports the two-state solution. Without explicitly committing to recognition of a Palestinian state, she has written that “Palestinians should be able to govern themselves in their own state, in peace and dignity, just as Israelis deserve a secure homeland for the Jewish people” [Council on Foreign Relations questionnaire, August 21 2019]. That seems indistinguishable from support for self-determination. Harris’s husband is Jewish.

Some white commentators evidently feel no discomfort in judging a woman of mixed heritage (Tamil Indian and Jamaican) on race. They discount the point made by the *LA Times* that “... many black voters are wary of her 27 years as a prosecutor enforcing laws that sent African Americans to prison. Often left unsaid is that Harris, a former state attorney general and San Francisco district attorney, did not play a role in passing those laws” [October 24 2019]. It may be true that California incarcerated a disproportionate number of black men during Harris’s time, but is there any state penal system that doesn’t hold a huge number of black people for very long periods? As a prosecutor, she will have had to

deal with the defendants the police put before her. It seems unhelpful to risk this becoming a proposal that Harris is “the wrong kind of African American”.

Harris’s record as a law officer and senator can be seen to bear comparison with any progressive lawyer and legislator in the country on homicide rates, domestic violence, sex crimes, gun crime and firearms availability, transnational crime, hate crime, LGBT+ rights, race bias in the police, immigration, trafficking, drug dealing convictions, possession offences, recidivism, social media rights, right-to-know access, truancy, environmental crime, transgender cases, corruption among public officers, business fraud, legal loopholes, mortgage foreclosure and locally on Propositions 8 and 21. In court, she has won billions of dollars for citizens from financial enterprises, speculators and fraudsters.

There is some evidence that she has sometimes temporised on the death penalty, parole access and body cameras for police officers. But there are few who take public roles that require far-reaching decision-making who do not find that those roles are apt to temper their beliefs and inclinations. The balance of judgment ought not to condemn Harris out of hand.

Voters cannot reasonably expect long-serving public officials to be meticulously consistent, preternaturally wise, hieratically noble and scrupulously on-message on a daily basis.

What’s more, it needs to be remembered that in politics, women, people of colour and progressives are judged by far more stringent standards than reactionary white



Kamala Harris: Opposed Saudi bombing of Yemen.

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men, who only need to be idiosyncratic and/or combative to be seen as godheads.

Because of the nature of the executive roles taken by both Biden and Harris, they were more vulnerable to generalised attack from their rivals for the Democratic nomination than any of those rivals in the televised debates. Someone in a thread on my Facebook page declared that Harris “got taken to absolute bits by Tulsi Gabbard”, but checking on the July 2019 debates shows no such case. Gabbard’s remarks, which accounted for just one minute of over 130 minutes of debate time, were broad and unsupported. It’s easy to throw out accusations that may or may not be true or fair. As Jeremy Corbyn, the much-maligned former leader of the UK Labour Party, could confirm, it’s impossible to defend a career against amorphous assaults. Harris was expected to expound her working method and philosophy in her own prescribed one minute. She made a fair fist of it.

**B**ut let’s step back from the particular. How close to an exemplary ideal do candidates need to be in order to avoid being decried by those whose votes they need? There’s an ancient saw about voting for Anyone But [Name of Candidate]. Many of those who will vote – “holding their noses” in the cliché – for Biden and Harris may very well do so only to ensure that Trump and Pence are ejected from office. Unusually this year, though, it’s hard to imagine there would be many votes for the incumbents in an Anyone But Biden and/or Harris camp.

## ***Trump has suffered a much greater drop in support than Johnson, though both have been widely denounced***

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But those seeking election hope to generate a little more enthusiasm than that, understandably. The Republicans will certainly rake over the careers of both Biden and Harris (respectively of 50 and 30 years’ duration) to find specific instances of useful ammunition. Biden has plenty of well-aired inconsistencies to defend. However, there is no richer pasture on which to spread manure than Trump’s record in office, which is why the general expectation is that he will attempt to rob the election of its legitimacy, both before and after November 3.

Meanwhile, the Democratic ticket will (unless badly advised) seek to propose an optimistic, positive, creative and restorative platform and stay aloof from dirty tricks. Those who incline to vote Democrat but still bite lumps out of the nominees need to consider the extent to which they are merely being useful idiots for Trump.

Trump’s ideology – if such a creature may be discerned at all – is something that nobody with an iota of concern for her fellows wants to maintain in the White House. Voting for the Democratic ticket is, to vast hordes of Americans, a no-brainer. Elsewhere in the world, questions of who rules are not always so clear-cut. Even in

nations where the regime is impervious to criticism, and opposition politicians are locked up and/or murdered, the spirit of fascist Italy lives on: “Il Duce ha sempre ragione” [Mussolini is always right].

**I**ron rule sometimes rusts, though, and at present there are proliferating outbreaks of unrest in several countries. Social media has proved an invaluable tool for those embarking on campaigns of civil disobedience, both in spreading the word about demonstrations quickly and in recording evidence of police or military brutality in response. Governmental attempts to shut down these avenues have inevitably followed. But periods of unrest are apt to fizzle out. At least, Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus and Carrie Lam of Hong Kong and Prayut Chan-o-cha in Thailand will hope so (if they’re still in office when you read this).

Of the alternatives, it’s what? – settling for electoral challengers whether or not they come up to your own high-minded expectations, or armed insurrection? There may be sound intellectual arguments in favour of the latter course, but to characterise it as perilous would be to understate its implications laughably. What’s more, a global pandemic may not be the most helpful background to such a drastic endeavour.

If storming the Winter Palace has become more hazardous than it used to be, a programme systematically to disrupt the circumstances of the masters of international capital one-by-one might be more profitable.

Britain made its contribution to the Black Lives Matter expressions

of citizens' outrage and continues to host disruptions of traffic organised by Extinction Rebellion, but there's little sense here that the state is threatened. This doubtless speaks to insufficient radical zeal among people living in a mild climate. If not at the Trump level, these islands have certainly been governed by some divisive leaders, about whom history will be mindlessly partisan if it neglects to record that they were deeply loathed by quite substantial numbers of citizens. I am thinking especially of Lloyd George, Churchill, Thatcher and Blair. To join this group, Boris Johnson may need to go to war.

It's interesting that, if opinion polling is to be credited at all (and I rarely think so), Trump has suffered a greater drop in support than Johnson, though both of them have been widely denounced as hopelessly incapable of finding credible responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, Johnson's government has been found wanting across a range of policies and (particularly) the handling of unforeseen events, and indeed foreseeable ones such as school ex-

## Would I prefer a Tory government that I am expected to oppose or a Tory government that I am expected to support?

aminations and term reopenings.

Yet the Tory government maintains a decisive lead in these polls over the Labour opposition. As the leader, Sir Keir Starmer, is supposedly held in some esteem by polled voters, his reported failure to cut through against Johnson's erratic bumbling must say something deeper about the political climate in Britain. A commentator on a Facebook page about polling that I manage characterised Starmer's approach as "promise nothing, say nothing, and hope the Tories wreck so many lives that nobody will vote for them". Masterful inactivity is usually more effective in theory than in practice.

My own view may perhaps be shared more widely than I imag-

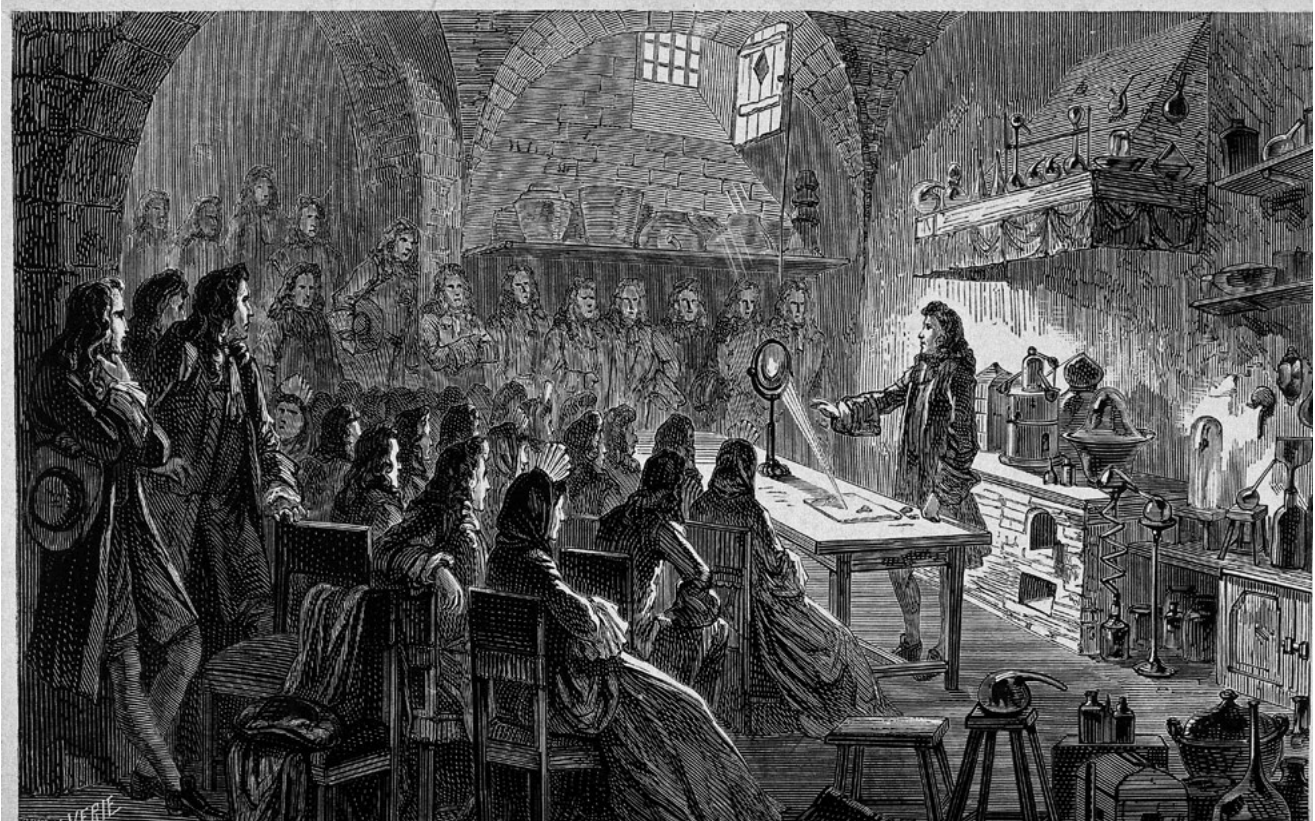
ine. While I would have no hesitation in voting for Biden and Harris in the US, I see little prospect of my voting for a Labour party led by Starmer. This is because the Democrats, though certainly not likely to seek all the societal change I would wish, would be sufficiently distinct from what has pertained over the last four years to make the decision simple. But Starmer can be seen to be determinedly turning his party into the shell of New Labour that Tony Blair left in 2007 and that David Cameron assumed in 2010. I ask myself: would I prefer a Tory government that I am expected to oppose or a Tory government that I am expected to support? That's a no-brainer too. I might even find myself voting for the Conservatives, just for the perversity. **CT**

*W. Stephen Gilbert has been a writer, journalist and TV producer since 1971, when his first play was screened on BBC1. His books include first biographies of Dennis Potter and Jeremy Corbyn. He mostly passes his twilight years indexing other writers' books.*

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BACK IN TIME: Isaac Newton was a man of many talents, including alchemy.

*Chris Gosden*

# The magical roots of modern science

*Magic was once seen as equal to science and religion.*

*Perhaps a bit of magical thinking could help the world now*

**O**n April 16 1872, a group of men sat drinking in the Barley Mow pub near Wellington in Somerset in the UK's south-west. A gust of wind in the chimney dislodged four onions

with paper attached to them with pins. On each piece of paper, a name was written. This turned out to be an instance of 19th-century magic. The onions were placed there by a "wizard", who hoped that as the vegetables shrivelled in the smoke,

the people whose names were attached to them would also diminish and suffer harm.

One onion has ended up in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. The person named on it is Joseph Hoyland Fox, a local temperance





SCARY: The earliest European depiction of a shamanistic rite. British Library. Nicolaes Witsen 1705, Amsterdam.

campaigner who had been trying to close the Barley Mow in 1871 to combat the evils of alcohol. The landlord, Samuel Porter, had a local reputation as a “wizard” and none doubted he was engaged in a magical campaign against those trying to damage his business.

E.B. Tylor, who wrote *Primitive Culture*, a foundational work of 19th-century anthropology, lived in Wellington. The onion came to him and thence to the Pitt Rivers Museum of which he was curator from 1883. Tylor was shocked by the onions, which he himself saw as magical. Tylor’s intellectual history regarded human development as moving from magic to religion to science, each more rational and institutionally based than its predecessor. To find evidence of magic

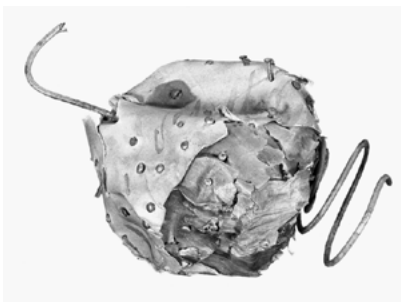


Photo: Pitt Rivers Museum.

**NAME AND SHAME:** Onion from the Barley Mow with Joseph Hoyland Fox’s name on the paper pinned to it

on his doorstep in the supposedly rational, scientific Britain of the late 19th century ran totally counter to such an idea.

Rumours of the death of magic have frequently been exaggerated. For tens of thousands of years – in

all parts of the inhabited world – magic has been practised and has coexisted with religion and science, sometimes happily, at other times uneasily. Magic, religion and science form a triple helix running through human culture. While the histories of science and religion have been consistently explored, that of magic has not. Any element of human life so pervasive and long-lasting must have an important role to play, requiring more thought and research than it has often received.

A crucial question is, “What is magic?” My definition emphasises human participation in the universe. To be human is to be connected, and the universe is also open to influence from human actions and will. Science encourages

us to stand back from the universe, understanding it in a detached, objective and abstract manner, while religion sees human connections to the cosmos through a single god or many gods who direct the universe.

Magic, religion and science have their own strengths and weaknesses. It is not a question of choosing between them – science allows us to understand the world in order to influence and change it. Religion, meanwhile, derives from a sense of transcendence and wonder. Magic sees us as immersed in forces and flows of energy influencing our psychological states and well-being, just as we can influence these flows and forces.

Magic is embedded in local cultures and modes of being – there is no one magic, but a vast variety, as can be seen in the briefest survey. Tales of shamanism on the Eurasian steppe, for example, involve people transforming into animals or travelling to the spirit world to counteract disease, death and dispossession.

In many places, ancestors influence the living – including in many African and Chinese cultures. A Bronze Age tomb in China reveals complex forms of divination with the dead answering the living. Fu Hao, buried in the tomb shown below, asked her ancestors about success in war and the outcomes of pregnancies, but then was questioned by her descendants about their future after death.



**NOW YOU SEE IT: The ‘conjurator’ John Dee performs a magical ‘action’ for Elizabeth I at Mortlake in London.**

British royalty employed magicians: Queen Elizabeth I asked Dr John Dee, a well-known “conjurator” – and probable model for Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* – to find the most propitious date for her coronation and supported his attempts at alchemy.

In the following century, Isaac Newton spent considerable effort on alchemy and Biblical prophecy. He was described by the economist John Maynard Keynes as not the first of the Age of Reason, but the last of the magicians. In the mind of Newton – and in his work – magic, science and religion were entangled, each being a tool for examining the deepest secrets of the universe.

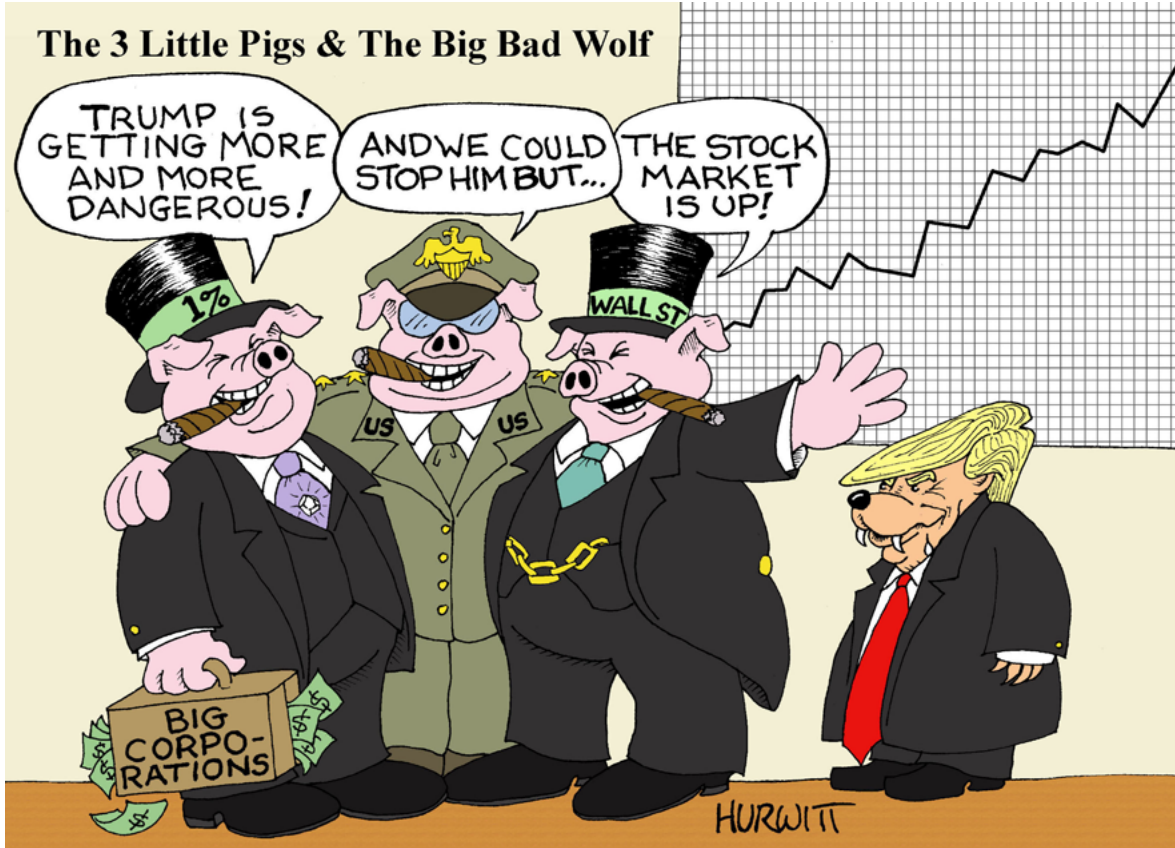
Many across the world still

believe in magic, which does not make it “true” in some scientific sense, but indicates its continuing power. We are entering an age of change and crisis, brought about by the depredations of the ecology of the planet, human inequality and suffering. We need all the intellectual and cultural tools at our disposal.

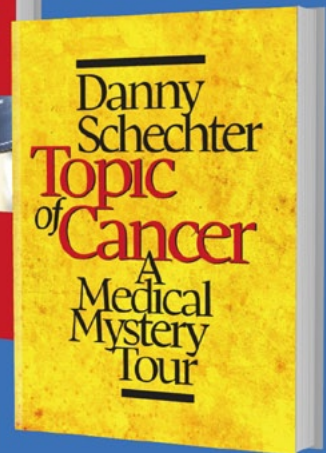
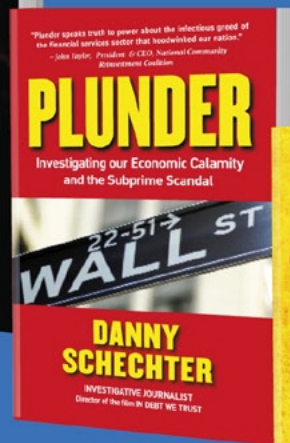
Magic encourages a sense of kinship with the universe. With kinship comes care and responsibility, raising the possibility that understanding magic, one of the oldest of human practices, can give us new and urgent insights today. **CT**

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*Sam Pizzigati*

# Moment of reckoning for gridiron greed

*College football already has a penalty for holding.  
Now it needs something more: a penalty for hoarding*

**T**his hasn't been a great time for America's college football coaches. The prospect of losing the entire 2020 college football season to the coronavirus has a ton of them fuming.

Cancelling the fall football season, Nebraska coach Scott Frost bluntly asserted before the 14 universities that make up the Big 10 decided to do just that this past Tuesday, would be a total disaster. "People need to understand the carnage and aftermath of what college athletics looks like". Frost continued, "if we don't play".

College football coaches, chimed in Penn State's James Franklin, will be failing their "responsibility" to help players "chase their dreams" if stadiums see no kick-offs this fall.

"I want to play", echoed Alabama superstar coach Nick Saban, "but I want to play for the players' sake, the value they can create for themselves".

The powers-that-be in Saban's corner of the college football universe, the Southeastern Conference, have so far bought that pay-for-the-players'-sake line and

refused to cancel their upcoming season. Of the nation's five biggest college football conferences, only two – the Big 10, a league for Midwest and Eastern schools, and the West Coast's Pac-12 – have so far called off fall football. The Southeastern, Atlantic Coast, and the Big 12, a mostly Southwestern conference, are all planning to open up play in September.

All for the good of the players, of course. But are the coaches and conference officials so eager to play this fall primarily worried about how a year off from football will impact the lives of their young men in shoulder pads? Or are these cheerleaders for challenging Covid thinking a bit more about the impact on their futures if American college football shuts down for the first time in 150 years?

Saban makes \$8.6-million a year at Alabama. His top coaching rival, Clemson's Dabo Swinney, takes home more than \$9.3-million. Overall, some 16 top-tier college football coaches make \$5-million a year or more, with another 18 pocketing at least \$3-million.

In more than half our nation's states – 28, to be exact – paychecks like these have left college football coaches their state's highest-paid public employee. Saban takes home 185 times the median household income in Alabama, Sweeney 184 times the median in South Carolina.

This college football excess runs well beyond the ranks of head coaches. In 2017, the University of Michigan became the first university with three assistant football coaches making at least \$1-million each.

These exceedingly well-compensated wizards of "x's and o's" all operate in ever-more sumptuous athletic facilities, surrounded by everything from locker rooms with PlayStation 5s and vibrating massage chairs by every locker to weight rooms the size of airline hangars.

How did we end up with this mix of privilege and entitlement, with college football teams that more and more run, in one critic's words, "as discrete commercial animals living tax-free and happy in the wilds of the American university system"?

This strange athletic environ-



**COLLEGE KINGS:** The players don't get paid, but their coaches rake in millions.

ment rests, most fundamentally, on the increasingly concentrated distribution of America's income and wealth. In the world of college football, this concentration even has a face: the late T. Boone Pickens. This billionaire didn't single-handedly create the college football universe we have now. But his exploits – before his passing last year at age 91 – certainly do vividly illustrate the creation process.

Pickens first gained regional renown as an oil man in Texas. But he wouldn't bust onto the national scene until the early 1980s, the years "corporate raiders" hit the

headlines with their brazen "hostile takeovers".

Pickens would prove a master at this game. He would target vulnerable companies, then buy up huge chunks of their stock, figuring, the *Washington Post* notes, that the managements, "to keep control of the business", would pay a premium to buy that stock back. Pickens typically figured right. He'd end up with "greenmail" windfalls. His targets would end up struggling, indebted, and haemorrhaging jobs.

By January 2006, Pickens had amassed a \$1.5-billion personal

fortune, and his BP Capital Management hedge fund was building that fortune by hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Pickens was winning.

"You don't go out there to lose", he liked to say.

Unfortunately, the football team of his dear alma mater, Oklahoma State, was losing, seldom rising above gridiron mediocrity. Pickens resolved to blaze a more noble pig-skin future. In 1983, after a tough Oklahoma State football loss to Kansas State, he gave the OSU football program \$100,000. Twenty years later, he upped his giving ante, donating \$20-million for renovating Oklahoma State's football stadium.

The next big Pickens move would rewire the college football economy. Early in 2006, Oklahoma State announced a \$165-million Pickens donation to the school's football enterprise, the largest single donation in college football history. By the end of 2009, the seating capacity of Oklahoma State's Boone Pickens Stadium had climbed to over 60,000 and players were marvelling at their dazzling new state-of-the-art amenities for everything from dining and studying plays to lifting weights and passing time.

Now deep-pockets had been bestowing their largesse upon college football programmes long before T. Boone Pickens started cascading dollars. But never at the level Pickens was suddenly playing at. To compete in the new Pickens era, college football programmes would clearly have to up their games. Donations of a few million here and few million there would no longer suffice. College athletic directors

had to be enticing eight-digit donations, not seven, nine-digit donations, not eight.

Only wins on the gridiron could guarantee levels of support so lush, and that reality heightened the already considerable pressure on college officials to hire coaches who could deliver winners. The predictable result: Pay deals for top college coaches soared. In 2006, just one college football coach pocketed as much as \$3-million. By last year, 31 coaches were making \$3-million or more.

College football fans saw other consequences of the new economic order that Pickens and his fellow plutocrats had ushered in. Saturday afternoons in the fall had traditionally been the time for college football games and all the pageantry around them. In college football's new reality, football conferences began signing TV deals that had them playing their games on fan- and student-unfriendly weekday nights.

Conference officials felt they had no choice. How else could they keep the money flowing in at anywhere near the new rates that America's richest had made the new must-meet standard?

Until the coronavirus, this new normal had seemed almost rationale. But the pandemic, as sportswriter Sally Jenkins sagely notes, has subjected college football to a "radiographical exposure" as revealing as what you get from "an X-ray that shows your cat swallowed your favourite fountain pen".

"You can see all the things", Jenkins explains, "that don't belong in the guts of a university".

Things like uncompensated college football players getting asked

## ***We need a more equal nation, where billionaires like Pickens don't get to set the tone of how our society operates***

to jeopardise their health playing a game that's catapulting their coaches into the ranks of the nation's richest 1 percent.

So what to do? The long-run challenge couldn't be clearer. We need a more equal nation, a place where billionaires like T. Boone Pickens don't get to set the tone of how our society operates.

**I**n the short run, we can take aim at the outsized rewards that now have college football's movers and shakers searching in the middle of a pandemic, says sports columnist Jerry Brewer, "for the moral loopholes that would allow the sport to function like the mega-billion-dollar business it pretends not to be".

This aiming effort has begun. The Drake Group, a two-decade-old group of scholars and college officials, is calling for "temporary salary reductions based on current salary levels", with "higher percent reductions for the highest salary levels graduated down to 0 percent for lowest paid employees". Kevin Blue, the athletic director at the University of California at Davis, wants federal lawmakers to start exploring how to "limit excessive spending on salaries and facilities in college sports". In Congress, Rep. Donna Shalala has

introduced legislation that creates a "Congressional Advisory Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics" empowered to "examine the amount of funds expended on coaching salaries".

How could a limit operate? Congress could choose to build upon the legislative work already begun on corporate pay excess. The 2010 Dodd-Frank Act currently requires all publicly traded corporations to annual reveal the pay ratio between the pay of their CEOs and most typical workers.

Congress could apply that same disclosure requirement to enterprises with tax-exempt nonprofit status – and then go a bold step further. Lawmakers could place consequences on those disclosures. They could deny tax-exempt status to universities and other nonprofits that pay their most highly compensated execs over 25 times what their median employees take home.

We bestow nonprofit status, after all, on institutions that we believe are doing good for their broader communities. But institutions that are lavishing compensation on personnel at lofty perches are doing the most good for those who least need our support. If universities can afford to pay their top coaches many millions of dollars a year, they can afford to do without our subsidies. **CT**

**Sam Pizzigati** co-edits *Inequality.org*. His recent books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him at [@Too\\_Much\\_Online](#).

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# Andrew Fischer's Random Thoughts

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## Rules of the game

Whatever his faults and mistakes, George Washington was a superior human being, indispensable to the American Revolution and truly the Father of His Country. One thing most people don't know is that when he was young he penned a set of rules to live by. Entitled *110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*, the maxims were based on those of 16th-century French Jesuits, and played an important role in shaping the USA's first president.

Some of those rules have meaning for us today. Here are five of them, from [www.mentalfloss.com](http://www.mentalfloss.com).

1. In the presence of others, sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum with your fingers or feet. *In other words, don't fidget.*

2. Do not laugh too loud or too much at any public spectacle. *Especially in a movie theatre.*

3. Let your discourse with men of business be short and comprehensive. *Everyone's busy, so be respectful of their time.*

4. Be not immodest in urging your friends to discover a secret. *Don't be a busybody or gossip.*

5. Speak not evil of the absent for it is unjust. *Don't talk behind others' backs, creep.*

Incredibly, this year an additional set of rules, written in

Latin, were discovered among Washington's papers. Here are five of them, in their original format and translated.

1. Equitantes cum equo semper utor a cameli et zonam finis calicem de tutela. *When riding a horse, always use a fine leather saddle and a protective cup.*

2. Nec est cur vos semper challenge qui refers te ad duellum perveniri ad mofo. *You must always challenge to a duel any cur who refers to you as "mofo".*

3. Si quis spiritum vestrum, et exclamatio faciendis supersedendum salierit tui. *If someone breaks wind in your presence, refrain from making exclamations or twitching your nostrils.*

4. Ostende igitur terrent nihil potest esse amicos, praesertim si suus a tergo zipper. *Show nothing to your friends that may scare them, especially if it's behind a zipper.*

6. Ne quis rhoncus in pede ligneo crus ligneum. Lusorem in alterum cruris. *Don't kick a man with a wooden leg in his wooden shin. Kick him in the other leg.*

## Bad start

Why is that at the beginning of almost every movie these days we have to sit through three or four production company logos – twice? The first

set is always colourfully animated, so it will be emblazoned into our addled brains forever. Well, that doesn't work, because right now I can only think of a small few out of scores of the things. But you know what I'm talking about.

First there's the Paramount or Universal logo. Fine and dandy. Then there's something like a cartoon canine morphing into a top hat, and then the name "Hat Dog Productions" appears. That's followed by a candle in the shape of a fish. A hand appears, strikes a match and lights the wick. Then gigantic "Fishwax Limited" letters appear and move away toward the candleholder, accompanied by dramatic music. That's replaced by some egomaniac's name suffixed with "house", starting out scrambled, then rearranging itself: "Hhtimseous" becomes "Smithhouse LLC".

Of course that's not enough. After the actual movie starts, all those names are shown again, only this time in type only, no animated cutesy nonsense. Why do we have to see the names twice? Why? Why? Why? ... Oh, how I hate redundancy. **CT**

**Andrew Fischer's** collection of short stories, *Purgastories*, is available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). He also designs board games, which can be downloaded at no charge from [www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com).

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