

**PROVOKING NUCLEAR WAR BY MEDIA** | JOHN PILGER  
**DARK SECRET OF ISRAEL'S STOLEN BABIES** | JONATHAN COOK  
**BORN TO BE WILD** | CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 124



# ILLITERATE

How can voters make informed choices if they can't read properly?  
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# AMERICA



# ColdType

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# Provoking nuclear war by media

**John Pilger** warns of the dangers of a potential nuclear catastrophe on the borders of Eastern Europe



Far from conspiring with convicted Bosnian–Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, Milosevic actually “condemned ethnic cleansing”

Slobodan Milosevic signs the Dayton Accords, formally ending the Bosnian War. Milosevic was recently cleared of genocide during the war. Photo: U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Brian Schlumbohm

The exoneration of a man accused of the worst of crimes, genocide, made no headlines. Neither the BBC nor CNN covered it. The Guardian newspaper allowed a brief commentary. Such a rare official admission was buried or suppressed, understandably. It would explain too much about how the rulers of the world rule.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has quietly cleared the late Serbian president, Slobodan

Milosevic, of war crimes committed during the 1992–95 Bosnian war, including the massacre at Srebrenica.

Far from conspiring with convicted Bosnian–Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, Milosevic actually “condemned ethnic cleansing,” opposed Karadzic and tried to stop the war that dismembered Yugoslavia.

Buried near the end of a 2,590–page judgment on Karadzic last February, this

## WHERE'S THE TRUTH?

**Milosevic was the prototype demon, vilified by the western media as the “butcher of the Balkans” who was responsible for “genocide,” especially in the secessionist Yugoslav province of Kosovo. Prime Minister Tony Blair said so, invoked the Holocaust and demanded action against “this new Hitler”**

truth further demolishes the propaganda that justified NATO’s illegal onslaught on Serbia in 1999.

Milosevic died of a heart attack in 2006, alone in his cell in The Hague, during what amounted to a bogus trial by an American-invented “international tribunal.” Denied heart surgery that might have saved his life, his condition worsened and was monitored and kept secret by US officials, as WikiLeaks has since revealed.

### **War propaganda**

Milosevic was the victim of war propaganda that today runs like a torrent across our screens and newspapers and beckons great danger for us all. He was the prototype demon, vilified by the western media as the “butcher of the Balkans” who was responsible for “genocide,” especially in the secessionist Yugoslav province of Kosovo. Prime Minister Tony Blair said so, invoked the Holocaust and demanded action against “this new Hitler.”

David Scheffer, the US ambassador-at-large for war crimes [sic], declared that as many as “225,000 ethnic Albanian men aged between 14 and 59” may have been murdered by Milosevic’s forces.

This was the justification for NATO’s bombing, led by Bill Clinton and Blair, that killed hundreds of civilians in hospitals, schools, churches, parks and television studios and destroyed Serbia’s economic infrastructure. It was blatantly ideological; at a notorious “peace conference” in Rambouillet in France, Milosevic was confronted by Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, who was to achieve infamy with her remark that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children were “worth it.”

Albright delivered an “offer” to Milosevic that no national leader could accept. Unless he agreed to the foreign military occupation of his country, with the occupying forces “outside the legal process,” and to the imposition of a neo-liberal “free market,” Serbia would be bombed. This was contained



**US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made an offer to Milosevic that no national leader could ever accept.** Photo: US State Department

in an “Appendix B,” which the media failed to read or suppressed. The aim was to crush Europe’s last independent “socialist” state.

Once NATO began bombing, there was a stampede of Kosovar refugees “fleeing a holocaust.” When it was over, international police teams descended on Kosovo to exhume the victims. The FBI failed to find a single mass grave and went home. The Spanish forensic team did the same, its leader angrily denouncing “a semantic pirouette by the war propaganda machines.” The final count of the dead in Kosovo was 2,788. This included combatants on both sides and Serbs and Roma murdered by the pro-NATO Kosovo Liberation Front. There was no genocide. The NATO attack was both a fraud and a war crime.

All but a fraction of America’s vaunted “precision guided” missiles hit not military but civilian targets, including the news studios of Radio Television Serbia in Belgrade. Sixteen people were killed, including cameramen, producers and a make-up artist. Blair described the dead, profanely, as part of Serbia’s “command and control.”

In 2008, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Carla Del Ponte, revealed that

## WHERE'S THE TRUTH?

she had been pressured not to investigate NATO's crimes.

This was the model for Washington's subsequent invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and, by stealth, Syria. All qualify as "paramount crimes" under the Nuremberg standard; all depended on media propaganda. While tabloid journalism played its traditional part, it was serious, credible, often liberal journalism that was the most effective – the evangelical promotion of Blair and his wars by the Guardian, the incessant lies about Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction in the Observer and the New York Times, and the unerring drumbeat of government propaganda by the BBC in the silence of its omissions.

At the height of the bombing, the BBC's Kirsty Wark interviewed General Wesley Clark, the NATO commander. The Serbian city of Nis had just been sprayed with American cluster bombs, killing women, old people and children in an open market and a hospital. Wark asked not a single question about this, or about any other civilian deaths.

Others were more brazen. In February 2003, the day after Blair and Bush had set fire to Iraq, the BBC's political editor, Andrew Marr, stood in Downing Street and made what amounted to a victory speech. He excitedly told his viewers that Blair had "said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right." Today, with a million dead and a society in ruins, Marr's BBC interviews are recommended by the US embassy in London.

Marr's colleagues lined up to pronounce Blair "vindicated." The BBC's Washington correspondent, Matt Frei, said, "There's no doubt that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially to the Middle East . . . is now increasingly tied up with military power."

This obeisance to the United States and

its collaborators as a benign force "bringing good" runs deep in western establishment journalism. It ensures that the present-day catastrophe in Syria is blamed exclusively on Bashar al-Assad, whom the West and Israel have long conspired to overthrow, not for any humanitarian concerns, but to consolidate Israel's aggressive power in the region. The jihadist forces unleashed and armed by the US, Britain, France, Turkey and their "coalition" proxies serve this end. It is they who dispense the propaganda and videos that becomes news in the US and Europe, and provide access to journalists and guarantee a one-sided "coverage" of Syria.

### Where the people live

The city of Aleppo is in the news. Most readers and viewers will be unaware that the majority of the population of Aleppo lives in the government-controlled western part of the city. That they suffer daily artillery bombardment from western-sponsored al-Qaida is not news. On 21 July, French and American bombers attacked a government village in Aleppo province, killing up to 125 civilians. This was reported on page 22 of the Guardian; there were no photographs.

Having created and underwritten jihadism in Afghanistan in the 1980s as Operation Cyclone – a weapon to destroy the Soviet Union – the US is doing something similar in Syria. Like the Afghan Mujahideen, the Syrian "rebels" are America's and Britain's foot soldiers. Many fight for al-Qaida and its variants; some, like the Nusra Front, have rebranded themselves to comply with American sensitivities over 9/11. The CIA runs them, with difficulty, as it runs jihadists all over the world.

The immediate aim is to destroy the government in Damascus, which, according to the most credible poll (YouGov Siraj), the majority of Syrians support, or at least look to for protection, regardless of the barbarism in its shadows. The long-term aim is to deny Russia a key Middle Eastern ally as part of a NATO war of attrition against the Russian

**Having created and underwritten jihadism in Afghanistan in the 1980s as Operation Cyclone – a weapon to destroy the Soviet Union – the US is doing something similar in Syria**

## WHERE'S THE TRUTH?

**The Guardian's Luke Harding leads his newspaper's Russia-haters in a stream of journalistic parodies that assign to Vladimir Putin every earthly iniquity**

Federation that eventually destroys it.

The nuclear risk is obvious, though suppressed by the media across “the free world.” The editorial writers of the Washington Post, having promoted the fiction of WMD in Iraq, demand that Obama attack Syria. Hillary Clinton, who publicly rejoiced at her executioner's role during the destruction of Libya, has repeatedly indicated that, as president, she will “go further” than Obama.

Gareth Porter, a journalist reporting from Washington, recently revealed the names of those likely to make up a Clinton cabinet, who plan an attack on Syria. All have belligerent cold war histories; the former CIA director, Leon Panetta, says that “the next president is gonna have to consider adding additional special forces on the ground.”

What is most remarkable about the war propaganda now in flood tide is its patent absurdity and familiarity. I have been looking through archive film from Washington in the 1950s when diplomats, civil servants and journalists were witch-hunted and ruined by Senator Joe McCarthy for challenging the lies and paranoia about the Soviet Union and China. Like a resurgent tumour, the anti-Russia cult has returned.

In Britain, the Guardian's Luke Harding leads his newspaper's Russia-haters in a stream of journalistic parodies that assign to Vladimir Putin every earthly iniquity. When the Panama Papers leak was published, the front page said Putin, and there was a picture of Putin; never mind that Putin was not mentioned anywhere in the leaks.

Like Milosevic, Putin is Demon Number One. It was Putin who shot down a Malaysian airliner over Ukraine. Headline: “As far as I'm concerned, Putin killed my son.” No evidence required. It was Putin who was responsible for Washington's documented (and paid for) overthrow of the elected government in Kiev in 2014. The subsequent terror campaign by fascist militias against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was the result of Putin's “aggression.” Pre-

venting Crimea from becoming a NATO missile base and protecting the mostly Russian population who had voted in a referendum to rejoin Russia – from which Crimea had been annexed – were more examples of Putin's “aggression.” Smear by media inevitably becomes war by media. If war with Russia breaks out, by design or by accident, journalists will bear much of the responsibility.

In the US, the anti-Russia campaign has been elevated to virtual reality. The New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, an economist with a Nobel Prize, has called Donald Trump the “Siberian Candidate” because Trump is Putin's man, he says. Trump had dared to suggest, in a rare lucid moment, that war with Russia might be a bad idea. In fact, he has gone further and removed American arms shipments to Ukraine from the Republican platform. “Wouldn't it be great if we got along with Russia,” he said.

This is why America's warmongering liberal establishment hates him. Trump's racism and ranting demagoguery have nothing to do with it. Bill and Hillary Clinton's record of racism and extremism can out-trump Trump's any day. As for Obama: while American police gun down his fellow African-Americans the great hope in the White House has done nothing to protect them, nothing to relieve their impoverishment, while running four rapacious wars and an assassination campaign without precedent.

The CIA has demanded Trump is not elected. Pentagon generals have demanded he is not elected. The pro-war New York Times – taking a breather from its relentless low-rent Putin smears – demands that he is not elected. Something is up. These tribunes of “perpetual war” are terrified that the multi-billion-dollar business of war by which the United States maintains its dominance will be undermined if Trump does a deal with Putin, then with China's Xi Jinping. Their panic at the possibility of the world's great power talking peace – how-

ever unlikely – would be the blackest farce were the issues not so dire.

“Trump would have loved Stalin!” belabored Vice President Joe Biden at a rally for Hillary Clinton. With Clinton nodding, he shouted, “We never bow. We never bend. We never kneel. We never yield. We own the finish line. That’s who we are. We are America!”

In Britain, Jeremy Corbyn has also excited hysteria from the war makers in the Labour Party and from a media devoted to trashing him. Lord West, a former admiral and Labour minister, put it well. Corbyn was taking an “outrageous” anti-war position “because it gets the unthinking masses to vote for him.”

In a debate with leadership challenger Owen Smith, Corbyn was asked by the moderator: “How would you act on a violation by Vladimir Putin of a fellow NATO state?”

Corbyn replied: “You would want to avoid that happening in the first place. You would build up a good dialogue with Russia . . . We would try to introduce a demilitarisation of the borders between Russia, the Ukraine and the other countries on the border between Russia and Eastern Europe. What we cannot allow is a series of calamitous build-ups of troops on both sides which can only lead to great danger.”

Pressed to say if he would authorise war against Russia “if you had to,” Corbyn replied: “I don’t wish to go to war – what I want to do is achieve a world that we don’t need to go to war.”

The line of questioning owes much to the rise of Britain’s liberal war makers. The Labour Party and the media have long offered them career opportunities. For a while the moral tsunami of the great crime of Iraq left them floundering, their inversions of the truth a temporary embarrassment. Regardless of Chilcot and the mountain of incriminating facts, Blair remains their inspiration, because he was a “winner.”

Dissenting journalism and scholarship have since been systematically banished

or appropriated, and democratic ideas emptied and refilled with “identity politics” that confuse gender with feminism and public angst with liberation and willfully ignore the state violence and weapons profiteering that destroys countless lives in faraway places, like Yemen and Syria, and beckon nuclear war in Europe and across the world.

The stirring of people of all ages around the spectacular rise of Jeremy Corbyn counters this to some extent. His life has been spent illuminating the horror of war. The problem for Corbyn and his supporters is the Labour Party. In America, the problem for the thousands of followers of Bernie Sanders was the Democratic Party, not to mention their ultimate betrayal by their great white hope.

In the US, home of the great civil rights and anti-war movements, it is Black Lives Matter and the likes of Code Pink that lay the roots of a modern version. For only a movement that swells into every street and across borders and does not give up can stop the warmongers. Next year, it will be a century since Wilfred Owen wrote the following. Every journalist should read and remember it.

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted  
lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high  
zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.*

**CT**

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**John Pilger** has won an Emmy and a British Academy Award, a BAFTA. Among numerous other awards, he has won a Royal Television Society Best Documentary Award. His epic 1979 *Cambodia Year Zero* is ranked by the British Film Institute as one of the 10 most important documentaries of the 20th-century.

**Jeremy Corbyn has also excited hysteria from the warmakers in the Labour Party and from a media devoted to trashing him**

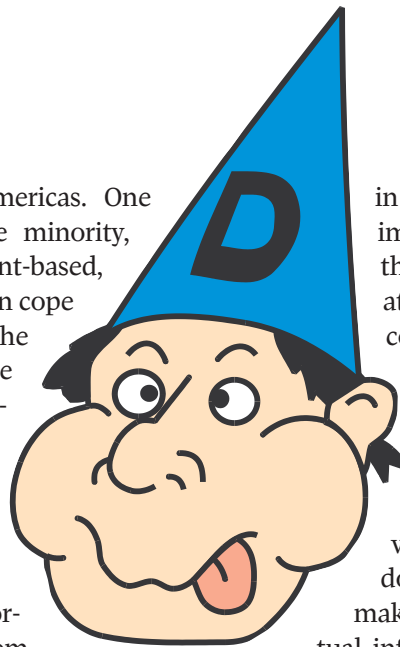
# America, the illiterate

How can voters make informed choices if they are unable to read properly?  
Democracy without education is impossible, writes **Chris Hedges**

**Political propaganda now masquerades as ideology. Political campaigns have become an experience. They do not require cognitive or self-critical skills**

**W**e live in two Americas. One America, now the minority, functions in a print-based, literate world. It can cope with complexity and has the intellectual tools to separate illusion from truth. The other America, which constitutes the majority, exists in a non-reality-based belief system. This America, dependent on skillfully manipulated images for information, has severed itself from the literate, print-based culture. It cannot differentiate between lies and truth. It is informed by simplistic, childish narratives and clichés. It is thrown into confusion by ambiguity, nuance and self-reflection. This divide, more than race, class or gender, more than rural or urban, believer or non-believer, red state or blue state, has split the country into radically distinct, unbridgable and antagonistic entities.

There are more than 42-million American adults, 20 percent of whom hold high school diplomas, who cannot read, as well as the 50-million who read at a fourth- or fifth-grade level. Nearly a third of the nation's population is illiterate or barely literate. And their numbers are growing by an estimated two million a year. But even those who are supposedly literate retreat



in huge numbers into this image-based existence. A third of high school graduates, along with 42 percent of college graduates, never read a book after they finish school. Eighty percent of US families did not buy a book last year.

The illiterate rarely vote, and when they do, they do so without the ability to make decisions based on textual information. American political campaigns, which have learned to speak in the comforting epistemology of images, eschew real ideas and policy for cheap slogans and reassuring personal narratives.

Political propaganda now masquerades as ideology. Political campaigns have become an experience. They do not require cognitive or self-critical skills. They are designed to ignite pseudo-religious feelings of euphoria, empowerment and collective salvation. Campaigns that succeed are carefully constructed psychological instruments that manipulate fickle public moods, emotions and impulses, many of which are subliminal. They create a public ecstasy that annuls individuality and fosters a state of mindlessness. They thrust us into an eternal present. They cater to a nation that now



lives in a state of permanent amnesia.

It is style and story, not content or history or reality, which inform our politics and our lives. We prefer happy illusions. And it works because so much of the American electorate, including those who should know better, blindly cast ballots for slogans, smiles, the cheerful family tableaux, narratives and the perceived sincerity and the attractiveness of candidates. We confuse how we feel with knowledge.

The illiterate and semi-literate, once the campaigns are over, remain powerless. They still cannot protect their children from dysfunctional public schools. They still cannot understand predatory loan deals, the intricacies of mortgage papers, credit card agreements and equity lines of credit that drive them into foreclosures and bankruptcies. They still struggle with the most basic chores of daily life from reading instructions on medicine bottles to filling out bank forms, car loan documents and unemployment benefit and insurance papers. They watch helplessly and without comprehension as hundreds of thousands of jobs are shed. They are hostages to brands. Brands come with images and slogans. Images and slogans are all they understand. Many eat at fast food restaurants not only because it is cheap but because they can order from pictures rather than menus. And those who serve them, also semi-literate or illiterate, punch in orders on cash registers whose keys are marked with symbols and pictures. This is our brave new world.

Political leaders in our post-literate society no longer need to be competent, sincere or honest. They only need to appear to have these qualities. Most of all they need a story, a narrative. The reality of the narrative is irrelevant. It can be completely at odds with the facts. The consistency and emotional appeal of the story are paramount. The most essential skill in political theatre and the consumer culture is artifice. Those who are best at artifice succeed. Those who have not mastered the art of artifice fail.

In an age of images and entertainment, in an age of instant emotional gratification, we do not seek or want honesty. We ask to be indulged and entertained by clichés, stereotypes and mythic narratives that tell us we can be whomever we want to be, that we live in the greatest country on Earth, that we are endowed with superior moral and physical qualities and that our glorious future is preordained, either because of our attributes as Americans or because we are blessed by God or both.

The ability to magnify these simple and childish lies, to repeat them and have surrogates repeat them in endless loops of news cycles, gives these lies the aura of an uncontested truth. We are repeatedly fed words or phrases such as “yes we can,” “maverick,” “change,” “pro-life,” “hope” or “war on terror.” It feels good not to think. All we have to do is visualise what we want, believe in ourselves and summon those hidden inner resources, whether divine or national, that make the world conform to our desires. Reality is never an impediment to our advancement.

The Princeton Review analysed the transcripts of the Gore-Bush debates, the Clinton-Bush-Perot debates of 1992, the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960 and the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. It reviewed these transcripts using a standard vocabulary test that indicates the minimum educational standard needed for a reader to grasp the text. During the 2000 debates, George W. Bush spoke at a sixth-grade level (6.7) and Al Gore at a seventh-grade level (7.6). In the 1992 debates, Bill Clinton spoke at a seventh-grade level (7.6), while George H.W. Bush spoke at a sixth-grade level (6.8), as did H. Ross Perot (6.3). In the debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, the candidates spoke in language used by 10th-graders. In the debates of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas the scores were respectively 11.2 and 12.0. In short, today’s political rhetoric is designed to be comprehensible to a 10-year-old child or

**Brands come with images and slogans. Images and slogans are all they understand. Many Americans eat at fast food restaurants not only because it is cheap but because they can order from pictures rather than menus**

## WORLDS APART

**Huge segments of our population, especially those who live in the embrace of the Christian right and the consumer culture, are completely unmoored from reality. They lack the capacity to search for truth and cope rationally with our mounting social and economic ills**

an adult with a sixth-grade reading level. It is fitted to this level of comprehension because most Americans speak, think and are entertained at this level. This is why serious film and theatre and other serious artistic expression, as well as newspapers and books, are being pushed to the margins of American society. Voltaire was the most famous man of the 18th-century. Today the most famous “person” is Mickey Mouse.

In our post-literate world, because ideas are inaccessible, there is a need for constant stimulus. News, political debate, theatre, art and books are judged not on the power of their ideas but on their ability to entertain. Cultural products that force us to examine ourselves and our society are condemned as elitist and impenetrable.

Hannah Arendt warned that the marketisation of culture leads to its degradation, that this marketisation creates a new celebrity class of intellectuals who, although well read and informed themselves, see their role in society as persuading the masses that Hamlet can be as entertaining as *The Lion King* and perhaps as educational. “Culture,” she wrote, “is being destroyed in order to yield entertainment.”

“There are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect,” Arendt wrote, “but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say.”

The change from a print-based to an image-based society has transformed our nation. Huge segments of our population, especially those who live in the embrace of the Christian right and the consumer culture, are completely unmoored from reality. They lack the capacity to search for truth and cope rationally with our mounting social and economic ills. They seek clarity, entertainment and order. They are willing to use force to impose this clarity on others, especially those who do not speak as they speak and think as they think. All the traditional tools of democracies, including

dispassionate scientific and historical truth, facts, news and rational debate, are useless instruments in a world that lacks the capacity to use them.

As we descend into a devastating economic crisis, one that Barack Obama cannot halt, there will be tens of millions of Americans who will be ruthlessly thrust aside. As their houses are foreclosed, as their jobs are lost, as they are forced to declare bankruptcy and watch their communities collapse, they will retreat even further into irrational fantasy. They will be led toward glittering and self-destructive illusions by our modern Pied Pipers – our corporate advertisers, our charlatan preachers, our television news celebrities, our self-help gurus, our entertainment industry and our political demagogues – who will offer increasingly absurd forms of escapism.

The core values of our open society, the ability to think for oneself, to draw independent conclusions, to express dissent when judgment and common sense indicate something is wrong, to be self-critical, to challenge authority, to understand historical facts, to separate truth from lies, to advocate for change and to acknowledge that there are other views, different ways of being, that are morally and socially acceptable, are dying. Obama used hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign funds to appeal to and manipulate this illiteracy and irrationalism to his advantage, but these forces will prove to be his most deadly nemesis once they collide with the awful reality that awaits us. **CT**

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**Chris Hedges** spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported from more than 50 countries and has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *National Public Radio*, *The Dallas Morning News* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This article originally appeared at [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)

# The dark secret of Israel's stolen babies

**Jonathan Cook** tells how hundreds of Arab-Israeli children were taken from their mothers after the country's creation in 1948

It is Israel's darkest secret – or so argues one Israeli journalist – in a country whose short history is replete with dark episodes. In July, Tzachi Hanegbi, minister for national security, became the first government official to admit that hundreds of babies had been stolen from their mothers in the years immediately following Israel's creation in 1948. In truth, the number is more likely to be in the thousands.

For nearly seven decades, successive governments – and three public inquiries – denied there had been any wrongdoing. They concluded that almost all the missing babies had died, victims of a chaotic time when Israel was absorbing tens of thousands of new Jewish immigrants.

But as more and more families came forward – lately aided by social media – to reveal their suffering, the official story sounded increasingly implausible. Although many mothers were told their babies had died during or shortly after delivery, they were never shown a body or grave, and no death certificate was ever issued. Others had their babies snatched from their arms by nurses who berated them for having more children than they could properly care for.

According to campaigners, as many as 8,000 babies were seized from their families in the state's first years and either sold or handed over to childless Jewish couples in Israel and abroad. To many, it sounds suspiciously like child trafficking. A few of the children have been reunited with their biological families, but the vast majority are simply unaware they were ever taken.

Strict Israeli privacy laws mean it is near-impossible for them to see official files that might reveal their clandestine adoption.

Did Israeli hospitals and welfare organisations act on their own or connive with state bodies? It is unclear. But it is hard to imagine such mass abductions could have occurred without officials at the very least turning a blind eye.

Testimonies indicate that lawmakers, health ministry staff, and senior judges knew of these practices at the time. And the decision to place all documents relating to the children under lock until 2071 hints at a cover-up.

Mr Hanegbi, who was given the task of re-examining the classified material by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been evasive on the question of official involvement. “We may never know,” he has said.

By now, Israel's critics are mostly inured to the well-known litany of atrocities associated with the state's founding. Not least, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homeland in 1948 to make way for Israel and its new Jewish immigrants.

The story of the stolen babies, however, offers the shock of the unexpected. These crimes were committed not against Palestinians but other Jews. The parents whose babies were abducted had arrived in the new state lured by promises that they would find in Israel a permanent sanctuary from persecution.

But the kidnapping of the children and the mass expulsion of Palestinians at much the same

**Although many mothers were told their babies had died during or shortly after delivery, they were never shown a body or grave, and no death certificate was ever issued. Others had their babies snatched from their arms by nurses**

# MEMORY HOLE

**Israeli campaigners seeking justice for the families of the stolen babies point out that the forcible transfer of children from one ethnic group to another satisfies the United Nations' definition of genocide**

time are not unrelated events. In fact, the babies scandal sheds light not only on Israel's past but on its present. The stolen babies were not randomly seized. A very specific group was targeted: Jews who had just immigrated from the Middle East. Most were from Yemen, with others from Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Arabness of these Jews was viewed as a direct threat to the Jewish state's survival, and one almost as serious as the presence of Palestinians. Israel set about "de-Arabising" these Middle Eastern Jews with the same steely determination with which it had just driven out most of the area's Palestinians. Like most of Israel's founding generation, David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister, was from Eastern Europe. He accepted the racist, colonial notions dominant in Europe. He regarded European Jews as a civilised people coming to a primitive, barbarous region.

But the early European Zionists were not simply colonists. They were unlike the British in India, for example, who were interested chiefly in subduing the natives and exploiting their resources. If Britain found "taming" the Indians too onerous, as it eventually did, it could pack up and leave. That was never a possibility for Ben Gurion and his followers. They were coming not only to defeat the indigenous people, but to replace them. They were going to build their Jewish state on the ruins of Arab society in Palestine.

Scholars label such enterprises – those intending to create a permanent homeland on another people's land – as "settler colonialism." Famously, European settlers took over the lands of North America, Australia and South Africa.

The Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has observed that settler colonial movements are distinguished from ordinary colonialism by what he terms the "logic of elimination" that propels them. Such groups have to adopt strategies of extreme violence towards the indigenous population. They may commit genocide, as happened to the Native American people and to the Australian Aborigines. If genocide is not possible, they may instead forcefully impose segregation based on racial criteria, as happened in apartheid South Africa. Or they may commit large-scale ethnic cleansing, as

Israel did in 1948. They may adopt more than one strategy.

Ben Gurion needed not only to destroy Palestinian society, but to ensure that "Arabness" did not creep into his new Jewish state through the back door. The large numbers of Arab Jews who arrived in the first decade were needed in his demographic war against the Palestinians and as a labour force, but they posed a danger, too. Ben Gurion feared that, whatever their religion, they might "corrupt" his Jewish state culturally by importing what he called the "spirit of the Levant."

Adult Jews from the region, he believed, could not be schooled out of their "primitiveness." But the Zionist leadership hoped the next generation – their offspring – could. They would be reformed through education and the cultivation of a loathing for everything Arab. The task would be made easier still if they were first detached from their biological families.

Israeli campaigners seeking justice for the families of the stolen babies point out that the forcible transfer of children from one ethnic group to another satisfies the United Nations' definition of genocide. Certainly, the theft of the Arab Jewish children and their reallocation to European Jews chimed neatly with settler colonialism's logic of elimination. Such abductions were not unique to Israel. Australia and Canada, for example, seized babies from their surviving native populations in a bid to "civilise" them.

The "re-education" of Israel's Arab Jews has been largely a success. Mr Netanyahu's virulently anti-Palestinian Likud party draws heavily on this group's backing. In fact, it was only because he dares not alienate such supporters that Mr Netanyahu agreed to a fresh examination of the evidence concerning the stolen babies.

But if there is a lesson from the government's partial admission about the abductions, it is not that Mr Netanyahu and Israel's European elite are now ready to change their ways. Rather, it should alert Israel's Arab Jews to the fact that they face the same enemy as the Palestinians: a European Jewish establishment that remains resolutely resistant to the idea of living in peace and respect with either Arabs or the region. **CT**

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# First came the Dream. Then the Nightmare

One of the most enduring American myths is that hoary old chestnut, perpetuated by generations of media, movies, and TV sit-coms that anyone can achieve the American Dream – becoming rich and famous through a combination of ambition, hard work and good luck. However, the decade since the great financial crash of 2008-9 has shown that our fate is more likely to be determined not by economic malfeasance and top-level greed than by fairy tales of hard work and good fortune. Still, many people cling to the comforting idea that poverty is the fate of the lawless, idle and feckless, who occupy the edges of society, rather than regular, hard-working “people like us.”

A new book – **American Reality** – should help dispel any remaining warm and fuzzy feelings about the face of American today. In 2011, Kira Pollack, director of photography at Time magazine, commissioned **Joakim Eskildsen** to photograph the crisis, in which nearly 46.2 million Americans were living below a poverty line set by the US Census Bureau. Eskildsen, with journalist **Natasha del Toro**, travelled to the places highlighted as having the highest poverty rates in the country – Fresno, California; Athens, Georgia; Cheyenne River, South Dakota; New Orleans and Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana; and Bronx, New York, to document the lives of those behind the statistics. The people Eskildsen portrays and Del Toro interviews over the following seven pages are just a few of those in the resulting book: people who are normally invisible in a society that still clings to the idea of the American Dream. Their message for the rest of US society is that times have changed: the American Dream has become the American Nightmare. – **Tony Sutton**



## AMERICAN REALITIES

Photos: Joakim Eskildsen

Text: Natasha del Toro

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## IN THE PICTURE



### FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

Pop music blares from loudspeakers while people are waiting in line for a meal at the Poverello House, a non-profit organisation that has been serving the hungry and homeless since 1973. Billions of dollars cut from the state's health and social services budget are expected to have drastic effects on fragile groups such as the elderly and the disabled, who are increasingly living on the streets and relying on food pantries. "You can go to the Salvation Army, the Catholic Charities . . . you've got a whole rotation. That's how the seniors in this town get by," said a 61-year-old veteran who lives in a van next to Poverello.



### CHEYENNE RIVER, SOUTH DAKOTA

17-year-old **Ramona Three Legs** was at a pregnancy check-up when a fire broke out due to a poorly-installed electrical system, and her family's trailer burnt down. The trailer, though condemned and with windows all boarded up, was everything the family owned. Apart from a family photo album that Kate finds in the rubble, the family's belongings have been destroyed. Kate lived here with her mother, her sister, and her two children. A few years earlier, her sister lost two children in a similar trailer fire. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sells condemned trailers to Native Americans in an attempt to solve the housing shortage on the reservation.

## IN THE PICTURE



Images by Joakim Eskildsen: American Realities (Steidl)

### **PLAQUEMINES PARISH, LOUISIANA**

Three-year old Eli Stockstill and his brother DJ often stay on their grandparents' shrimp boat that sits in a lot out of the water for maintenance. Darla and Todd Rooks, longtime Louisiana fishermen, moved into the 40-square foot cabin of their boat after the BP oil spill, because they were not sure they would be able to continue paying their lease. Before the oil spill, they used to make good living, eating healthy food from the sea. Now, the fresh seafood has been replaced by canned food, and they have developed a host of health problems. Even the puddles in which the boys used to play seem dangerous to Darla who fears the water is contaminated.





### FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

**Madai Nunez** and her 8-year-old neighbour **Amy** live in a migrant worker motel in downtown Fresno, California. During the day, Amy and her friends play in the parking lot where Nunez is keeping an eye on the children while their parents work in the fields for \$8 an hour. At night, the mood at the motel changes when the men, after a long day of physical labour, start drinking to unwind. Fights are common, and at times, prostitutes come knocking on doors looking for business, sometimes with their babies in tow.

## IN THE PICTURE



Images by Joakim Eskildsen: American Realities (Steidl)

### **ATHENS, GEORGIA**

**Ruby Ann Smith** lives under the North Avenue Bridge where it crosses the North Oconee River in Athens, Georgia. She shares the space with other homeless people who have made an outdoor encampment. A prostitute and a drug addict, Ruby Ann has been beaten, shot, and sexually assaulted. "I am so lucky I am still alive", says Smith, half smiling, half crying, "I should have been dead ten times by now."



### BRONX, NEW YORK

**Jasmine** and **Derrick Amoateng**, a pair of first-generation siblings from Ghana, sit in a Hispanic bakery in the South Bronx. Historically with a large population of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Mexicans, the South Bronx has in recent years seen an influx of immigrants from Ghana, Nigeria and Mali, and the population of residents born in Africa has seen a five-fold increase since 1990. Mixing with Hispanics and other ethnic groups, they have had a significant impact on the local culture, opening African restaurants and shops, as well as holding soccer tournaments.

## IN THE PICTURE



Images by Joakim Eskildsen: American Realities (Steidl)

### **FRESNO, CALIFORNIA**

Javier Hernandez and Albino Lopez have been working as farm labourers in California's Central Valley since they emigrated from Mexico 40 years ago. It is a gruelling routine they have grown used to; they are picked up at 5am by a truck that transports them to fields where they pick fruit, vegetables and cotton for eight hours a day with few breaks. At the end of the shift, they return to overcrowded trailers, together with other migrant workers. When possible, they send a portion of their minimum-wage earnings to their families back in Mexico. The day we met them, the labour contractor had sent them home from the fields for the second day in a row with no explanation and no pay.

# 'Pow-pow, you're dead'

**Frida Berrigan** on children, toy guns – and the real thing

It was a beautiful evening and the kids – Madeline, two; Seamus, almost four; and Rosena, nine – were running across a well-tended town green. Seamus pointed his rainbow flag with the feather handle at his sisters and “pow-powed” them, calling out, “Yous are dead now, guys. I shot you.”

Madeline and Rosena laughed and just kept on running, with Seamus at their heels. I hid my face in my hands. It wasn't just that he was playing guns, but that he was using a Pride flag as his gun at a vigil to mourn those killed at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. My pacifist husband Patrick ran to redirect their activities, replacing the flag with a ball and glove and beginning a game of catch. Vigil organisers were taking turns reading the names of those killed into a microphone.

“... *Juan Ramon Guerrero, 22*  
*Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36*  
*Luis S. Vielma, 22 ...*”

Those three men and 46 others were massacred on June 12th. Another 50 people were wounded. Omar Mateen, who killed them, was armed with a Sig Sauer MCX assault rifle and a Glock 17 9mm semi-automatic pistol. He bought those two weapons legally in the days leading up to the attack.

The carnage brought politicians and

pundits out in force, using all the usual arguments for and against guns. Because the victims were mostly gay and mostly Latino, and because the attack was carried out by an American citizen with an ethnic last name who may have been enthralled by Islamic terrorism, or a closeted, self-hating homosexual (or both), the commentary quickly became muddled. Was it a hate crime, Islamic terrorism, or a strange double-bonus hit for the haters? Mateen was killed in a shootout with police and so can't speak to his motives. Investigators were left to sift through the material evidence and a dizzying compilation of online comments, Facebook likes, and recollections from old co-workers, family members, and possible lovers in their search for answers.

The most essential facts are, however, not that complicated: Mateen had a license to carry a gun, training as a private security guard, and hatreds to act upon. He armed himself and he killed.

And all over the country, since that fateful day that elicited the usual cries of “never again,” the killing continues: Alton Sterling and Philando Castille by the police; Dallas Area Rapid Transit Police Officer Brent Thompson and four Dallas Police officers, Lorne Ahrens, Michael Smith, Michael Krol, and Patrick Zamarripa, by a lone sniper, Micah Johnson, who himself was then

**I hid my face in my hands. It wasn't just that my son was playing guns, but that he was using a Pride flag as his gun at a vigil to mourn those killed at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida**

## KID STUFF

**I grew up in a similar family of activists. We, too, were forbidden toy guns and other war toys. My brother and I were more likely to play games such as “protester at the Pentagon” than cops and robbers**

killed by an armed police robot; three more police officers in Baton Rouge on July 17th. “... Montrell Jackson, 32  
*Matthew Gerald, 41*  
*Brad Garafola, 45...*”

And the killing continues. Using the Gun Violence Archive, I counted another 306 deaths by guns throughout the United States in the first eight days of July alone. Most of them weren't high-profile police shootings or mass tragedies, but in a small-scale and localised way, the grief and outrage of Baton Rouge, St. Paul, and Dallas were replicated in every corner of this country, including Ticfaw, Louisiana; Woodland, California; Tabernacle, New Jersey; and Harvey, Illinois. More than 300 deaths by gun in just eight days.

### **“Stabbin’ my bunny” – Teaching kids about guns and violence**

And then, of course, there were my kids, my husband, and those “guns.” As a boy, Patrick wasn't allowed to play with toy guns. Instead, he, his parents, and their friends would go to the mall during the Christmas buying spree to put “Stop War Toys” stickers on Rambo and GI Joe action figures. When he went to his friends' houses, he had to tell them that war toys were verboten.

I grew up in a similar family of activists. We, too, were forbidden toy guns and other war toys. My brother and I were more likely to play games such as “protester at the Pentagon” than cops and robbers. I've been thinking recently about why toy guns didn't have a grip on our imaginations as kids. I suspect it was because we understood – were made to understand – what the big gun of US militarism had done in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Indochina, and throughout Central America. Our dad had seen the big gun of war up close and personal. His finger – the same one he pointed at us when we were in trouble – had pulled the trigger again and again in France during World War II. He was decorated there, but had zero

nostalgia for the experience. He was, in fact, deeply ashamed of the dashing figure he had once cut when home from the front. And so, dad screwed up a new kind of courage to say no to war and violence, to killing of any kind. His knowledge of war imbued his non-violent peace activist mission with a genuine, badass, superhero style swagger.

Our parents – our community of ragtag, countercultural Catholic peace activists – made that no-violence, no-killing, no-matter-what point again and again. In fact, my early experience of guns was the chilling fear of knowing that, in protest, my father, mother, and their friends were walking into what they called “free fire zones” on military bases, where well-armed, well-trained soldiers were licensed to kill intruders. So we didn't point toy guns at each other. We didn't pow-pow with our fingers or sticks. We crossed those fingers and hoped that the people we loved would be safe.

Our inner city Baltimore neighbourhood, where crack cocaine madness was just taking hold, drove that point home on a micro level. Our house was robbed at gunpoint more than once – and we had so little worth taking. We watched a man across the street bleed to death after being stabbed repeatedly in a fight over nothing. People from our house ran to help and were there for far too long before an ambulance even arrived. We knew as little kids that violence was no laughing matter, nor child's play. It was serious business and was to be resisted.

As parents tend to do, Patrick and I are passing this tradition on to our kids, hopefully without the emotional scarring that went with our childhoods of resistance. They don't have guns or action figures or any other toy implements of death. Still, we've been watching Seamus, our Team Elsa (from the Disney blockbuster Frozen) son, as he's recently begun turning every stick into an imaginary gun. This is, of course, happening just as, in the headlines of the moment, actual guns are turning so many previously real people into statistics.

Under the circumstances, how could I not find myself thinking about toy guns, real guns, the nature of play, the role of imagination, the place of parents, and how to (or whether to) police (ha!) that imaginary play?

When my stepdaughter Rosena was about four, she found a toy dagger at the playground, somehow smuggled it home, and was stabbing one of her beloved stuffed animals, a bunny, repeatedly with it.

In the other room, I could hear the thumps on the bedroom floor and called out, “What are you doing?”

“Stabbin’ my bunny. I kilt her,” she responded matter-of-factly.

Seizing a “teaching moment” and undoubtedly gripped by my own childhood experiences and memories of my parents, I blustered into the bedroom with a shoebox. “Now, your bunny is dead,” I announced in my version of over-the-top mommism. “You know what happens when living things die, right? It’s forever, right? Now, we have to bury her.” Rosena and I then “buried” the doll on a high shelf in her closet. I told her that we cannot hurt or kill the things (or people) we love. I told her that, because she had “killed” that bunny, she could never play with it again.

About a week later, I slipped it back into her toy basket and, when she asked why, assured her that I thought she wouldn’t hurt her toys like that again. She agreed. I recall that episode now with a certain embarrassment, but when I recently heard Rosena explaining death and loss to her little brother and sister, I thought: oh, maybe the drama of the shoebox burial was actually helpful in some fashion.

Toys matter. We’ve put a fair amount of thought into what might be called toy curation in our household. We’ve bought nothing new and little used. Mostly, we’ve accepted shipments of hand-me-downs from friends who just wanted “this crap” out of their houses. No guns came with them, thankfully. After all, even toy guns

can mean death under the wrong circumstances.

A year ago, I visited the Cuddell Recreation Center in Cleveland with my daughter Madeline and a group of friends. That broad stretch of ball fields and paths, anchored by a gazebo and a playground, was where 12-year-old Tamir Rice was fatally shot by Officer Timothy Loehmann in November 2014. Rice, an African American, was playing with an Airsoft pellet gun that a friend’s Dad had bought at Walmart. A replica of an actual Colt pistol, it shot plastic pellets and looked pretty real, since the orange tip signifying “toy” was missing. However, Officer Loehmann, investigating a report that a man was carrying a gun in the park, was moving too fast to notice much. He sped up and began shooting even before his squad car stopped moving. Rice’s hands were still reportedly in his pockets.

Though Loehmann was not indicted, the city of Cleveland paid a \$6-million settlement to the Rice family and demolished the gazebo where the boy was shot. In the park that day, local activists described the shooting and its aftermath to our group. Half listening, I followed Madeline as she toddled into the playground. I tried to imagine Samaria Rice’s pain in this unremarkable place made part shrine, part soapbox by a police officer’s quick trigger finger, racism, and her son’s blood.

I thought about that toy gun in Tamir Rice’s hand and what might have been going through his head as he pointed it and played with it. Despite the age difference, it couldn’t have been that far from what regularly goes through my son’s head when he picks up a stick and points it: pop, boom, wow! The difference, of course, is that Seamus, blond and freckled and unmistakably white, would run little risk of being shot down by a policeman, even eight years from now with a replica toy gun in his hands.

### **Blasters, blasters, everywhere**

Toys are a big business in this country, rak-

**Though Loehmann was not indicted, the city of Cleveland paid a \$6-million settlement to the Rice family and demolished the gazebo where the boy was shot**

## KID STUFF

**Seamus was quickly overwhelmed by the glut of everything – lots of pictures of toys on boxes, but not a lot to pick up. It was, in that sense, the very opposite of our visits to the Goodwill store, where you can sit on the floor and play with all those second-hand toys as long as you put them back afterwards.**

ing in \$19.4-billion in 2015, according to the retail tracking firm NPD Group. Our family is not responsible for even a dime of this. Not surprisingly, then, my announcement that we were all going to spend a rainy afternoon at a local Toys ‘R’ Us store came like a bolt from the blue for the kids.

I wanted to see what kind of toy weaponry was for sale there. I was curious, among other things, about whether the boys at school who had taught Seamus about superheroes, bad guys, and Star Wars had ignited in my son a love of weaponry; I was curious, that is, as to how he would react to the walls of guns I imagined Toys ‘R’ Us displaying.

We got into our car as if it were Christmas Eve, Seamus beside himself with excitement, Madeline on a contact high from her brother. I was experiencing my own contact high, taking my kids on their first research trip.

What we found was not exactly what I expected – on many levels.

Seamus was quickly overwhelmed by the glut of everything – lots of pictures of toys on boxes, but not a lot to pick up. It was, in that sense, the very opposite of our visits to the Goodwill store, where you can sit on the floor and play with all those second-hand toys as long as you put them back afterwards. Not so surprisingly, in retrospect, he went straight for what was familiar, what he could grab in his hand and actually look at: the books. It took some effort to wrestle him away from Five Stories About Princesses and enlist him in my quest for bad toys. (Madeline had, by then, fallen asleep.)

I had finally found the Nerf “blasters,” but he wasn’t interested. “Let’s not go down this aisle, okay, Mom?”

I was, of course, looking for the worst of the worst when it came to weaponry, but it proved remarkably hard to find. The aisle did, admittedly, have the Nerf Zombie Strike Dominator and the Nerf Modulus Recon MKII for \$34.99 each. Those certainly sounded grim, given the eternal

war against the undead, but the bright orange, cartoonish, completely unrealistic “blasters” on display and marketed to kids “eight and up” seemed distant indeed from American gun carnage (and our wars in distant lands), nor was there anything on the packaging that even hinted at real people getting shot in real encounters or real wars. I must admit that I don’t like the idea of Seamus shooting anything at anyone – even a brain-hungry zombie – but as it turned out, I needn’t have worried, not this time around anyway. Zombie-killing wasn’t in his wheelhouse.

Still, I kept looking for the real gun aisle, and I did come across more blasters, dart shooters, and the like, none with the word “gun” on them. Of course, we do live in Connecticut, less than 100 miles from Newtown where, in 2012, Adam Lanza, a devotee of violent video games who grew up in a gun-filled house, killed 20 kids just a little older than Seamus along with six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School. So maybe our local toy outlet was being sensitive, but I doubt it. There was the Halo UNSC SMG Blaster (the initials make it sound extra tough but stand for nothing) for \$19.99, and the Nerf Star Wars Episode VII First Order Stormtrooper Deluxe Blaster, which fires 12 darts up to 65 feet without reloading, for \$41.99. The worst thing I could find was the Xploderz Mayhem, with “more distance, more ammo,” which shoots easy-to-wash off mini-water pellets. It was on clearance for \$18.89.

By then, Seamus was pulling me frantically toward the aisle with the full Frozen franchise on display. Madeline was now awake and in heaven.

So I left them there briefly and snuck off to do a last check for “real” toy guns. No such luck. I didn’t find the kind of Airsoft gun Tamir Rice was playing with when he was killed. I didn’t find an ersatz Sig Sauer either.

It turns out that most brick-and-mortar toy stores don’t seem to offer realistic-look-



ing toy weaponry anymore, nor is there the toy store equivalent of the curtained-off area in the old neighbourhood video rental shop where the porn was available. For such toys, you have to turn to an online world of websites like Kids-Army.com, where you can indeed buy realistic-looking toy rifles, shotguns, and pistols, or even to Amazon, where you can find an Airsoft version of the Sig Sauer rifle for \$249.99.

### An early start

The National Rifle Association (NRA) would undoubtedly have been disappointed by my local Toys 'R' Us outlet – just as its officials undoubtedly are by the way most big toy merchants seem to have left their more realistic guns for the online world. This happened, in part, in response to the sort of social pressure that my husband engaged in when in high school and – more critically – the almost routine horror of the blurred line between toy guns and real ones. You know we're a quirky, gun-crazy nation when Cleveland could ban toy guns and umbrellas with pointy tips from the area around the Republican Convention in the name of security, but couldn't keep out the real guns in open-carry Ohio.

The NRA wants kids to play with realistic toy guns and BB guns, since they believe that such toys are part of a child's initiation into the future ownership of perfectly real guns. At the moment, the gun lobby is concerned that not enough people have guns – even though the 270 million to 310 million of them already amassed around this country (according to the Pew Research Center) could arm just about every man, woman, transgendered person, and child around. Still, despite the fact that Americans can now carry guns in all 50 states and the NRA continues to win most of the big political fights, the number of households with guns is actually down from its peak in the late 1960s (though those that are armed have more and deadlier weapons than ever before). No wonder the gun



**Eddie the Eagle: The NRA uses cartoons to market guns to kids.**

industry and the gun lobby are fighting to produce an army of toddlers.

“Start Them Young,” a February 2016 report from the Violence Policy Center, details how gun manufacturers and the NRA are eager to market real guns to younger and younger consumers. The report starts with a selection of quotes from the industry: including this gem from Craig Cushman, marketing director for Thompson/Center Arms, about their Hot Shot rifle for kids: “[We’re] talking about a tiny gun intended for the very youngest shooters – the ultimate first gun. We’re targeting the six- to 12-year-old range.” In other words, kids are literally in their sights.

It's a strange world we live in. The toy industry has puffed up and candy-coloured its play guns, turned up the volume on the violence online and in video games, and wrapped everything in plastic and safety warnings. At the same time, the gun industry is making its guns smaller and cuter for kids, while putting its energy into the all-important junior market.

Can we be safe – any of us – in a nation awash in guns? The gun-and-ammo industry boasted \$16-billion in revenue for 2015. Gun stores – from brick-and-mortar shops to online retailers – had \$3.1-billion in revenue that same year. The industry as a whole claimed responsibility for nearly \$50-billion in “economic activity” in 2015

**At the moment, the gun lobby is concerned that not enough people have guns – even though the 270 million to 310 million of them already amassed around this country could arm just about every man, woman, transgendered person, and child around**

## KID STUFF

**To my mind, non-intervention is often a missed opportunity to be a parent. Sure, the violence isn't real. The pow-pows don't actually rip skin and tendon or stop hearts from beating, but the United States, which has been fighting distant wars nonstop for 15 years now, does have a violence problem and a man problem and a gun problem**

alone. That represents a fair number of jobs, but here is the number that really goes boom: \$229-billion. That's the annual cost of fatal and non-fatal gun violence in this country, according to Mother Jones magazine and analyst Ted Miller of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation who teamed up to crunch the numbers. That figure includes both the direct costs of gun injuries and deaths – police investigations, emergency personnel, hospital bills, long-term care for the injured, funeral expenses for the dead, and the costs of prosecuting and imprisoning the perpetrators. As the report concludes: “Even before accounting for the more intangible costs of the violence . . . the average cost to taxpayers for a single gun homicide in America is nearly \$400,000. And we pay for 32 of them every single day.”

### **National mythology**

We are awash in guns. Where does it end? Gun violence is embedded in our national mythology, our foreign policy, our notions of masculinity, our entertainment industry, and our children's play. We see violence solving problems on every screen – from the zombie apocalypse to the rise of ISIS. Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's maxim still applies: “One should not put a loaded rifle onto the stage if no one is thinking of firing it.” Sooner or later, that rifle is sure to go off. It might be an accident; it might be terrorism; it might be hate. But it will go off. Somewhere, as you read this, it's going off right now.

I don't want to police my kids' imagination. And there is a whole strain of parenting literature that assures me I don't have to. It says don't interfere with your kid's play, even if it includes guns and shooting and killing. Imagination is imagination and the violence isn't real. It might even, so this line of thinking goes, be a healthy way for them to process feelings of aggression.

I get what they're saying, but it seems like a cop-out to me. To my mind, non-intervention is often a missed opportunity to be a parent. Sure, the violence isn't real. The pow-pows don't actually rip skin and tendon or stop hearts from beating, but the United States, which has been fighting distant wars nonstop for 15 years now, does have a violence problem and a man problem and a gun problem.

We know where that problem ends, but it starts somewhere, too. One place to begin to look, at least, is at how our kids – particularly our boys – play, and how they are nurtured (or not), and taught to express their emotions (or not). It is, at least in part, up to us, their parents, to decide whether they are going to be the ones who help repair our society and reorient us (or not). And it begins with the kinds of care and love they receive, the kinds of conversations they are invited into, the kinds of expectations they are given about behaviour and relationships.

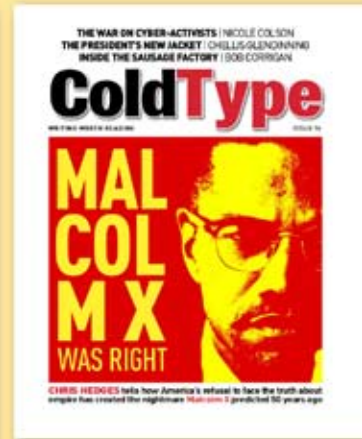
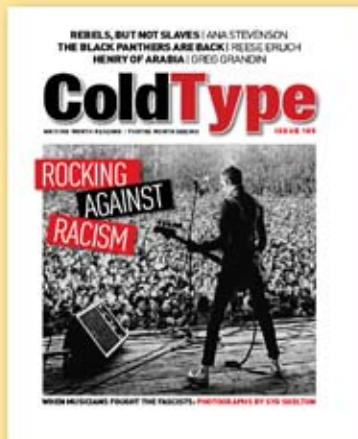
I don't want to raise Seamus, Madeline, or Rosena in the austere, ripped from the headlines of horror, polemical atmosphere that was the essence of my own childhood. But I don't want them to get comfortable with killing either.

I want so much more for, and from, my little boy than “Pow, pow, you are dead now!” And that starts with taking the gun or the stick or the rainbow flag out of his hands, sitting him down, and having a hard conversation about what guns actually do to people – and how much killing hurts us all.

**CT**

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**Frida Berrigan**, who writes the *Little Insurrections* blog for *WagingNonviolence.org*, is the author of *It Runs In The Family: On Being Raised By Radicals and Growing Into Rebellious Motherhood*, and lives in New London, Connecticut. This essay originally appeared at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

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# It's the robots, stupid!

Hard work and personal sacrifice used to mean a better life for future generations. But that's no longer true, and it's making us more fearful, says **Barry Lando**

**Almost half the jobs in the United States – and not just factory workers, receptionists, telephone operators and bank tellers – could be wiped out or seriously diminished by technological change in the near future**

The rabid anti-immigrant campaign of Donald Trump mirrors the racist vitriol of right-wing politicians across much of the developed world. But totally absent from what passes for political debate in the US and abroad is what's really driving those ever more incendiary movements.

They are fuelled by fear. There's the dread of terrorist attacks, to be sure. But much more pervasive is the unremitting, anxiety of hundreds of millions in the developed world that they are threatened by change, by dark forces they neither understand nor control – by rampant unemployment and a diminished standard of living. They have been brought up to believe that hard work and sacrifice would bring a better life. No longer.

Donald Trump tells them that hordes of immigrants, illegal aliens and disastrous trade pacts are to blame. But Trump – as well as those excoriating him – miss the point. The major force impacting our society is the spectacular advance of technologies – robotics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. The dizzying pace of change is only going to accelerate: a chain reaction as we hurtle to warp speed.

Why is this phenomenon not the urgent focus of our political debates? Why are we instead obsessed with illegal aliens and Hillary's e-mails? It used to be that we welcomed advances in technology. We were assured they ultimately create more jobs than they destroy. No longer.

Estimates are that almost half the jobs in the United States could be wiped out or seriously diminished by technological change in the near future. These are not just factory workers, receptionists, secretaries, telephone operators and bank tellers. Sophisticated algorithms will soon replace some 140 million full-time “knowledge workers” worldwide. Those threatened range from computer programmers, to graphic artists to lawyers, to financial analysts and journalists.

Meanwhile, robots are being programmed to care for the burgeoning ranks of the elderly. In Thailand, a solicitous robot, known as Dinsow helps old folk exercise, keeps track of their medication, entertains them with its karaoke skills, and helps them to videophone their relatives. Dinsow also cheerfully answers the same questions ad infinitum from patients suffering from memory loss.

Other companies are manufacturing soft, pliant life-size robots increasingly proficient at everything from sex to Sumo wrestling. Indeed, there are serious people who believe that such phenomenal change will not only ravish our workplaces but ultimately challenge the future existence of our species.

So, how to explain why this is not the major issue of the day? Because, I would argue, the technological revolution is progressing faster than our ability to deal with it. Which might be a good indication that we're already on the way to extinction. The questions this revolu-

tion highlights are just too complex for us to handle, the answers too mind-bending. In many ways it's like the our attitude to global warming: we recognise the extraordinary impact of the future but it raises too many issues that we'd rather not confront. It's as if we refused to acknowledge that a comet is hurtling towards us: we seem caught in the glare, paralysed, unable to act. And Donald Trump gives us the easy solution: Expel the aliens! Built a wall!

Psychologists would label our refusal to deal with the real menace as cognitive dissonance – attempting to deny or ignore a situation that conflicts with our basic beliefs. We've been taught that technological progress is good, and that any destructive impact can be countered by teaching the unemployed new skills, helping them relocate, and improving their education.

But, with the rampaging pace of technological change, even providing graduate degrees to every American will still mean that tens of millions will be out of work. If you're not at serious risk, certainly your kids will be.

What is largely responsible for the loss of millions of jobs, the relative decline in salaries, the hollowing out of the middle class, and the increasing gap between a tiny percentage of super rich and the growing army of the poor is not just craven politicians and grasping Wall Street bankers, but the inexorable process by which "capital" (ie machinery and robots and computers, memory banks and the like) is taking more and more of what used to be labour's share in producing new goods and services.

As human labour is replaced by non-salaried robots so is human labour's claim to its rightful share of the national product. Meanwhile the people owning the "capital" are making enormous fortunes.

But where do you see that process being seriously discussed? Certainly not by politicians or the army of journalists covering the US election campaign. Such facts would only clutter the cozy simplistic world in which Donald Trump and demagogues around the world thrive.

The need to tackle the real issue is urgent. But our predicament is monumental. What is there to do? Ban technological research? Limit the advance of Artificial Intelligence?

We can't do that, but we can at least try to control the rate of change. How? Tax companies for each robot they add, put tariffs on imported goods made by robots, require products to be labelled with the percentage of content made by humans.

We could also protect established professions – by limiting the use of robots in hospitals, for example (where robots are already diagnosing and operating). We could shield millions of workers by outlawing self-driving cars (tens of thousands such cars will be on the roads within the next five years).

What if we are streaking towards a society where the majority of people – even if they are extraordinarily educated – will not find a job? We're talking about a society where almost everything we need will be produced by robots, perhaps with the input of a tiny fraction of the human population.

In one respect, that could be utopia – every human able to do whatever he/she wants – except work. All the goods and services provided to them and their families by a government via some algorithm that does away with the need for people to have to pay for what they consume, all thanks to the marvellous advanced generations of dedicated robots labouring 24/7 for our benefit. That's assuming the robots want to keep us around.

In fact, those robots would, in effect, be new species, as many futurists now predict, a species that would supersede us just as we supplanted apes and chimpanzees. How will they choose to deal with us? What use – other than as an interesting biological curiosity unable to cope or survive in a furiously changing world – would we be to them?

**CT**

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**Barry Lando** spent 25 years as an award-winning investigative producer with 60 Minutes. His latest book is *The Watchman's File*.

**We're talking about a society where almost everything we need will be produced by robots, perhaps with the input of a tiny fraction of the human population**

# What women want

**W. Stephen Gilbert** tells how the latest accusations against British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn aren't having the impact his opponents had expected

**Picture the scene: Corbyn refuses to debate the leadership because he and Owen Smith make an all-male panel. Who is going to accept that that is his reason for refusing?**

A recent front that has opened up against Jeremy Corbyn is sex. Having exhausted their disdain of his global responsibility for anti-semitism, jihadism and homophobia, the malcontents are now roundly accusing him of misogyny, sexual discrimination and old-fashioned male chauvinism. So we have Sophie Walker, leader of the Women's Equality Party (which in fact is a political party standing against the others, including Labour) on a recent airing of *Any Questions?* on BBC Radio 4, "It's a great shame that Jeremy's done so little, frankly, for the many women voters in the Labour Party.

She adds, "There is a male leader, there is a male deputy leader, there is a male Bristol mayor, there is a male London mayor, there is a male mayoral candidate for Greater Manchester, a male mayoral candidate for West Midlands, a male mayoral candidate for Liverpool, a male chair of the NEC and male chairs of all 14 affiliated unions. I think that says it all."

Well, not quite all, because both the General Secretary and the President of the TUC, the body that represents all unions, are women, as are the Presidents of both UNISON and BECTU. But the wider point is, of course, that none of these posts, not a single one, is in Corbyn's gift. His own position and that of his deputy were voted on by the party membership. The mayoral

candidacies are settled by a local ballot (and Marvin Rees in Bristol and Sadiq Khan in London were selected before Corbyn became party leader). The chair of the NEC is elected from within the NEC. If Corbyn had tried to impose a chair, there would have been hell to pay and any argument that it was necessary to ensure that the chair was a woman would have cut no ice.

Walker went on to make an absurd point, "Both the Labour leadership contenders were asked by the Labour Women's Network to subscribe to a whole list of demands about fair and equal representation of women in the Labour Party. Those demands included refusing to appear on any all-male panels. They're doing it every other night in the leadership hustings."

So picture the scene: Corbyn refuses to debate the leadership because he and Owen Smith make an all-male panel. Who is going to accept that that is his reason for refusing? How can it be a criticism of Corbyn that his opponent is Owen Smith rather than Angela Eagle? How can the fact that the PLP selected Smith to be Corbyn's challenger be resolved to satisfy the Labour Women's Network (if indeed those women agree with Walker who, as I say, speaks for a party other than the Labour Party)?

Cat Smith, a Corbyn supporter who is in the shadow cabinet, was also on the Any



Three of the five deputy leadership candidates were women but Tom Watson still won

**BALANCE:** Women's Equality Party leader Sophie Walker (left) and Cat Smith of the Labour Party clashed during a discussion on gender equality in Britain's Labour Party. (Photos: Wikipedia/Twitter)

Questions? panel. She pointed out that “Jeremy Corbyn was the first party leader in this country to put together a shadow cabinet that was gender-balanced.”

“Not any more it’s not” interjected Walker, evidently unaware that the present shadow cabinet self-selected by being those prepared to serve. In fact, Cat Smith could have made the point that all three of Corbyn’s shadow cabinets have not merely been gender-balanced but each of them initially had a majority of women. Even the self-selected one had a female majority until Pat Glass abruptly had her mind changed.

Where the party membership has been given the chance to elect a woman, as in the leadership and deputy leadership elections last year, they declined to do so. In the leadership election, the two women candidates came third and fourth, the latter winning only 4.5 percent of the vote. Three of the five deputy leadership candidates were women but Tom Watson still won.

But it isn’t only the wider membership that declines the invitation to discriminate positively. In the 2010 Labour leadership election, there was a single woman candidate who was eliminated in the first round. Candidacies are the prerogative of MPs and just eleven women MPs nominated her, as

against twice as many men (one of whom, naturally, was Jeremy Corbyn). When I reveal that the woman in question was Diane Abbott, you will see that being a woman is not of itself sufficient to secure a fellow woman MP’s vote. She has to be a woman “who agrees with me.”

To be fair to her, Harriet Harman did nominate Abbott, coming good on her long-term advocacy of more women in the leadership, even though she clearly had fundamental policy differences with her nominee. But other fervent advocates of women in the leadership – Angela Eagle, for instance – did not. Were Diane Abbott now in the position that Corbyn finds himself, I find it hard to imagine that the parliamentary sisterhood would be behaving significantly differently.

Here’s the best joke of all, though. I set no store by opinion polls but many do, and when a finding is overwhelming it’s hard to ignore. So I just gently point out this statistic from a poll by YouGov at the beginning of this month. Support for Owen Smith among women voters: 33 percent. Support for Jeremy Corbyn among women voters: 67 percent. It seems that his gross and vile treatment of Labour women isn’t playing too badly for him. **CT**

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**W. Stephen Gilbert** is the author of *Jeremy Corbyn – Accidental Hero (Eyewear)*.

# Here they come again

Corporate lobbyists and their captive governments try to wear down our resistance with one fake trade treaty after another, writes **George Monbiot**

**TTIP has been booted off the stage but another treaty, whose likely impacts are almost identical, is waiting in the wings. And this one is more advanced, wanting only final approval**

Is it over? Can it be true? If so, it's a victory for a campaign that once looked hopeless, pitched against a fortress of political, corporate and bureaucratic power.

TTIP – the transatlantic trade and investment partnership – appears to be dead. The German economy minister, Sigmar Gabriel, says that “the talks with the US have de facto failed.” The French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, has announced “a clear halt”. Belgian and Austrian ministers have said the same thing. People power wins. For now.

But the lobbyists who demanded this charter for corporate rights never give up. TTIP has been booted off the stage but another treaty, whose likely impacts are almost identical, is waiting in the wings. And this one is more advanced, wanting only final approval. If this happens before Britain leaves the EU, we are likely to be stuck with it for the next 20 years.

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is ostensibly a deal between the EU and Canada. You might ask what harm Canada could do us. But it allows any corporation which operates there, wherever its headquarters might be, to sue governments before an international tribunal. It threatens to tear down laws protecting us from exploitation and prevent parliaments on both sides of the Atlantic from legislating.

To say that there is no mandate for such

agreements is an understatement: they have received an unequivocal counter-mandate. The consultation the EU grudgingly launched on TTIP's proposal to grant new legal rights to corporations received 150,000 responses, 97% of which were hostile. But while choice is permitted when you shop for butter, on the big decisions there is no alternative.

It's not clear whether national parliaments will be allowed to veto this treaty. The European trade commissioner has argued that there is no need: it can be put before the European Parliament alone. But even if national parliaments are allowed to debate it, they will be permitted only to take it or leave it: the contents are deemed to have been settled already.

### **Text leaked**

Only once the negotiations between European and Canadian officials had been completed, and the text of the agreement leaked, did the European Commission publish it. It is 1600 pages long. It has neither a contents list nor explanatory text. As far as transparency, parity and comprehensibility are concerned, it's the equivalent of the land treaties illiterate African chiefs were induced to sign in the 19th Century. It is hard to see how parliamentarians could make a properly-informed decision.

If you seek to buy a secondhand car these days, the salesperson might wheedle and



spin, but they will also – thanks to EU consumer protection laws – be obliged to explain the risks and caveats. If you want to know whether or not to buy this trade treaty, you have no such protection: the EU’s website tells you what a wonderful set of wheels this is, but carries not a word about the risks.

Here is its answer to the question of whether the CETA negotiations were conducted in secret. “Not at all ... During the five years of talks, the Commission held various civil society dialogue meetings for stakeholders.” I followed the link it gave and found that four meetings had taken place, all of them in Brussels, all dominated by corporate trade associations, which are likely to have been on the inside track anyway. Where was the publicity? Where were the attempts to reach beyond a gilded circle of lobbyists and cronies? Where were the efforts to take the discussion to other nations? Where were the debates, the drive to seek genuine public engagement, let alone consent? If this is transparency, I dread to think what secrecy looks like.

After long hours struggling with the treaty, I realised I hadn’t a hope of grasping its implications. I have had to rely on experts commissioned by groups such as Attac in Germany and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Like TTIP, CETA threatens to lock in privatisation, making renationalisation (of Britain’s railways, for example), or attempts by cities to take control of failing public services (as Joseph Chamberlain did in Birmingham, laying the foundations for modern social provision) impossible. Like TTIP, it uses a broad definition of both investment and expropriation to allow corporations to sue governments when they believe their “future anticipated profits” might be threatened by new laws.

Like TTIP, it restricts the ways in which governments may protect their people. It appears to prohibit, for example, rules that would prevent banks from becoming too big to fail. It seems to threaten our planning laws

and other commonsense protections.

Anything not specifically exempted from the agreement is considered covered. In other words, if governments don’t spot a potential hazard before the hazard emerges, they are stuck with it. The European Union appears to have relinquished its ability, for example, to insist that investment and retail banking be separated.

### Little to do with trade

CETA claims to be a trade treaty, but many of its provisions have little to do with trade. They are attempts to circumscribe democracy on behalf of corporate power. Millions of people in Europe and Canada want to emerge from the neoliberal era. But such treaties would lock us into it, allowing the politics we have rejected to govern us beyond the grave. If parliaments reject this treaty, another attempt is already being prepared: the Trade in Services Agreement that the European Union is simultaneously negotiating with the US and 21 other nations. May’s government has expressed enthusiasm: her Department for International Trade says “the UK remains committed to an ambitious Trade in Services Agreement.” So much for taking back control.

Corporate lobbyists and their captive governments have been seeking to impose such treaties for over 20 years, starting with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (it was destroyed, like TTIP, by massive public protests, in 1998). Working in secrecy, without democratic consent, they will keep returning to the theme, in the hope of wearing down our resistance.

When you are told that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, this is what it means. This struggle will continue throughout your life. We have to succeed every time, they have to succeed only once. Never drop your guard. Never let them win.

**CT**

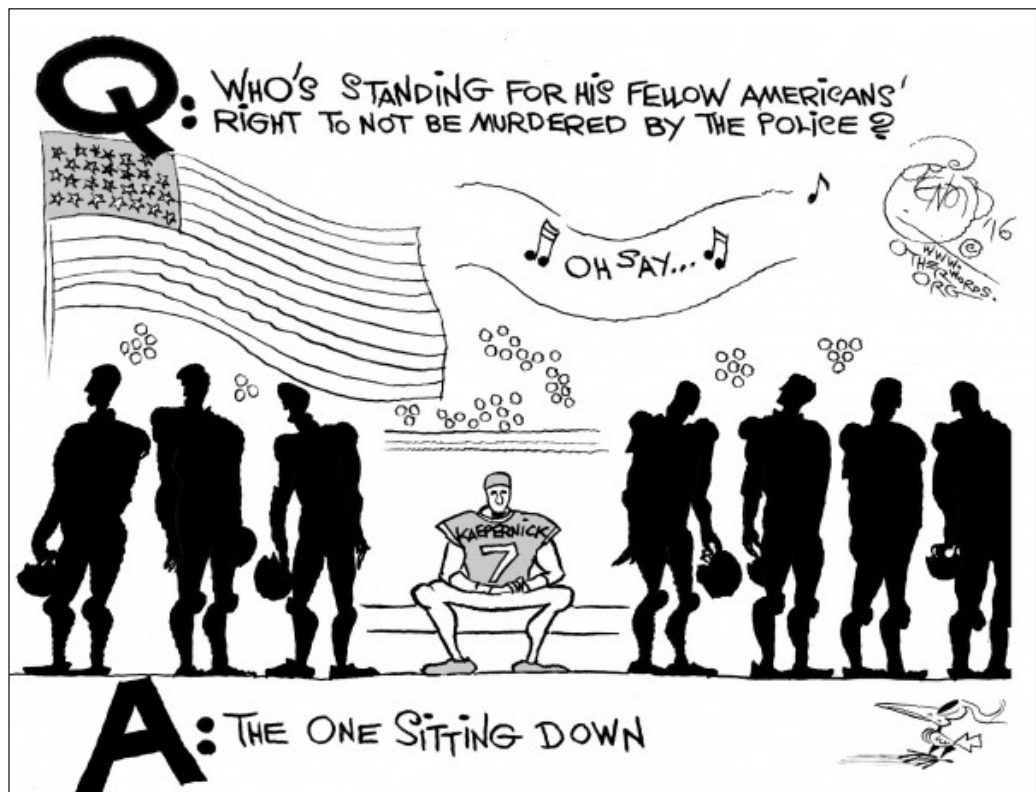
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**George Monbiot’s new book, *How Did We Get into This Mess?*, is published by Verso. His web site is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)**

**CETA restricts the ways in which governments may protect their people. It appears to prohibit, for example, rules that would prevent banks from becoming too big to fail. It seems to threaten our planning laws and other commonsense protections**

# A national anthem and an angry footballer

Philip A. Farruggio on the man who wouldn't stand for his country

Kaepernick has focused more on the injustices leveled out against "people of colour" by the white law enforcement community



**A** 28-year-old man, born of a single white 19-year-old woman (most likely Italian American) and an Afro-American father, had a rough (to say the least) upbringing. Now that he is doing well financially and at the same time gaining in consciousness, Colin Kaepernick, the San Francisco 49ers speaks up and speaks out. He, like many Black, White, Latino, Asian and any other col-

our Americans sees the truth . . . and it hurts! Although not perhaps as well-read as many of us who study history through the prism of empire, Kaepernick has focused more on the injustices levelled out against "people of colour" by the white law enforcement community.

OK, let's pause for a breath. Kaepernick was clear in his points that the majority of white (and Black, and Hispanic) police officers are

not out to gun down or harass people of colour . . . especially unarmed ones. Too many videos of too many unarmed Black men and women being gunned down is just too obscene to bear. Period! So, he protests the national anthem, as that is the gateway to our American Exceptionalism mindset.

Here is what Colin Kaepernick, if more well-read on our nation's history, should have focused on: An empire on steroids that celebrates militarism and phony wars.

Ask yourself this: Why is it that before every sporting event we have not only the national anthem, but honour guards and giant flags spread across the field of play? During WWII our nation was at war, thus the constant reminders of our patriotism and national pride.

Folks, they, meaning the masters of empire, wish to make you believe that we are now at war, but we are NOT! Even during those hysterical and fear implanted days of the so called "Cold War" our media was used to propagandise this extreme patriotism.

After all, as any baby boomer can attest, we kids spent many an afternoon in the '50s and '60s crouched beneath our desks or up against the walls of our elementary and middle schools. Those A-Bomb drills were forever upon us, as at any moment the Russians could attack. If Mr. Kaepernick had experienced the above situations, perhaps he would have included the empire in his protest.

Two friends at the simulcast centre where we watch horse racing engaged me today on the Kaepernick protest. One, a 90-year-old WW2 vet and usually as mellow as can be, was

taken aback by my agreement with Kaepernick's protest. He actually said that the guy "should be executed for treason!"

Another friend, a 60-year-old guy, called Kaepernick every invective he could think of, and wished that, "Those San Diego players and fans really give it to him tonight" at the pre-season game. He called him a rich, full-of-shit, phony who deserves to get released from football.

Both told me how our troops deserve better treatment for all they are doing to protect our freedoms. I told them I did not recall Kaepernick speaking of our troops . . . and added, "Well, maybe it is more patriotic to protest a government that sends our troops to those Middle Eastern countries to kill and get killed, where we don't fucking belong!"

The masters of this empire will always work to polarise the working stiffs with fake rhetoric and shallow arguments. You know, like during the Vietnam phony so-called "war," whenever we protested, along came the same harangue: America, love it or leave it! If you don't like it here why don't you go and live in Russia?

Sad how during this whole debate on what Colin Kaepernick is doing, we're not hearing ONE word about how those myriad of unarmed people of colour have been gunned down by police. Not one! **CT**

.....  
**Philip A Farruggio** is a semi-retired baby boomer who was born and bred in blue collar Brooklyn NYC. He is the son and grandson of Brooklyn longshoremen. He can be reached at [paf1222@bellsouth.net](mailto:paf1222@bellsouth.net))

**Why is it that before every sporting event we have not only the national anthem, but honour guards and giant flags spread across the field of play?**

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# The power - and the violence - of religion

**Daniel Margrain** discusses the violence arising from a clash of political and religious rhetoric

**David Cameron claimed that Islamic extremism can have nothing to do with Western intervention since the invasion of Iraq came after 9/11, seemingly unaware of a century of imperial intervention before that date**

In light of the recent spate of terror attacks, it's worth reminding readers of a speech that former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron made in Birmingham a year ago. The speech, which was low on substance and high on rhetoric, unveiled what could loosely be termed as a less-than-coherent strategy to tackle Islamist extremism. Cameron's nonsense would have almost certainly gone down well with many of his core Friends of Israel Tory MPs, some of whose constituents have left the UK to fight for Israel against the occupied and oppressed Palestinians while others have gone to fight alongside the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Is the UK ever likely to have a future Prime Minister who talks condescendingly to the Jewish community in the Golder's Green district of North London about strategies to tackle Jewish-Zionist extremism? Moreover, is a future leader likely to debate in leafy Surrey, the Christian-Zionist fundamentalism of Blair and Bush that resulted in the deaths of at least half a million Iraqis on the basis of a pack of lies? The questions of course are rhetorical since we know the answer.

Unlike the Tory-voting wealthy middle classes and Friends of Israel, mostly anti-Tory Muslims within de-industrialised urban landscapes such as Birmingham are regarded as political fair game for Tory shenanigans. Ignoring many of the causal

factors that drive a small minority of young Muslims to ISIS, Cameron outlined the Tory five-year plan to defeat home-grown extremism. The former PM set out four major areas that needed attention: countering the "warped" extremist ideology, the process of radicalisation, the "drowning-out" of moderate Muslim voices, and the "identity crisis" among some British-born Muslims.

The then-PM spoke about the need to enforce British values citing "equal rights regardless of race, sex, sexuality or faith" as a core aspect of these values, despite the fact that he voted in support of the homophobic Clause 28 as recently as 2003.

Cameron then claimed that Islamic extremism can have nothing to do with Western intervention since the invasion of Iraq came after 9/11, seemingly unaware of a century of imperial intervention before that date. In the Tories' vision, ISIS popped out of thin air, and had nothing to do with a vacuum left as a direct result of US-British intervention in Iraq.

The most hypocritical thing is how the establishment pick and choose their Muslims. A well-worn narrative is that Muslims are incapable of coping with modern values. However, a succession of British Foreign Secretaries – including the latest, Philip Hammond – are only too happy to dine and be photographed alongside the Saudi royal family who don't accept any of the values

the establishment call British. And when current PM, Theresa May, talk about the British values we should accept that she's not talking about the values her lot used when they were building an empire.

In his speech, Cameron conflated what British values were *not* by referencing forced marriage and female genital mutilation., the implication being that these manifestations of "un-Britishness" are unique to Muslim culture, which, of course, they are not.

"No more turning a blind eye on the basis of cultural sensitivities" he said. Fine! I'll now wait in eager anticipation for a similar speech by Theresa May to the Jewish community in Stamford Hill.

Cameron continued, "I want to work with you to defeat this poison [of Islamist extremism]." Presumably, "defeating" ISIS doesn't involve the counterproductive action of bombing to smother them yet more innocent civilians as justification for mission creep or unconditionally supporting Sunni authoritarian regimes, the ideology and funding of which helped spawn the likes of Al-Qaida and ISIS in the first place.

The one, unintended, positive that emerged from his speech was when he talked about the differentiation between Islamist extremism on the one hand, and Islam the religion, on the other. As such he brought into focus the wider questions regarding the differing interpretations seemingly inherent to religious doctrine.

Jon Snow of Channel 4 News quoted the Muslim Council of Great Britain saying: "We need to define tightly and closely what extremism is rather than perpetuate a deep misunderstanding of Islam and rhetoric which invariably facilitates extremists to thrive."

Do we know what Islamic extremism is exactly? Is there a distinction between Islam and extremism peddled in the name of Islam? Can a distinction be made between the Wahabbi version of Islam in Saudi Arabia and extremism? Surely the former is in-

distinguishable from the latter?

In order to tackle the problem associated with certain extremist interpretations of Islam, it makes sense to want to tackle the problem at source. But crucially, this was the aspect missing from Cameron's speech. For if he was to highlight it, he would have been cutting off his nose to spite his face. That's because Britain has an extremely cozy relationship with the oppressive totalitarian states of the Arab Gulf peninsula, all of whom, adhere to extremist theocratic Islamic ideologies, but nevertheless represent extremely good business for Great Britain PLC.

Is it the duty of Muslims living in Birmingham to defend other Muslims living in Baghdad? Conversely, can the killing of innocent people in Western liberal democracies ever be considered justifiable on the basis that the populations within these nations often elect governments that initiate wars of aggression against Muslims in their name? Can violent acts in these circumstances ever be justified? Does this, in the minds of extremists, justify Jihad against Westerners by Muslims irrespective of where either reside in the world?

Some moderate Muslims such as Baroness Warsi insist that Jihad is about "self-improvement, self-evaluation, questioning injustice and being prepared to raise your voice when you see injustice." This contrasts with the more extreme interpretation of Jihad in which external factors like the taking of arms are seen as the precursor to the kind of self-evaluation outlined by Warsi. How can these seemingly irreconcilable differences be reconciled?

One of the main problems that needs to be addressed, but tends to be constantly evaded, relates to the contradictory aspect of religion itself. Christians, Jews and others of all denominations often claim piety with one hand, but adopt the role of arm-chair generals holding a metaphorical grenade with the other. Moreover, irrespective of whether one is a follower of ISIS, or

**Can the killing of innocent people in Western liberal democracies ever be considered justifiable on the basis that the populations within these nations often elect governments that initiate wars of aggression against Muslims in their name?**

# TACKLING EXTREMISM

**While political objectives maybe expressed in religious terms, the goal of ISIS/ Al Qaida is the same as previous secular-nationalist movements in the Middle East – the defeat of US imperialism and its allies in the region**

whether one is a part of the vast majority of the wider Muslim community of Sunni or Shia, all groups and sects will and claim they are the true representatives of Islam and all will justify their opposing positions by cherry-picking appropriate verses from their religious book. These contradictory positions are, in turn, exploited politically by racists and Islamophobes.

Islamophobia has been purposely perpetuated as a result of the politicisation of religion of which the creation of an Islamophobia industry is a reflection.

The government's Prevent Strategy and the policies of the Henry Jackson Society are integral to the functioning of this industry. Cage, the London-based advocacy organisation, wrote of the Prevent Strategy: "Prevent's causal analysis and theory is fundamentally flawed. According to the strategy, the cause of violence in the Muslim world is rooted in ideology. Whereas in reality the cause is the political struggle of Muslims in response to unrepresentative regimes, often aided by Western policy and occupations."

This assessment appears to be consistent with the analysis of Stephen Holmes, who, in reference to the attacks on New York and the Pentagon, implied that the goal of ISIS and Al Qaida is no different from other national liberation movements – to achieve independence by forcing the imperialist powers to retreat: "The vast majority of Bin Laden's public statements provide secular, not religious, rationales for 9/11. The principal purpose of the attack was to punish the 'unjust and tyrannical America.' The *casus belli* he invokes over and over again is injustice, not impiety. True, he occasionally remarks that the United States has declared war on god, but such statements would carry little conviction if not seconded by claims that the United States is tyrannising and exploiting Muslim people . . . Bin Laden almost never justified terrorism against the West as a means for subordinating Western unbelievers to the true faith. Instead, he al-

most always justified terrorism against the West as a form of legitimate self-defence."

According to Holmes, while political objectives maybe expressed in religious terms, the goal of ISIS/Al Qaida is the same as previous secular-nationalist movements in the Middle East – the defeat of US imperialism and its allies in the region.

However, to claim that all instances of jihadist violence do not have religious rationales is misleading. Nevertheless, the anti-Muslim ideology of the right-wing Henry Jackson Society, alongside the creation of the illiberal Prevent Strategy, meant that the establishment have been quick to exploit the media's often sensationalist reporting as well as the fear and panic Muslims generate for their own narrow political propaganda purposes.

The former, for example, set up the group Student Rights, which produced a report that manufactured panic around gender segregation on campuses. Cameron weighed in, although he never mentioned the gender segregation at Eton. Catherine Heseltine of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK, spoke of how growth in the fear of Islam has gone along with policies pushed by governments, when she said: "Immediately after 9/11, only 10 percent of people in Britain saw Islam as a religion as a threat . . . Since then that figure has just about tripled."

According to Bob Ferguson, teacher and convener for Newham Stand Up Against Racism, since the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act in February last year, Islamophobia has been taken to a new level. Teaching staff at universities and schools now have a statutory duty to report people who may be vulnerable to "Islamic non-violent extremism." One clause that is particularly pernicious requires teachers and lecturers to report discussions on "Grievances to which terrorist organisations claim to have a solution." That one clause wipes out any possibility of discussing imperialism.

Ferguson says: “There was a minute’s silence for the victims of the beach attack in Tunisia. All the Muslims I know at my school thought those murders were a vile, reactionary crime. Many also regard the slaughter of three boys playing football on the beach in Gaza by Israel as a vile, reactionary crime. Expressing the first sentiment proves you are a good Muslim, but expressing the second could get you seen as an extremist.”

The issues are complex and multifaceted and not one aspect by itself is the reason why some young people join up with groups like ISIS. Whether moderate and peaceful Muslims disagree with their violent counterparts is irrelevant since both self-identify as Muslims and justify their respective actions. As Muslims based on the interpretation of passages contained within

the holy book.

In Iraq, religious Sunni/Shia sectarian violence was unleashed following the illegal allied invasion of that country. Saddam had kept a lid on it up until that point. That’s just one example where religion is a major contributory cause of violence. Similarly, Zionist Jews justify continued illegal settlement building predicated on the Biblical imperative, and Bush and Blair were alleged to have got down on their knees in the name of their Christian God prior to the invasion of Iraq.

Some religious followers who interpret their books literally, cherry pick certain violent quotes from them in order to justify their beliefs, mainly for political purposes. This is true of religious extremists whether they be Salafist Muslims, Zionist Jews or Christian fundamentalists. **CT**

**All the Muslims I know at my school thought those murders were a vile, reactionary crime. Many also regard the slaughter of three boys playing football on the beach in Gaza by Israel as a vile, reactionary crime**

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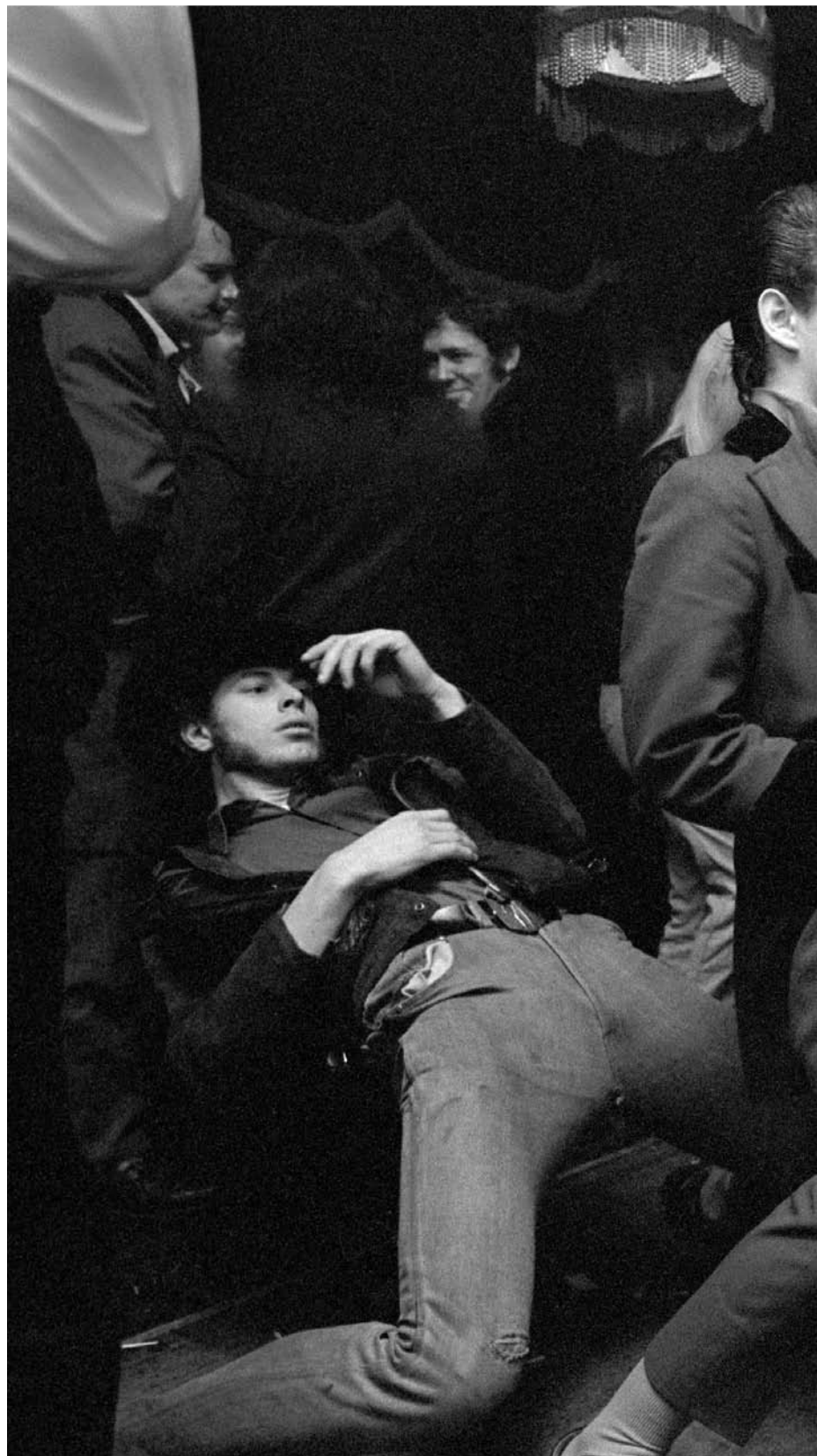
# Born to be Wild

Britain's Teddy Boys made the headlines in 1956 after rioting during showings of the Bill Haley film, *Rock Around The Clock*. Photographer **Chris Steele-Perkins** recorded their part in post-war teen culture in his recently re-issued book, *The Teds*

**T**he Teddy Boys arrived in Britain in the early '50s, a product of social changes that swept Europe almost a decade after the end of the war that had ravaged the world. "The War Children had come of age," writes Richard Smith, in the text accompanying photographs in a new edition of Chris Steele-Perkins' 1979 book, *The Teds*, republished by Dewi Lewis to coincide with a London exhibition of the photographer's work.

Smith adds, "The Fifties' teenagers lived at a time of increasing wealth. There was a boom in profits, wages, and consumer credit. Juvenile delinquents at least faced an affluent adulthood. There was a cause for optimism; rising expectations could be fulfilled."

That optimism was expressed in a sartorial and musical explosion, which brought the Teddy Boys to national attention with the release of the Bill Haley film *Rock Around The Clock*, in September, 1956. The film was shown at more than 300 cinemas across the country, and it wasn't long before riots started. Seats were





## IN THE PICTURE

'The Teds' © Chris Steele-Perkins / MAGNUM PHOTOS. [www.dewilewis.com](http://www.dewilewis.com)



## IN THE PICTURE

slashed at London's Elephant and Castle Trocadero, and when police tried to disperse a throng of jiving, singing teenagers, bottles and fireworks were thrown. Shop windows were smashed, two police were injured and nine Teds arrested.

More trouble followed in Manchester and London, while the film was banned in Birmingham, Blackpool, and Belfast and denounced by religious leaders.

The Teddy Boys' image was as brazen as their violence. Their dress was alien to their fathers, who clung tenaciously to the short-back-and-side haircuts and cheap suits that had marked the years of post-war austerity. Knee-length jackets with velvet



## IN THE PICTURE

"The Teds" © Chris Steele-Perkins / MAGNUM PHOTOS. [www.dewilewis.com](http://www.dewilewis.com)



collars, skin-tight trousers, and thick-soled 'brothel-creeper' shoes constituted the new uniform, while the hair was a sight to behold. The back was "greased in from the sides to meet the hair coming down. This was the Duck's Arse, the DA, or, more politely, the Duck Tail," writes Smith, while the front was a quiff, "formed by parting the hair across the back of the head. The hair curved forwards from the sides to meet at a point somewhere in front of the forehead. In asymmetrical quiffs, the hair was greased back at one side, parted, swerved round the front, to be swept back at the other side."

Laughable? Perhaps. But it was not a good idea to guffaw while the Teds were present, for they also packed fearsome weapons: coiled bicycle chains, stiletto



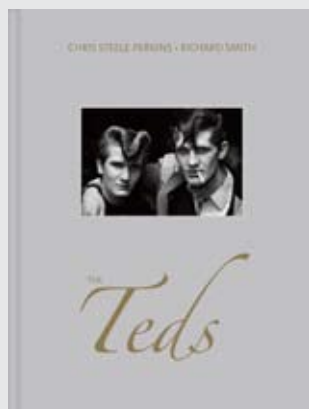
## IN THE PICTURE

knives and knuckle dusters. Well, at least some of them did. One of my older cousins joined a gang of Teds and strutted menacingly through town with his pals. However, a few months later he presented a more pathetic sight when, after being called up for National Service in the army, he was found by his mother, cowering in a backyard shed, hair now cropped in a military crew-cut, a sobbing runaway who couldn't adapt to life away from home . . .

Yes, National Service was the Achilles heel of the Teds. The days of rebellion were short-lived: their fathers' predictions that "the Army would soon knock the shit out of them," prescient. However, the Teds were important in the development of teen culture; they were the vanguard of a new world just beyond the horizon. Conscription ended gradually from 1960 to 1963, then along came Beatlemania, Flower Power, Hippies and the sexual revolution . . .

60 years later, the Teds are still around, if not as threatening or as brazen, at pubs and clubs, new devotees joining their fathers (and grandfathers!) as they bop and jive to the rock'n'roll sounds that heralded a revolution.

**Tony Sutton**



### THE TEDS

Photos: Chris Steele-Perkins

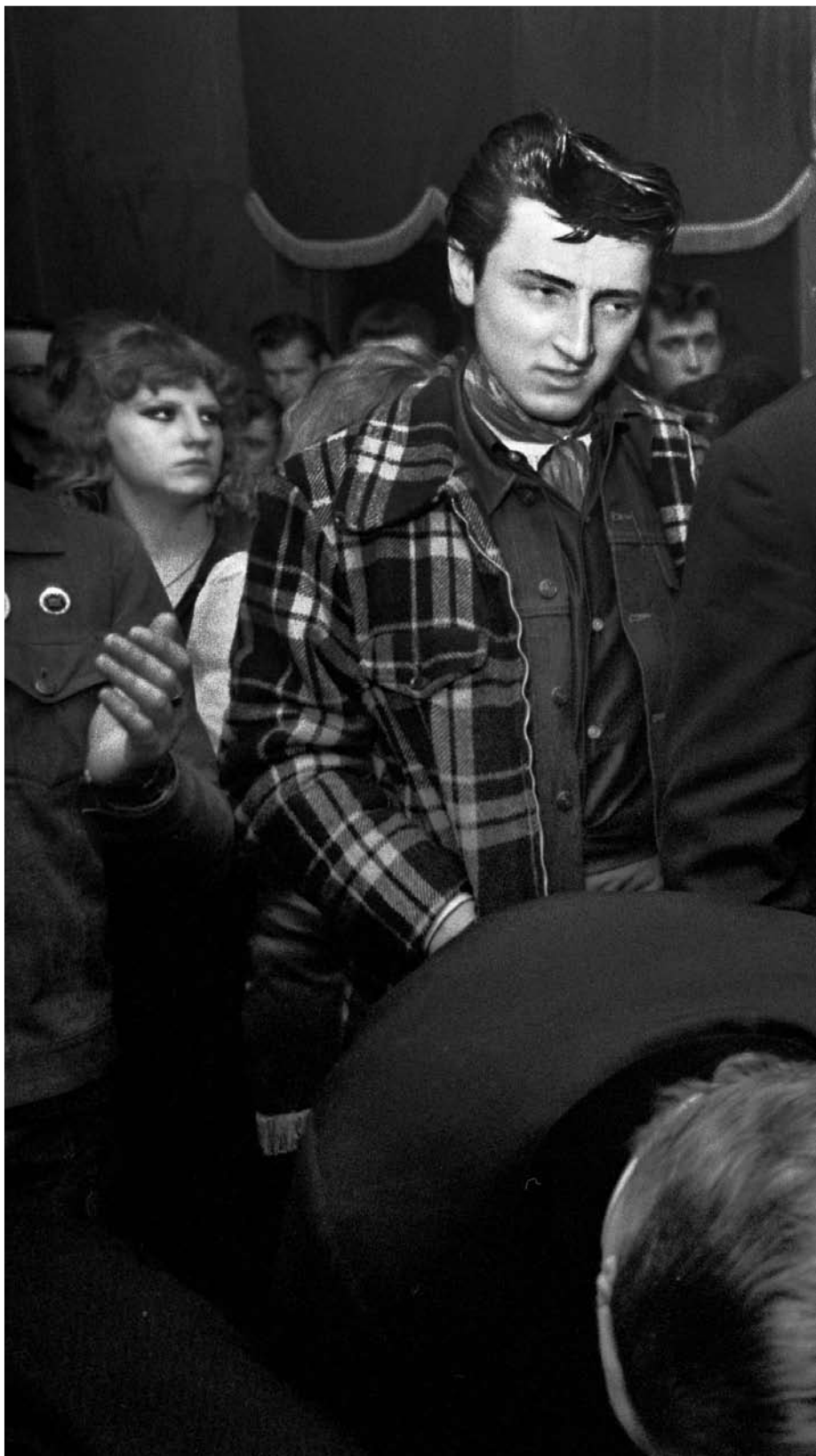
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### THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Chris Steele-Perkins joined Magnum Photos in 1979. Alongside extensive work in the developing world he has continued to document Britain, with his 40 year overview, *England, my England*, being published in 2009 and *A Place in the Country*, his tenth book, in 2014. An award winning photographer, Steele-Perkins exhibits regularly throughout the world and continues to publish in major magazines worldwide

# The Great Wall of Calais

History tells us that building a wall to keep migrants out of the UK won't work, but does that matter when it's 'us' against 'them,' writes **Sean Lang**

**Walls are about control – rulers use them to set boundaries beyond which law, protection and people may not go**

Incredibly, 27 years after the world celebrated the fall of the detested Berlin Wall, barriers are back in fashion. Donald Trump has promised to build a wall along the Mexican frontier to keep those pesky Mexicans out – though they will, he blithely assumes, happily pay for it – and now the UK's home secretary, Amber Rudd, has announced that Britain will pay for a wall to keep back the refugees of the Calais “Jungle”.

Defensive walls to keep undesirables out are nothing new – 2,000 years ago, the Great Wall of China was built to keep the “barbarian” Mongols at bay. It didn't work – they worked their way round it and ended up ruling China. Hadrian's famous wall marked the northernmost frontier of the Roman Empire, but the tribes who brought the Empire crashing down came instead from Germany. Oops.

Walls are about control – rulers use them to set boundaries beyond which law, protection and people may not go. They isolate and separate, turning former neighbours and friends into a dangerous and untrustworthy “Other”. So the Nazis built walls across the cities of eastern Europe to create Jewish ghettos, making normal community relations impossible and turning Jews from next-door neighbours or work colleagues into “the people on the other side of the wall”.

Of course, this approach can backfire: the Berlin Wall inadvertently turned West Ber-

lin into a highly attractive but unattainable island of Western prosperity in the heart of the Communist bloc. It also provided both John F Kennedy and Ronald Reagan with their most celebrated anti-Soviet soundbites, which certainly wasn't what the East Germans had intended when they built it.

Even walls with a less deadly purpose can feel oppressive. One of the most hated features of pre-revolutionary Paris was the Wall of the Farmers-General, a customs barrier that surrounded the city and lined the pockets of France's tax farmers, officials who were entitled to a substantial share of the taxes they collected. It symbolised the privilege enjoyed by the French aristocracy and, not surprisingly, was one of the first structures torn down by the Paris mob in the Revolution.

Intriguingly, in 19th century India, the British built a similar customs barrier, in the form of a vast and impenetrable hedge, ten to 14 feet high and six to 12 feet thick, stretching from the Indus to the Mahanadi in Madras – a distance of 2,300 miles – to stop evaders of their salt tax. It was completed in 1869 and took 14,000 labourers to build – and was patrolled by nearly the same number of troops. Ten years after it was built, the customs line was abolished and today there are hardly any traces left of the Great Hedge.

For such highly visible signs of control, governments are surprisingly reluctant to

admit their walls' real purposes. Officially, the Berlin Wall was a defensive structure to protect the people of East Berlin from Western fascism, though its real purpose, as everyone knew, was to keep them in. Israel's controversial concrete barrier around the Palestinian-inhabited areas of the West Bank was erected to protect Israelis from terrorist attacks during the second Intifada but its critics accuse Israel of using it to contain and control the Palestinians themselves.

It is tempting to say that walls are doomed to fall. To the younger generation, the Berlin Wall is probably better known for falling than for going up and everyone knows how the walls of Jericho came "tumblin' down". Certainly the mighty walls of Christian Constantinople were unable to prevent the city's conquest by the Turks in 1453. Hadrian's Wall, which was originally much higher and more substantial than the remains we see today, may have been intended to overawe the Pictish tribes but it could not protect Roman Britain from collapse. History is littered with the remains of these brick or concrete assertions of control.

But the impact of walls should not be underestimated. The Berlin Wall helped to embed the idea in German minds that they were

two peoples, not one. In the difficult times that followed reunification in 1990, Germans from both sides of the country sometimes complained that they wished the Wall could go back up again.

The sealed border between the two Koreas has acted as a wall so effectively that it is easy to forget that the Koreans were ever one people. By separating people, walls prevent that immediate human contact that can challenge stereotypes and develop understanding and compassion. If you want people to forget their common humanity, keep them divided by walls and prevent them from ever meeting.

In this way, the Calais wall may have an impact far beyond the security concerns that have led to its creation. Walls on their own won't protect lorries from people determined to get to Britain, but they can keep both French and British people away from the migrants themselves and help entrench still further the idea of "us" and "them" that Nigel Farage whipped up in the EU referendum.

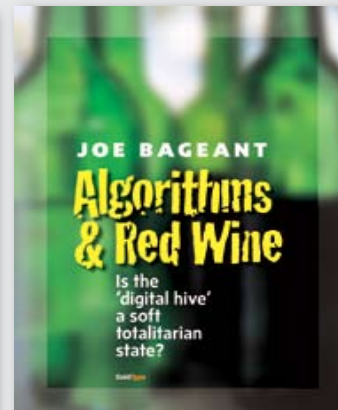
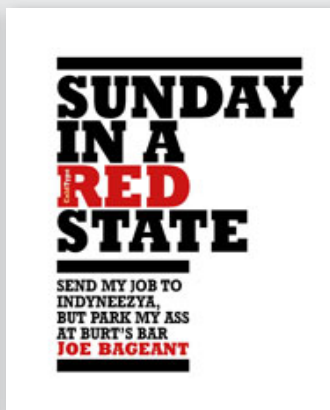
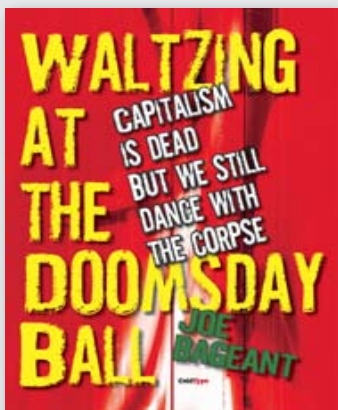
Once that idea is implanted in people's minds, it can prove a much stronger and more durable wall than any made of brick or concrete.

**The Calais wall may have an impact far beyond the security concerns that have led to its creation**

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**Sean Lang** is a senior lecturer in history, at Anglia Ruskin University in England. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)

CT

## Read the best of Joe Bageant



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# The West and Syria: Media versus reality

Ian Sinclair on the media lies that prolong the wars in the Middle East

**Rather than informing the historical record, public opinion and government policy these snippets of essential information are effectively thrown down the memory hole**

**T**he sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary,” George Orwell noted in his censored preface to his 1945 book *Animal Farm*. “Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban.” Orwell explained that “at any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is ‘not done’ to say it.”

The corporate media’s coverage of Syria adds a twist to Orwell’s dictum – inconvenient reports and facts do occasionally appear in respected newspapers and on popular news programmes but they are invariably ignored, decontextualised or not followed up on. Rather than informing the historical record, public opinion and government policy these snippets of essential information are effectively thrown down the memory hole.

Instead the public is fed a steady diet of simplistic, Western-friendly propaganda, a key strand of which is that the US has, as Channel 4 News’s Paul Mason blindly asserted in January, 2016, “stood aloof from the Syrian conflict.” This deeply ingrained ignorance was taken to comical lengths when Mason’s Channel 4 News colleague Cathy Newman interviewed the former

senior US State Department official Anne-Marie Slaughter, both women agreeing that the US had not armed the insurgency in Syria.

In the real world, the US has been helping to arm the insurgency since 2012, with US officials telling the *Washington Post* in last year that the CIA’s \$1bn programme had trained and equipped 10,000 rebel fighters. “From the moment the CIA operation was started, Saudi money supported it,” notes the *New York Times*. According to the former American Ambassador to Syria, the US “has looked the other way” while fighters it has backed have “coordinated in military operations” with the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda’s official affiliate in Syria. The UK, of course, has obediently followed its master into the gates of hell, with the former UK Ambassador to Syria recently explaining the UK has made things worse by fuelling the conflict in Syria.

And if they are not playing down the West’s interference in Syria, journalists and their political masters are presenting Western actions as having benign, peaceful, motives. For example, in his official response to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on UK military action in Syria, recently departed British Prime Minister David Cameron argued “since the start of the crisis the UK has worked for a political solution in Syria.” The *Guardian*’s foreign affairs spe-



cialist Simon Tisdall echoed this idea of the West's "basic benevolence" in 2013 when he noted in passing that President Obama "cannot count on Russian support to fix Syria."

Compare this propagandistic framing with what Andrew Mitchell, the former British Secretary of State for International Development, had to say about the West's role in the 2012 United Nations peace plans on the BBC Today Programme earlier this month: "Kofi Annan, the very distinguished former General Secretary of the United Nations, came forward with his plan, asked by the UN General-Secretary to do so. Part of that plan was to say that [Syrian President Bashar] Assad is part of the problem here and, therefore, by definition, is part of the solution, and therefore he must be included in negotiations. And that was vetoed by the Americans and, alas, by the British Government, too."

Mitchell's astonishing revelation is backed up by two highly respected Middle East experts. In September 2015 Avi Shlaim, Professor Emeritus of International Relations at Oxford University, noted that Western insistence that Assad must step down sabotaged Annan's efforts to set up a peace deal and forced his resignation. Professor Hugh Roberts, the former Director of the North Africa Project at the International Crisis Group, concurs, writing "the Western powers . . . sabotaged the efforts of the UN special envoys, Kofi Annan and then Lakhdar Brahimi, to broker a political compromise that would have ended the fighting." Indeed, the US Secretary of State himself conceded this reality when he recently noted that demanding Assad's departure up front in the peace process was "in fact, prolonging the war."

A quick survey of recent history shows this warmongering isn't an unfortunate one-off but a longstanding US policy of blocking peace initiatives in times of conflict.

In 1999 the US used Serbia's rejection

of the Rambouillet Agreement to justify its 78-day bombing campaign. However, the proposed agreement included the military occupation and political control of Kosovo by NATO, and gave NATO the right to occupy the rest of Yugoslavia. It was a document "that no sovereign country on earth would have signed," reporter Jeremy Scahill noted.

Two years later, as the US geared up to bomb and invade Afghanistan, the Taliban raised the idea of handing over Osama bin Laden if the US produced evidence of his involvement in the attack on 9/11. According to the New York Times, "the White House quickly rejected the move" because "it did not 'meet American requirements' that Afghanistan immediately hand over the prime suspect in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon."

Several months into the 2003 Iraq War, the Guardian reported that "in the few weeks before its fall, Iraq's Ba'athist regime made a series of increasingly desperate peace offers to Washington, promising to hold elections and even to allow US troops to search for banned weapons." Like Afghanistan, the Guardian noted "the advances were all rejected by the Bush administration, according to intermediaries involved in the talks."

And finally, in January 2015, the Washington Times highlighted the various attempts made by the Libyan government to push for a negotiated settlement during the 2011 NATO intervention. Citing secret audio recordings between an intermediary working for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Libyan government, the newspaper noted that the head of the US African Command attempted to negotiate a truce but was ordered to stand down by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's State Department. This account resonates with other reports that show how NATO ignored peace initiatives coming from the Libyan Government and the African Union.

Of course, some or perhaps all of these

**Professor Hugh Roberts, the former Director of the North Africa Project at the International Crisis Group, wrote, "the Western powers . . . sabotaged the efforts of the UN special envoys, Kofi Annan and then Lakhdar Brahimi, to broker a political compromise that would have ended the fighting in Syria"**

## VOLUNTARY CENSORS

**Russia and Iran, by backing the Assad Government, have also played a central role in prolonging and escalating the war, but, as a British citizen whose taxes fund the British government, my primary concern is the actions of the UK and its allies**

peace overtures may have been disingenuous and/or unworkable. However, we will never know because they were never seriously considered or explored by the West in its rush to war.

Turning back to Syria, the facts clearly show the West, by blocking the UN's peace initiative while continuing to arm the insurgency, played a key role in prolonging and escalating a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and led to a staggering 11 million refugees.

Of course, Russia and Iran, by backing the Assad Government, have also played a central role in prolonging and escalating the war, but, as a British citizen whose taxes fund the British government, my primary concern is the actions of the UK and its allies. As Noam Chomsky has noted "You're responsible for the predictable consequences of your actions. You're not responsible for the predictable consequences of somebody else's actions."

Roberts clearly understands what the predictable consequences of the US and UK actions in Syria have been: "Western policy has been a disgrace and Britain's contribution to it should be a matter of national shame."

As always, the government prefers to treat the public like mushrooms – keeping them in the dark and feeding them bullshit. And with our supposedly crusading, disputatious, stropky and difficult fourth estate unable or unwilling to report basic facts and to connect some very simple dots, what chance does the general public have of ever gaining even a basic understanding of what the West is doing in Syria? **CT**

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**Ian Sinclair** is the author of *The March That Shook Blair: An Oral History of 15 February 2003*, published by Peace News Press. This article was originally published at [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)

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## HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



# It's only propaganda when *they* do it

**Paul Robinson** compares press coverage of democracy and education

A couple of newspaper articles recently caught my attention. The first was in the Times, and claimed the following: “President Putin has launched a secret propaganda assault on Britain from within its own borders, the Times can reveal. The Kremlin is spreading disinformation through a newly opened British bureau for its Sputnik international news service, and is infiltrating elite universities by placing language and cultural centres on campuses. Analysts said that the push was part of Russia’s military doctrine, which specifies the use of ‘informational and other non-military measures’ in conflicts.”

The Times was particularly alarmed by the fact that, “the University of Edinburgh accepted £221,000 from the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation to host Britain’s first Moscow-sponsored language and cultural centre. The foundation has also opened centres at Durham University, which accepted £85,000, and St Antony’s College, Oxford.” According to the newspaper, “A NATO source accused Russia of ‘operationalising information’ from within Britain. ‘The Russian information effort is to muddy the waters, to create uncertainty,’ he said.”

The second article was published in the New York Times. In this, the former US ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul claims that “Everywhere, autocrats are pushing back against democrats, and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia is the de facto leader of this global movement.” America must resist this movement, McFaul says. Otherwise, “The threats will grow and eventually endanger our peace, as we saw in Eu-

rope and Japan in the 1930s, and Afghanistan in the 1990s.”

What exactly should America do? McFaul suggests: “Just as the Kremlin has become more sophisticated at exporting its ideas and supporting its friends, so must we. We should think of advancing democratic ideas abroad primarily as an educational project, almost never as a military campaign. Universities, books and websites are the best tools, not the 82nd Airborne.”

But it’s best not to do this openly, McFaul admits. He says, “Direct financial assistance to democrats is problematic: A check from an American embassy can taint its recipients. America’s next president should privatize such aid and help seed new independent foundations.”

So, let me get this straight. Russkii Mir openly provides money to the University of Edinburgh for the study of Russian language and culture. That constitutes a “secret propaganda assault on Britain.” But when Ambassador McFaul proposes giving money to Russian universities through disguised channels and for decidedly political purposes, that is “advancing democratic ideas.”

’Nuff said!

**CT**

**Paul Robinson** is a professor at the University of Ottawa in Canada. He writes about Russian and Soviet history, military history, and military ethics, and is the author of a number of books including “Doing Less With Less: Making Britain More Secure,” and, with Yay Dixon, *Aiding Afghanistan: A History of Soviet Assistance to a developing Country.* He blogs at [www.irrussianality.wordpress.com](http://www.irrussianality.wordpress.com)

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