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NO TRUE FRIENDS IN A RACE WAR

"By the time I arrived in downtown Oakland, California, the protests were already in full swing. Young people marched and chanted against a back-of-the-head, enclosed-up window. Most of their signs were scrawled with "DEFUND THE COPS" or "WHITE SILENCE IS VIOLENCE" or "BLACK LIVES MATTER." Perhaps a moment's pause really does let us glimpse a human in a blue-shedding. It really is a moment's pause, held up a sign that read "POLICE BRUTALITY IS SHAME. DON'T ENJOY!" Her phone cuts to the beat of the music – he said she found her way to the end of the road." — JAC ALLEN PAGE 12

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Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

Joe Allen doesn't believe Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil — just another Alpha Geek, creating chemical trails through our hi-tech machine, leading us where he wants us to go. (See Page 22)

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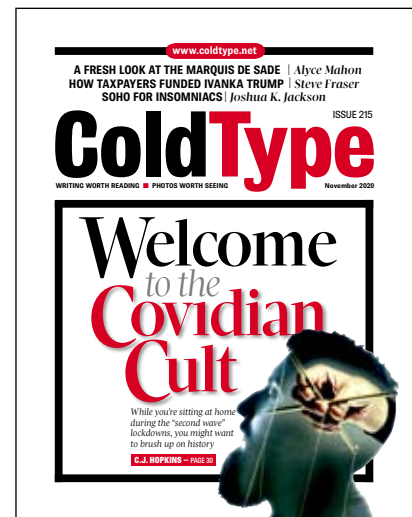
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Insights

Alyce Mahoney

Marquis de Sade: Pornographer or philosopher?

Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade, was a bestselling author in his day and yet he spent most of his life behind bars. His novels inspired the term “sadist” – “a person who derives pleasure, especially sexual gratification, from inflicting pain or humiliation on others” – and yet, in 2017, France declared his work a “national treasure”.

So, was Sade a pornographer or a philosopher – and why does his name continue to cause such heated debate?

Two centuries after his death, Sade (1740-1814) remains a figure of controversy. On the one hand, his name is associated with the French Revolution and the storming of the Bastille, on the other, with rape, sexual terror and torture. During his lifetime, Sade was found guilty of sodomy, rape, torturing the 36-year-old beggar woman Rose Keller, imprisoning six children

in his chateau at Lacoste, and poisoning five prostitutes with the aphrodisiac “Spanish fly”.

He managed to avoid the death sentence but still spent 32 years in prisons and insane asylums, partly due to the intervention of family members who kept him locked up to avoid disgrace.

Momentarily freed under the French Revolution, he became “Citizen Sade”, participating in some of the key political events of the era, only to see his works seized, destroyed and banned under Napoleon Bonaparte.

His work remained censored throughout the 19th-century and most of the 20th – but in 2017 the French State declared his *120 Days of Sodom* (1785), written in the Bastille on a 12-metre scroll, a “national treasure”.

So what happened between



Art: Author supplied (colour added)

Portrait of the sadist as a young man by Charles Amédée Philippe van Loo (1719-1795).

his lifetime and ours to change his profile so radically? Here are five things we should all know about the Marquis de Sade.

1. The most disgusting books

Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue (1791), *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795), *The New Justine* (an extended version of *Justine* published in 1797) followed by the *Story of Juliette, Her Sister* (1797) and *The 120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Libertinage* (1785) – these are the works that led Napoleon

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Bonaparte to call Sade an author of “abominable” books and to have a “depraved imagination”. But they were all written behind bars and are the products of an incarcerated imagination – not accounts of his personal life and crimes.

No one escapes the satirical power of Sade’s pen – young or old, virtuous or corrupt, rich or poor – although his narratives are dominated by certain types, especially bankers, clergy, judges, aristocrats and prostitutes.

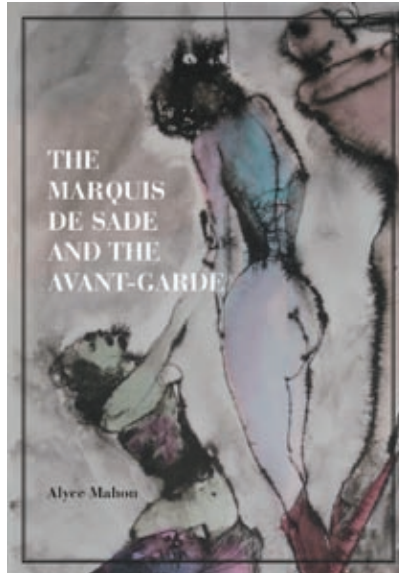
2. Philosopher of the bedroom

Sade lived in a time of terror. His writings may be read as a knowing inversion of Enlightenment high ideals as they were penned in France at the end of the 18th-century in the shadow of the bloody guillotine. For example, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* – which contains a mock political pamphlet: *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans* – was written shortly after the fall of the leading radical Robespierre and it offers an absurdist take on the rhetoric and promises of the French Revolution.

In it, Sade also reminds us that “were it among Nature’s intentions that man be born modest, she would not have caused him to be born naked”.

3. Sade and sadism

Sade’s taste for sodomy, paedophilia and flagellation, in addition to his fictional



CONTROVERSIAL STUDY: the author’s recent book about Marquis de Sade.

accounts of excessive orgies, which describe sexual cruelty and murder in excessive detail, led many to presume he was deranged. This status was magnified by the fact that he ended his life in the asylum of Charenton, although a scientific examination of his skull by a Dr Ramon after his death showed no physical or mental abnormalities – phrenology determined the skull “was in all respects similar to that of a Father of the Church”. Casts were even made of his skull, one of which now sits in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.

In Sade’s writings, however, the clergy are typically amoral characters, and by the 19th-century the term “sadism” was coined by psychoanalysts to denote the experience of pleasure through the infliction of

physical pain upon others.

4. Pornography at the service of women

The feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir defended Sade in a 1951 essay entitled: “Must We Burn Sade?”.

She argued that his novels’ exploration of the idea that “in a criminal society, one must be criminal” was never more relevant and that his life story and increasing perversity in his fiction was a symptom of society’s increasing attempts to control him.

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists engaged in heated debate over Sade and his philosophical value. Angela Carter defended him for putting pornography “at the service of women”, while Andrea Dworkin insisted his fiction only defended the male sexual desire to “possess” women.

5. 'Divine Marquis'

By the 20th-century, Sade was deemed “divine” by many intellectuals and artists who interpreted his writings as a dark mirror of man’s inhumanity to man. From Man Ray’s imaginary portraits of Sade in the late 1930s, portraying him as a paragon of liberty beside the burning Bastille, as war loomed in Europe, to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film *Saló* (1975), which restages Sade’s *120 days of Sodom* in fascist Italy, Sade’s name and writings offered modern artists and writers a means

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to address the horrors of war and totalitarian regimes. These are themes American artist Paul Chan explores in his mixed-media installations *Sade for Sade's Sake* (2009) by conflating Sade and the “War on Terror”.

Sade’s writings may seem cold and cruel, but they can but leave

a mark on the reader. Surely that is the power of art and why we must continue to read Sade. **CT**

Alyce Mahon is Reader in Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Cambridge. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com.

The ma and pa of this local pizza palace listen to all this, absolutely horrified. Their daughter, they point out, knows nothing about making pizzas. How could she be a consultant? Pretending she was, ma and pa scolded, would be committing tax fraud.

The chastened neighbour slinks away.

Donald Trump goes by a different standard. Between 2010 and 2018, Trump’s hotel projects around the world cleared an income of well over \$100-million. On his tax returns, Trump claimed \$26-million in “consulting” expenses, about 20 percent of all the income he made on these hotel deals.

Who received all these “consulting” dollars? Trump’s tax returns don’t say, but *New York Times* reporters found that Ivanka Trump had collected consulting fees for \$747,622 – the sum her father’s tax return claimed as a consultant-fee tax deduction for hotel projects in Vancouver and Hawaii. All the \$26.2-million in Trump hotel project consulting fees, a CNN analysis pointed out, may well have gone to Ivanka or her siblings.

More evidence of the Trump consulting hanky-panky: People with direct involvement in the various hotel projects where big bucks went for consulting, the *New York Times* notes, “expressed bafflement when asked about consultants on the project”. They told the *Times* they never interacted with any consultants.

Sam Pizzigati

How taxpayers funded Ivanka Trump

The warmest and fuzziest phrase in the political folklore of American capitalism? “Family-owned business”!

These few words evoke everything people like and admire about the US economy: the always welcoming luncheonette, the barbershop where you can still get a haircut, with a generous tip, for less than \$20, the corner candy store.

But “family-owned businesses” have a dark side, too, as we see all too clearly in the Trump Organization. We now know – thanks to the landmark *New York Times* exposé on Trump’s taxes – far more about this sordid empire than ever before.

Put simply, the report shows how great wealth gives wealthy families the power to get away with greed grabs that would

plunge more modest families into the deepest of hot water.

Let’s imagine, for a moment, a family that runs a popular neighbourhood pizza parlour. Melting mozzarella clears this family-owned business \$100,000 a year. The family owes and pays federal income taxes on all this income.

Now let’s suppose they had a conniving neighbour who one day suggested that he knew how the family could easily cut its annual tax bill by thousands.

All the family needed to do: hire its teenage daughter as a “consultant” – at \$20,000 a year – and then deduct that “consulting fee” as a business expense. That move would sink the family’s taxable income yet keep all its real income in the family.

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The *New York Times* determination: “Trump reduced his taxable income by treating a family member as a consultant and then deducting the fee as a cost of doing business”.

During the 2016 presidential debates, Donald Trump dubbed his aggressive tax-reducing moves as “smart”. Now, veteran tax analysts have a different label: criminal. Daniel Shaviro, a tax law prof at NYU, feels that “several different types of fraud may have been involved here”.

Ivanka Trump, adds former Watergate prosecutor Nick Akerman, had no “legitimate reason” to collect consulting fees for the Trump hotel projects “since she was being paid already as a

Trump employee”. Donald and Ivanka Trump, says Akerman, should with “no question” be facing “at least five years in prison for tax evasion”.

Plutocrats don’t play by the same rules as pizza parlours, and that won’t change so long as Donald Trump remains in the White House. But these new revelations may make that a harder sell. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org* for the Institute for Policy Studies. He’s the author of *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don’t Always Win*. This op-ed was adapted from *Inequality.org* and distributed by www.OtherWords.org.

advertising. It seems to be falling into place.

But when I watch Marr’s Sunday programme, it seems to me that the BBC is already part-owned by the oligarchs. To an even greater extent than most BBC news and current affairs, his show follows the newspapers’ lead. Six years ago, Robert Peston, then the BBC’s economics editor, remarked that BBC news is “completely obsessed by the agenda set by newspapers”, especially the *Mail* and the *Telegraph*. Since then, nothing has changed. The BBC follows the billionaire press like a faithful dog.

The BBC’s appeasement of monied power, both conscious and unconscious, won’t save it.

These newspapers do not report the news: they create it. Every day, massive events happen: environmental disasters, theft and fraud by the very rich, power grabs and attacks on democracy. Instead of reporting them, the newspapers concoct scandals out of marginal topics, or out of thin air. They turn the public anger that should be directed at billionaires and corporations against refugees, Muslims, the “woke”, the poor. News in the UK is the propaganda of the oligarch, amplified by the BBC.

Alongside this general capitulation, there are specific concessions. Before the last election, the Andrew Marr Show became the Conservative party’s patsy. The BBC had persuaded Jeremy

George Monbiot

BBC is biggest threat to its own future

They don’t want balance, they want possession. The oligarchs who own the UK’s newspapers will never accept the BBC, because it does not belong to them. However tame and conservative it becomes, they will demand it is defunded. And Boris Johnson is listening.

In an interview with the *Guardian* at the beginning of October, the presenter Andrew Marr warned, “The Murdoch empire and others are trying

to push us towards a world in which the BBC is pretty marginal and people are getting most of their news and their views from privately funded television companies, as in America”. He’s right. A forthcoming book by Patrick Barwise and Peter York, *The War Against the BBC*, shows that Johnson’s attacks arise from a long-standing plan to cripple it. Dominic Cummings sketched out his strategy in 2004: discredit the BBC; set up rival, partisan channels; and lift the ban on political

Insights

Corbyn to be interviewed by Andrew Neil – the toughest gig on television – before it secured the same commitment from Johnson. Corbyn was duly mangled, but then Johnson refused to appear. The Conservatives instead offered him to Marr’s show, which is seen as a softer option. At first, the BBC rightly refused to play, then suddenly caved in, citing as its justification a terrorist attack in London.

The day after Vote Leave admitted to breaking the law during the EU referendum campaign, its chair, Gisela Stuart, appeared on the Andrew Marr Show to give her side of the story. But as Shahmir Sanni, the whistleblower whose revelations led to the admission, pointed out, “None of us who uncovered their criminality have been asked to speak on the issue. The BBC didn’t just ignorantly allow for a cover up, they are facilitating it”.

I don’t mean to single out Marr, but to show how even the staunchest defenders of the BBC’s independence unwittingly surrender it. They report from within the castle of power. For most BBC political journalists, politics seems to begin and end in Westminster. A political issue is one that divides the major parties (or divides people within a party). If the parties aren’t divided, it’s not an issue. The BBC’s political reporting, like that of almost all the media, is, in effect, court reporting: what one powerful person said to another; who’s in, who’s out; who might win, who might lose.



Photo: TV screenshot

The BBC’s Andrew Marr.

The really big questions – such as the gathering collapse of our life support systems – are, on most days, outside the circle of light. Above all, because the BBC is unconsciously led by the oligarchs’ agenda, it fails to confront the greatest source of political power: money. The BBC represents politics as a matter of preferences, rather than as a matter of interests.

With a few rare and brave exceptions, it avoids explaining how economic power comes to dominate and direct political power. Instead, every day the corporation provides an unchallenged platform to those who promote this power: lobbyists, trade associations, opaquely funded thinktanks. The BBC’s bias is not trivial or inconsequential: throughout the modern era, the primary political conflict has been between democratic power and the power of money. Its impartiality is fundamental, and calamitous for democracy.

The BBC’s journalists genu-

inely believe they’re impartial. But they belong to, and reflect, a peculiar and tendentious culture, immersed in wealth and power, looking out from the centre. Society moves from the margins. All the new and thrilling political ideas are hatched outside mainstream politics, beyond the citadel’s walls. By excluding marginal issues and marginal voices, the BBC ensures it is always aligned with the status quo, and always behind the curve.

Impartiality is not just about balance. It’s about the way you construct a picture of the world. But BBC bosses, as Tom Mills, author of *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, points out, simply refuse to engage with these objections. They see the surface. They don’t see the depths.

The BBC’s appeasement of monied power, both conscious and unconscious, won’t save it. Like Donald Trump, the billionaire owners of the newspapers are constitutionally dissatisfied. However much wealth and power they accumulate, they cannot fill the hole in their hearts. They supported Johnson for a specific purpose: to destroy obstacles to their power – tax, public protections and public institutions.

For all its failings, like Marr I still want to save the BBC. I want to save it from the oligarchs and from the government. But above all, I want to save it from itself. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com.

Insights



SIGN OF THE TIMES: Many students at UK universities caught up in Covid crisis are stuck in their rooms, unable to leave, while forced to pay high rents.

Laurie Macfarlane

Landlords always come first

For thousands of new students across the UK, the university dream has quickly turned into a nightmare. Instead of being overwhelmed by social and intellectual temptations, many have found themselves imprisoned in their accommodation with a group of strangers, unable to leave. And if living under house arrest isn't bad enough, they are being forced to pay rent for the privilege.

With most teaching set to take place online for the foreseeable future, many are asking a simple question: "Why are we here?"

"My course is all online. I could have done this at home, but I'm paying for this accommoda-

tion", one student told the BBC. "I don't think it's worth the money".

"It feels as though we're paying to be in prison", another told the *Guardian*.

Despite being repeatedly warned that reopening university campuses would lead to coronavirus outbreaks, governments and universities across the UK decided to press ahead with their plans. The warnings were justified: at least 80 universities have reported outbreaks so far, and the number is growing by the day.

Why was such a foreseeable fiasco allowed to unfold? As ever, it helps to follow the money. Student accommodation is big business: there are 660,000 beds in the UK

student accommodation market, and on average students spend around £6,000 a year on rent.

If students had been advised to stay at home rather than move into their university accommodation, landlords would have lost billions of pounds of rent. Universities themselves are among those landlords: in the UK's increasingly financialised higher education sector, landlordism is a vital part of the business model.

And so students were lured back onto campuses, in some cases under false pretences that face-to-face teaching would continue. Whether it was intentional or not, the outcome is the same: as a society we have decided that the right of landlords to collect rent is more important than the right of students to live and learn in a safe environment.

Students probably haven't learnt much else this term, but they have been taught a crucial lesson about Britain's economy: the interests of landlords always come first. Students are not alone. Even before the crisis, half of the UK's private renters were only one pay cheque away from losing their homes— with no savings to fall back on.

But while homeowners and landlords have been offered mortgage holidays to assist with cashflow issues, tenants have received precious little support – despite being far more likely to face financial difficulties. As a result, Shelter estimates that 322,000 private renters have

Insights

fallen into arrears since the pandemic started.

With unemployment soaring and millions more facing shorter working hours, many tenants face the impossible prospect of paying accrued arrears on top of what are already some of the highest rents in Europe.

The government's guidance states that landlords should "show compassion" and negotiate with tenants "to agree an affordable rent repayment plan". But this overlooks the tremendous power imbalances that exist between them. With the eviction ban in England now lifted, it is likely that tenants who can't pay will instead be served with eviction notices. Indeed, councils predict that as many as half a million private-sector renters could be in danger of being made homeless in the months ahead. The disastrous social consequences of this would be felt for years to come.

Even after evicting tenants, landlords can pursue a number of legal avenues to collect unpaid rent from them, some of which can lead to personal possessions being seized or arrears being deducted from wages and benefits.

Given the desperate situation faced by many renters, one would assume that the UK's progressive political parties would be rallying to their cause. But such support has been next to non-existent.

When campaigners called on politicians to back a temporary rent suspension, the Labour Party refused, stating that doing so would be "un-Labour" and would breach landlords' human

rights. Instead, the party proposed that tenants should be granted two years to pay back any arrears accrued during the pandemic. In other words: landlords must be paid in full, and the cost of the crisis should be borne entirely by tenants.

It's not just households that are on a collision course with landlords – many businesses are too. An estimated £4.5-billion of commercial rent has gone unpaid since the pandemic began, as high streets have been devastated by a rise in remote working and huge decline in footfall. As with housing however, the rules are rigged firmly in landlords' favour.

Across the UK, it has long been standard practice for commercial rent reviews to be on an 'upward-only' basis. This means that rents can only ever increase, and can never be negotiated downwards.

The only way to break free from this arrangement is to declare insolvency, which a growing number of businesses are viewing as the only option. According to a recent market survey, 69 percent of hospitality and leisure operators are weighing up that prospect because they cannot afford their rent.

"We are seeing more company voluntary arrangements (CVAs), many of them unnecessary, because there is currently no mechanism for commercial rents to be revised down in the rent review process", David Abramson, CEO of property ad-

visors Cedar Dean, recently said.

Under capitalism, investing is supposed to be about sharing risks and rewards. But when it comes to landlordism, it's a one-way street. Landlords hoover up wealth in the good times but expect to be sheltered during the bad times. From the perspective of tenants, it's 'heads they win, tails we lose'. This isn't just morally dubious – it's also bad for the economy. Every pound spent by households and businesses on rent is a pound not spent supporting jobs and investment in the productive economy.

If the government is serious about "building back better," it must urgently act to stop landlords squeezing the life out of businesses and households. This means introducing measures to redress the balance of power between landlords and tenants, and ensure the costs of the crisis are more fairly shared. Without this, any economic recovery will be slow, unequal and deeply unjust.

The government won't act unless it feels it has to. So it is crucial that tenants make their voices heard. A simple message should suffice: "Can't pay, won't pay". **CT**

Laurie Macfarlane is economics editor at openDemocracy, and a research associate at the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. He is the co-author of the critically acclaimed book 'Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing'. This article was first published at www.opendemocracy.net.

Steve Fraser

The United States of Paranoia

From the Salem witch hunt, the Constitution's less-than-perfect godfathers, Joseph McCarthy, through to Donald Trump and his QAnon pals

News is “faked”; elections are “rigged”; a “deep state” plots a “coup”; Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died suspiciously in bed with a pillow over his face; aides of ex-president Barack Obama conspire to undermine foreign policy from a “war room”; Obama himself was a Muslim mole; the National Park Service lied about the size of the crowd at the president’s inauguration; conspiracies are afoot in nearly every department and agency of the executive branch, including the State Department, the CIA, the Justice Department, the Federal Drug Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI (“What are they hiding?”). Thus saith, and maybe even believeth, the president of the United States.

Donald Trump is not the first commander-in-chief to believe in conspiracies. And some of those conspiracies were real enough, but he is our first conspiracist president. “Conspire” in Latin means to “breathe together.” Conspiracy thinking is the oxygen that sustains the political respiration of

Trumpism. Oval Office paranoid fantasies metastasise outside the Beltway and ignite passions – fear and anger especially – that leave armies of Trump partisans vigilant and at the ready.

Members of the administration’s inner circle keep the heat on. Michael Flynn, whose career as national security adviser lasted but a nanosecond, tweets, “New York Police Department blows whistle on new Hillary emails: Money Laundering, Sex Crimes with Children, etc ... MUST Read”. Michael Caputo, now on leave from his post at the Department of Health and Human Services, uncovered a supposed “resistance unit” at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention committed to undermining the president, even if it meant raising the Covid-19 death toll.

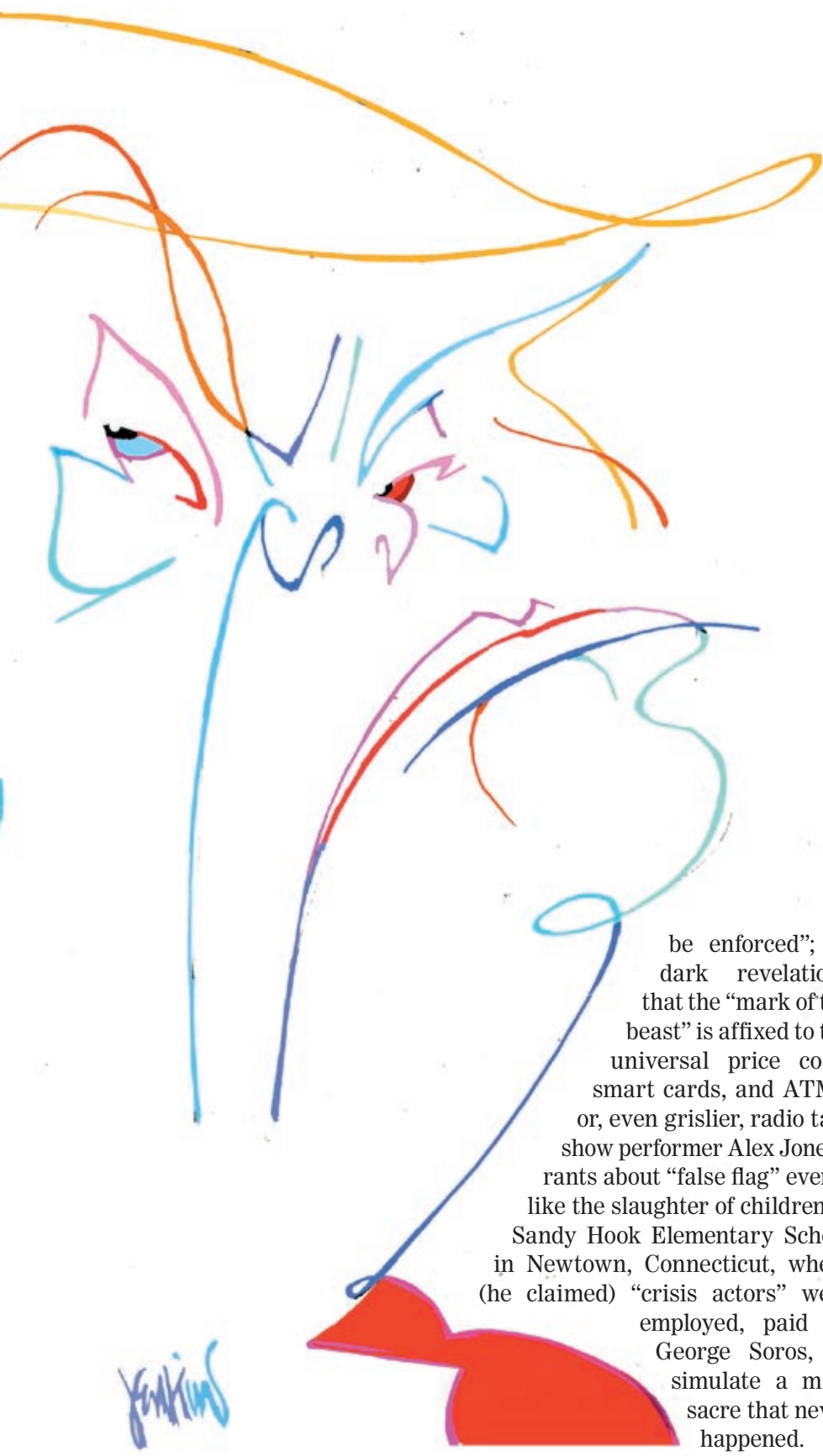
On a planet far, far away – but not so far as to prevent the president from visiting when he’s in the mood or the moment seems propitious – is QAnon, where the conspiratorial imagination really exhales and goes galactic.

The earliest moments of QAnon, the conspiracy theory, centred

around “Pizzagate”, which alleged that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex-trafficking ring out of a Washington, DC, pizzeria where children were supposedly stockpiled in tunnels below the store. (There were no tunnels – the restaurant didn’t even have a basement – but that didn’t stop it from nearly becoming a murder scene when a believer in Pizzagate walked into the shop armed with an assault rifle and began shooting wildly.)

But QAnon was playing for bigger stakes than just child sex-trafficking. Q (him or herself a purported ex-government agent) supposedly relayed inside information on Trump’s heroic but hidden plans to stage a counter-coup against the “deep state” – a conspiracy to stop a conspiracy, in which the president was being assisted by the Mueller investigation flying under a false flag.

QAnon supporters are only the best known among conspiracy-oriented grouplets issuing alerts about a covert CIA operation to spread lesbianism or alt-right warnings that FEMA storm shelters are really “death domes” and/or places where “Sharia law will



Art: Anthony Jenkins / www.jenkinsdraws.com

The point of it all is to make clear how close we are to The End; that is, to the overthrow or destruction of the Constitution and the Christian Republic for which it stands.

President Trump flirts with such a world of conspiracy thinking. He coyly acknowledges an affinity with it, then draws back from complete consummation, still sensing that it's good medicine for what otherwise threatens to shorten his political life expectancy. QAnon "members" show up in the thousands at Trump rallies with signs and shirts reading "We Are QAnon." (And 26 QAnon-linked candidates are running for Congress this month.)

Conspiracy thinking has always been an American pastime, incubating what the novelist Phillip Roth once called "the indigenous American berserk". Most of the time, it's cropped up on the margins of American life and stayed there. Under certain circumstances, however, it's gone mainstream. We're obviously now living in just such a moment. What might ordinarily seem utterly bizarre and nutty gains traction and is ever more widely embraced.

be enforced"; or dark revelations that the "mark of the beast" is affixed to the universal price code, smart cards, and ATMs; or, even grislier, radio talk show performer Alex Jones's rants about "false flag" events like the slaughter of children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, where (he claimed) "crisis actors" were employed, paid by George Soros, to simulate a massacre that never happened.

It's customary and perhaps provides cold comfort for some to think of this warped way of looking at the world as the peculiar mental aberration of the sadly deluded, the uneducated, the left-behind, those losing their tenuous hold on social position and esteem, in a word (Hillary Clinton's, to be exact), the "deplorables". Actually, however, conspiracy mongering, as in the case of Trump, has often originated and been propagated by elites with fatal effect.

Sometimes, this has been the work of true believers, however well educated and invested with social authority. At other times, those at the top have cynically retailed what they knew to be nonsense. At yet other moments, elites have themselves authored conspiracies that were all too real. But one thing is certain: whenever such a conspiratorial confection has been absorbed by multitudes, it's arisen as a by-product of some deeper misalignment and fracturing of the social and spiritual order. More often than not, those threatened by such upheavals have resorted to conspiracy mongering as a form of self-defence.

Witch-hunting, of which the president tediously reminds us he is the victim, began long, long ago, before the country was even a country. Cotton Mather, a leading Puritan theologian in a society where the church exercised enormous power and influence, detected a "Diabolical Compact" in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. There, Satan's servants were supposedly conspiring to destroy the righteous (sicken and kill them) and overthrow the moral order. By the time the witch frenzy had run its course, it had infected 24 surrounding towns, incarcerated 150 people, coerced 44 into confessing diabolical designs, executed 20 of the irredeemable, left four to languish and die in prison, and killed the husband of an alleged witch by pressing him to death under a pile of heavy rocks.

Salem is infamous today, mainly as a cautionary tale of mass hysteria, but from its outset it was sanctioned and encouraged by

Elites resort to conspiracy mongering when the social order they preside over seems seriously out of joint

New England's best and brightest. Cotton Mather was joined by local ministers and magistrates eager to allow "spectral evidence" to convict the accused. Social fissures fuelled anxiety.

Worries about uppity women (widows in particular), especially with their own sources of income and so free of patriarchal supervision, added to the sense of disorientation. Slavery and the undercurrent of fear and foreboding it generated among the enslavers may also have raised temperatures. Can it be a mere coincidence that the first to "confess" her knowledge of satanic gatherings was Tituba, a slave whose fortune-telling to a group of four young girls set the witch-hunt process in motion? Fear of slave conspiracies, real or imagined, was part of the psychic underbelly of the colonial enterprise and continued to be so for many years after independence was won.

Elites, whether theocratic or secular, may be inclined, like Mather, to resort to conspiracy mongering and even engage in their own conspiracies when the social order they preside over seems seriously out of joint. Take the founding fathers.

Soon after independence was won, the founding fathers began

conspiring against their fellow revolutionists among the hoi polloi. The Constitution is a revered document. Nonetheless, it was born in the shadows, midwived by people who feared for their social position and economic well-being.

Most, if not all, of the revolution's leaders were men of affairs, embedded in trans-Atlantic commerce as planters, ship owners, merchants, bankers, slave brokers, lawyers, or large-scale landowners. But the revolution had given voice to another world of largely self-sufficient small farmers in towns and villages, as well as frontier settlers, many of them at odds with the commercial and fiscal mechanisms – loans, debts, taxes, stocks and bonds – of their seaboard-bound countrymen.

Tax revolts erupted. State legislatures commanded by what was derisively referred to as the "democratical element" declared moratoria on, or cancelled, debts or issued paper currencies effectively devaluing the assets of creditors. Civil authority was at a discount. Farmers took up arms.

Men of property responded. They drafted a constitution designed to restore the authority of the prevailing elites. The new federal government was to be endowed with powers to tax, to borrow, to make private property inviolate, and to put down local insurrections. That was the plan.

Gaining consent for this, however, wasn't easy in the face of so much turmoil. For that reason, the founding fathers met secretly in Philadelphia – all the windows and doors of Independence Hall were deliberately closed despite stifling heat – so no word of their deliberations could leak out. And

for good reason. The gathering was authorised only to offer possible amendments to the existing Articles of Confederation, not to do what it did, which was to concoct a wholly new government. When the Philadelphia “conspirators” eventually presented their handiwork to the public, there was a ferocious reaction and the Constitution was nearly stillborn. Its authors were frequently labelled counter-revolutionary traitors.

Less than 10 years later the Constitution’s godfathers would themselves dissolve in fraternal enmity. Once again, charges of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary cabals would superheat the political climate.

John Adams and Alexander Hamilton would denounce Thomas Jefferson and James Madison as agents of godless Jacobinism, conniving in secret with revolutionary French comrades to level the social landscape and let loose a mobocracy of “boys, blockheads, and ruffians.” Jefferson and Madison returned the favour by accusing their erstwhile brothers of conspiring to restore the monarchy (some had indeed tried to persuade George Washington to accept a kingship), of being “tory aristocrats” seeking to reestablish a hierarchical society of ranks and orders. (Again, it was true that Hamilton had advocated a lifetime presidency and something along the lines of the House of Lords.) Everything seemed to hang in the balance back then, so much so that the feverish conspiratorial imaginings of the high and mighty became the emotional basis for the first mass

The conspiratorial imagination of the upper classes became increasingly secular as time passed

political parties in America: Jefferson’s Republican-Democrats and Adams’s Federalists.

If you think Donald Trump has introduced an unprecedented level of vitriol and character assassination into public life, think again. Little was considered out of bounds for those founding fathers, including sexual innuendo linked to political deceit and scabrous insinuations about “aliens” infecting the homeland with depraved ideologies. It was a cesspool only a conspiracy monger could have completely enjoyed. Two centuries later those ventures into the dark side, even if largely forgotten, should have a familiar ring.

Conspiracy mongering may not have been the happiest legacy of the revolutionary era, but it was a lasting one. New England’s social and religious elites, for instance, feared the atheism that seemed embedded in the revolution and its implicit challenge to all hierarchies, not merely clerical ones. So, for example, Timothy Dwight, the president of Yale College and a pastor, had nightmares about “our daughters” becoming the “concubines of the Illuminati,” an alleged secret society, atheist to the core, whose members, it was claimed, used pseudonyms and arranged themselves in complex hierarchies

for the purpose of engineering the godless French revolution.

Those “Illuminati” came and went, but the spectre of atheism endured as a vital element of the pre-Civil War conspiratorial political imagination. An anti-Masonic movement, for instance, emerged in the 1830s to deal with the Freemasons, a secret order alleged to harbour anti-republican and especially unchristian intentions and to engage in pagan rituals, including drinking wine out of human skulls.

Anti-Masonic sentiments became a real force and even developed into a political party (the Anti-Masonic Party), which exercised considerable leverage in New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and elsewhere – yet more evidence of how easily the spectre of conspiracies against God could inflame public life. We are reliving that today.

Along with American culture more generally, the conspiratorial imagination of the upper classes became increasingly secular as time passed. What most came to alarm them was class rather than spiritual warfare. From the years after the Civil War through the Great Depression of the 1930s, this country was the site of a more or less uninterrupted battle, in the phrase of the time, between “the masses and the classes”; between, that is, the exploited and their exploiters or what we might now call the 99 percent and the 1 percent.

One way to justify dealing harshly, even murderously, with the chronically restless lower orders was to claim that scheming among them were the covert agents of social revolution. If there

were uprisings by anthracite coal miners in Pennsylvania, blame and then hang the Molly Maguires, alleged Irish terrorists imported from the old country. If there were hunger demonstrations demanding public relief and work during five miserable years of economic depression in the 1870s, blame it on refugee subversives from the Paris Commune, workers who had only recently taken rebellious control of that city and now threatened the sanctity of private property in the United States.

If there were nationwide strikes for the eight-hour day in the 1880s, it must be the work of secret anarchist cells inciting “mongrel firebugs” – immigrants, also known to respectable opinion as “Slavic wolves” – to riot in the streets. It was okay in 1913 for the Colorado National Guard and the Rockefeller company’s private army of guards to machine gun a tent colony of striking Colorado miners, including their wives and children, killing at least 21 of them, because they were, after all, the pawns of syndicalist plotters from the Industrial Workers of the World (colloquially known as “Wobblies”) who advocated One Big Union for all working people.

Upper-class hysteria, which consumed the captains of industry, leading financiers, the most respectable newspapers like the *New York Times*, elders of all the mainstream Protestant denominations, hierarchs of the Catholic Church, and politicians from both parties, including presidents, ran amuck through World War I. It culminated in the infamous Red Scare that straddled the war and

A clothing salesman went to jail for six months for saying Russian leader Vladimir Lenin was smart

post-war years.

Mass arrests and deportations of radicals and immigrants; the closing down of dissenting newspapers and magazines; the raiding and pillaging of left-wing headquarters; the banning of mass meetings; the sending in of the Army, from the Seattle waterfront to the steel country of Pennsylvania and Ohio, to suppress strikes – all were perpetrated by national and local political elites who claimed the country was mortally threatened by a global Bolshevik conspiracy headquartered in St. Petersburg, Russia. Attempts to overthrow the government by force and violence were, so they also claimed, just around the corner.

So it was that the conspiratorial mentality in those years became weaponised and the night terrors it conjured up contagious, leaping from the halls of Congress and the cabinet room in the White House into the heartland. A Connecticut clothing salesman went to jail for six months for saying Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin was smart. In Indiana, a jury took two minutes to acquit a man for killing an “alien” who had shouted, “To hell with the United States”. Evangelist Billy Sunday thought it might be a good idea to “stand radicals up before a firing squad

and save space on our ships”.

Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer best expressed the imagined reach of “the Great Fear”, an all-embracing dread of a fiendish conspiracy that supposedly sought to strike at the very foundations of civilised life. Denouncing “the hysterical neurasthenic women who abound in communism”, he warned of a hellish conspiracy “licking at the altars of churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes to replace marriage vows with libertine laws”.

You can hear something similar echoed in Donald Trump’s recent inveighing against “socialism” and the way Joe Biden and the Democrats threaten God, family, and country.

Arguably, America never truly recovered from that first Red Scare. A generation later that same cosmological nightscape, brought to a fever pitch during the early years of the Cold War by the claims of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy that communists lurked in the highest reaches of the government, would terrify legions of Americans. His notorious “conspiracy so immense” reached everywhere, he claimed, from the State Department and the Army to movie studios, the Boy Scouts, advertising agencies, and the Post Office. No place in America, it seemed, was free of red subversion.

Still, it’s instructive to remember that McCarthy’s Cold War conspiracy culture was, in fact, set in motion soon after World War II not by him but by highly positioned figures in the administration of President

Harry Truman, as loyalty oaths became commonplace and purges of the government bureaucracy began. And note the irony here: it wasn't communist conspirators but the national security state itself, in particular the Central Intelligence Agency, which first conducted an ever-expanding portfolio of mind control and behavioural modification experiments, while launching disinformation campaigns, assassination plots, coups, and every other variety of covert action globally. That, as it happened, was America's true new reality and it was indeed as conspiratorial as any on offer from the lunatic zone.

All of this nationalised the conspiratorial mindset at the highest levels of our society and helped make it into a permanent part of how millions of people came to understand the way the world works.

Donald Trump might then be seen as but the latest in a long line of the empowered who either believed in or, for reasons of state, class interest, or political calculation, feigned a belief in grand conspiracies. Yet, as in so many other ways, Trump is, in fact, different.

Past conspirators offered a general worldview, which also came with meticulously detailed descriptions of how all the parts of the conspiracy supposedly worked together. Sometimes these proved to be dauntingly intricate jigsaw puzzles that only the initiated could grasp. Such cosmologies were buttressed by "evidence," at least of a sort, that tried to trace links between otherwise randomly occurring events, to prove how wily the conspiracy was in its diabolical designs. And there was always some great purpose – a Satanic takeover or world domina-

Trump and his crew load up the airwaves and Internet with a steady flow of disconnected accusations

tion – for which the whole elaborate conspiracy was put in motion, something, however loathsome, that nonetheless reached into the far beyond where the fate of humankind would be settled.

None of this characterises the reign of the present conspirator-in-chief. Trump and his crew simply load up the airwaves and Internet with a steady flow of disconnected accusations, a "data set" of random fragments. No evidence of any kind is thought necessary. Indeed, when evidence is actually presented to disprove one of his conspiracies, it's often reinterpreted as proof of a cover-up to keep the plot humming. Nor is there any grand theory that explains it all or points to a higher purpose... except one. Abroad in the land is, in Senator McCarthy's classic 1950s phrase, a "conspiracy so immense" to – what else? – do in the Donald. The Donald is the one and only "elect" without whom America is doomed.

We live in conspiratorial times. The decline of the United States as an uncontestable super-power and its descent into plutocratic indifference to the wellbeing of the commonwealth is the seedbed of such conspiracy-mindedness. Soldiers are sent off to fight interminable

wars of vague purpose against elusive "enemies" with no realistic prospect of resolution, much less American-style "victory" whatever that might mean these days. "Dark money" undermines what's left of democratic protocols and ideals. Gross and still growing inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income are accepted year after year as business as usual.

All of this breeds entirely justified resentment and suspicion.

To the degree that political conspiracies take root among broader populations today, it is in part as a kind of folk sociology that tries to make some sense, however added, of a world in which real conspiracies flourish. It's a world where the complexities of globalisation threaten to overwhelm everybody and a sense of loss of control, especially in pandemic America, is now a chronic condition as mere existence grows ever more precarious.

Trump is the chief accomplice in this to be sure. And his narcissism has produced a distinctive, if degraded and far less coherent version of the grander conspiracies of the past. Still, as in the past, when we try to come to terms with what one historian of the CIA has called this conspiratorial "wilderness of mirrors" we are all compelled to inhabit, we might better turn our attention to America's "best and brightest" than to the "deplorables" who are so easy to scapegoat. **CT**

*Steve Fraser is the author of **Mongrel Firebugs and Men of Property: Capitalism and Class Conflict in American History**. He is a co-founder and co-editor of the **American Empire Project**. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.*

Matthew Alford / Tom Sykes / Stephen Harper

The fake news we should really fear

*History is determined by the victors.
Crucially, so are the conspiracies*

We live in an era where paranoid political fantasies are not just commonplace but consequential. In the US, Donald Trump swept into the Oval Office on a wave of outlandish narratives – demonising Hillary “lock her up” Clinton and Barack “born in Kenya” Obama. The latest iteration, spilling out unmasked onto British and American streets, is a conspiracy theory called QAnon which alleges that a cabal of Satanic paedophiles is using a bogus virus to enslave the planet. According to believers, among them several Congressional candidates for the November elections, Trump himself is secretly working to thwart this dastardly plot.

The mainstream has recently clamped down hard on such fringe theories. In 2017, Google’s Project Owl aimed to relegate “post-truth” stories in its search results. Sites like the World Socialist Website consequently plummeted down the search lists, while words like “imperialism” and “inequality” led users to corporate instead of independent outlets. By 2018 the repeal

of FCC rules ended so-called “net neutrality”. That same year, the BBC launched a range of programming designed to counter ‘fake news’ and, in Summer 2020, the warning label “state-affiliated” began appearing across social media channels, meaning that those channels will not be recommended or amplified. On October 6, Facebook banned QAnon outright.

It is perfectly sensible to help media audiences identify poorly sourced or scientifically discredited arguments and to defend the victims of paranoid vigilantes. Nevertheless, this fretful fixation on fringe theories misses the point about conspiracies in three key ways.

First, such labelling of social media has been slapped on without proper regard to content. In September, Twitter falsely labelled the left-wing French newspaper *Ruptures* as “Russian state-affiliated” – less than an hour after the small but fiercely independent title had published a critical article debunking Democrat claims that Trump was a puppet of the Russian state.

Twitter has yet even to reply to its complaint. While it remains early days, it also appears that these measures are prejudiced against official enemies of the West. Twitter has recently removed or suspended thousands of Iranian accounts that they think might “disrupt the public conversation”, as though Iranians have no right even to Tweet about America.

The opacity of these decisions is particularly striking and has led to widespread concerns about shadow-banning. Derek Swannson, former Californian journalist and independent producer of the dissident documentary series *A Pandemic in New York* told us: “The ‘community guidelines’ designed by social media platforms are so vague that just about any video could be banned at any time. YouTube explained that my last film was banned for using a clip of nudity from *Eyes Wide Shut* but I had used precisely the same clip in other videos without a ban. I’m pretty sure the real reason was that I included controversial comments about Covid-19 or Ghislaine Maxwell and her family’s infiltration of Big Tech on behalf of Israeli intel-



ligence”. The point is that no one can really know, since decisions are based on secret algorithms that are being constantly changed.

So far, the sceptical reader might say, so what? This algorithmic architecture stands opposed to the free-for-all spirit of the Internet, and society as a whole, but the outcomes could be written off as somewhat arbitrary but well-meaning inconveniences rather than something more troubling.

However, this brings us to our second point: such clampdowns potentially stymie news stories that

desperately deserve air-time.

As editor-in-chief of Wikileaks, Julian Assange was sufficiently reckless and principled to publish reams of data implicating authorities worldwide in corruption, illegal surveillance, false flag attacks, and much more.

In separate developments, in 2011, British PM David Cameron was forced to admit that UK security services had colluded with Ulster terrorists to murder an Irish lawyer, Pat Finucane. And, in 2012, Cameron had to backpedal over another criminal conspiracy, when the Hillsborough Independent Panel published its report expos-

ing a police campaign to blame Liverpool football fans for 96 deaths at the stadium. The government hit on Finucane and the “unlawful killings” at Hillsborough had both occurred in 1989 but both conspiracies took more than two decades to unravel, when the suspicions and dedication of the victims’ families forced reviews by the House of Commons.

The lead author on the piece you’re now reading has himself authenticated wild conspiracy theories, including the preposterous-sounding notion that thousands of films, TV shows, and videogames have been secretly rewritten by the

US national security apparatus.

In short, journalists should hunt out conspiracies and no one should welcome precedents on curtailing journalism, whistleblowing, or free speech.

Interestingly, one of *Ruptures*' editors, Laurent Dauré, told us that no outlet reported what happened to his newspaper, except RT, but we noticed that even RT pulled its video report a few hours after it was uploaded – it's easy these days for a channel to get the jitters even over something relatively minor like censure from Twitter. It is also notable that, although almost everyone in the Western establishment gets off scot free doing anything whatsoever anyway, the UK Parliament has passed the "Licence to Kill" bill just to make sure that any future cover-ups pass off without even the patchy opposition and exposure of the past.

But the third and perhaps the most important thing to recognise is that the conspiracy theories with the most deleterious political consequences typically come not from QAnon's moronic street preachers but from the heart of the establishment itself.

Modern history furnishes plenty of examples of Western governments which have promoted falsehoods: that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had allied with al-Qaeda boss Osama Bin Laden at the turn

Modern history furnishes plenty of examples of Western governments which have promoted falsehoods

of the century or that Libya's Colonel Gaddafi was plotting to massacre his own people in 2011. These narratives were crucial in justifying disastrous US/UK military interventions that killed and displaced millions of people.

Nor was this just the product of an idiosyncratic environment post 9/11. Way back in 1964, government officials falsely claimed that the Vietnamese had conspired to bomb a US warship in the Gulf of Tonkin, leading to a drastic escalation of the Vietnam war. And for nearly 30 years now, top US and Israeli officials have been out on a limb in alleging that Iran is a year or so from building a nuclear weapon, which never emerges but remains an allegation that may yet trigger a terminal conflagration in the Middle East.

Perhaps the most prominent conspiracy theory to have arisen during the Trump administration is that Russian premier Vladimir Putin "hacked" the 2016 election in Trump's favour. The book *Col-*

lusion, by *Guardian* journalist Luke Harding, supposedly best laid out the case against Moscow but in an interview when asked for actual evidence of collusion, the author repeatedly changed the subject, shifting the goalposts in the same way one might expect from an anti-masker in the conspiracy theory bargain basement. With Russia framed as such a villain, America has incredibly wound up just weeks away from abandoning the very last of its arms control commitments and the risks of open war between the old rivals – maybe over Ukraine or Turkey – are greater than they have been in decades. (Harding, incidentally, was also caught out making up stories that smeared Julian Assange – without consequence, of course.)

"How many deaths were caused by 9/11 Truthers? None," Laurent Dauré commented to us, aptly. "And how many have been caused by conspiracy theories about foreigners?" He leaves the point hanging.

They say that history is determined by the victors. Crucially, so are the conspiracies. **CT**

Matthew Alford, Tom Sykes, and Stephen Harper teach in the Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries at the University of Portsmouth. A shorter version of this article was published by the Morning Star newspaper.

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Joshua K. Jackson

While you were sleeping

*Photographer finds a cure for
insomnia in the streets of London*





Insomnia, for most of us, is a monotonous burden, eased by counting sheep (dogs, in my case), nipping into the kitchen for a can of beer, or staring wearily at the bedroom ceiling waiting for exhaustion to perform its magic.

Joshua K. Jackson found a different solution. The London photographer tackled his sleeplessness by leaving home with his camera and shooting images of the lamp-lit and neon-filled streets of Soho, the city's top entertainment area.

When he saw the first frames from his nocturnal rambles, Jackson decided to make the most of insomnia, continuing his night walks from 2017 until late 2019, capturing a unique set of photographs that reveal the complex and intense atmosphere of the district that never sleeps.

Those images, now published in

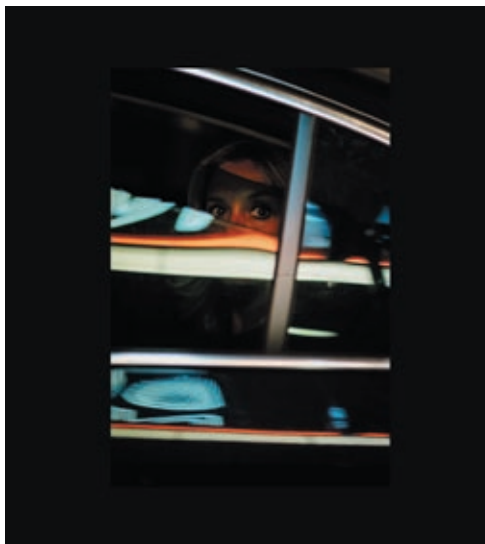




Sleepless In Soho, his first photobook, show the often uneasy juxtaposition between an adventurous intimacy forged by the bright lights of today's Soho and the seamy, faded character of the area's past.

A glance through the pages of this slim, unforgettable, volume shows that night is, perhaps, not just for sleeping, but also for creating. That said, walking the streets is not where you'll find me on a cold, sleepless, winter night: I'll be tucked up in a warm bed. Staring at the bedroom ceiling. Counting dogs.

– *Tony Sutton*



SLEEPLESS IN SOHO

Joshua K. Jackson

Published by Setanta Books

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www.joshkjack.com

72 pages. Hardcover

£40



Joe Allen

Raised by fire, carved by ice

*While human beings fight themselves to make anything work,
Nature creates, destroys, and renews the world without trying*

The gem-cut mountains of Glacier National Park tower over the placid lakes, bearing witness to Nature's creative destruction. Their sheer cliffs rise thousands of feet above the spruce and fir, carved out by glacial ice that exposed the multicoloured layers of our planet's deep history.

A few massive glaciers remain below the peaks, just thick enough to survive the heat of late summer. These enduring snowpacks – far older than humankind – sag and crack under the sun. They send down perpetual waterfalls and rushing streams, quenching the thirst of plants and animals struggling to survive below.

Winter will blanket these elders with tons of new snow, replenishing their stores – to an extent. Over the past century and a half, rising temperatures have caused these frozen giants to shrink dramatically. According to David Rockwell's essential handbook, *Glacier: A Natural History Guide*, "In 1850, the park contained about 150 glaciers. By 1966 only 37 were large enough to merit being named on maps". As of 2007, there were only

twenty-seven remaining. One day soon, they'll have to rename this place Just-a-Bunch-of-Old-Rocks National Park.

Nothing lasts forever, so pack up your gas-guzzler and come admire these sapphire ice blocks while you still can. And be sure to bring a can of bear spray. Grizzlies may look snuggly, but according to local lore, those assholes will tear your gawking face off.

As the noble descendants of archaic monkeys – always foolhardy and endlessly curious – we humans are designed to climb the soaring peaks. Naturally, some mountaineering routes require more transprimate techniques than others. This being my first ascent in the park, I chose the comparatively gentle grade of Mt. Gould for an early morning solo run. Its sharp summit rises high above the forested valley, slicing through the clouds and topping off at 9,553 feet.

To either side of Mt. Gould, the climber sees serrated stone blades running north and south along the ridge of the Garden Wall. The formations are completely different from anything you'd find in

the rolling Appalachian range, the Cascadian stratovolcanoes, or even the southern Rockies' craggy peaks.

These enormous vertical structures, flat and precarious like Stegosaurus plates, were dubbed "arêtes" by early French mountaineers. The frilly name stuck. David Rockwell explains their origin succinctly: "Arêtes form when two glaciers gnaw away on opposite sides of a ridge, forming a jagged knife-edge wall of rock." At the time of their creation – about a million years ago – a vast ocean of ice covered all but the highest peaks. Today, only a few remnants take cover in the shade.

Although the spectacle alone will stiffen the cock and weaken the knees, Glacier's vistas offer more than awe and beauty. Once the aesthetic spell has loosened its grip, the mountains' strange contours and geological layers tell an epic story.

A hundred million years ago, the perpetual flame in our planet's core churned the molten rock beneath the Pacific Ocean, far beyond the western horizon. This energy



CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT: In the 1880s, Upper Lake Grinnell was still frozen into the Salamander glacier. A pond was first noticed in 1927, then no larger than two acres. When last surveyed in 1968, it had grown to thirty-one acres.

slowly pushed an army of prehistoric islands into North America's west coast. In time, these hostile invaders would fuse to become British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon. Thirty-five million years later, as the last dinosaurs perished, this steady tectonic pressure lifted the Rocky Mountains some 14,000 feet into the air, from the American southwest all the way up into Canada.

Meanwhile, here in northern Montana, a slow-moving but insistent rock slab – 300 miles long (think longitude) and nearly four miles thick – actually popped up

onto the earth's surface and crept eastward for fifty miles, creating a thrust fault. Today, at the base of this slab, you can touch some of the oldest stones ever exposed to the open sky.

A good way to imagine this event is to place both hands flat on a table. These are the two sides of the thrust fault. As you press your left hand into the other, let it angle slightly upward and slide, inch by inch, halfway over your right hand. The index and middle fingers of your left hand, each containing a billion and a half years of geological history, will eventually become

the knife-blade mountains we see in Glacier today.

Possessed by a Luciferian impulse, subterranean fires lifted the earth up to the heavens. Then, as global temperatures plummeted, ice fell from the sky to carve the stone into sharp arêtes and deep, U-shaped valleys.

Much of this work was done during the last major Ice Age. Some two million years ago, when *Homo erectus* first stood up in Africa's arid savannah, a continent-sized ice sheet capped our planet's northern hemisphere.

Frozen rivers pushed southward in successive waves, gouging out the underlying stone from northern Montana and New England's Green Mountains to the polished cliffs of Scandinavia.

This sustained assault finally subsided around 10,000 years ago, as the first farmers began tilling the Fertile Crescent and Asian hunter-gatherers ventured southward into the Americas. The melting ice sheets unveiled a masterpiece of jagged mountains and glacial lakes. Like any work of genius, these gorgeous scenes were created effortlessly, unconsciously, shaped according to an inner nature.

The retreating ice has revealed volumes of natural history that's recorded, line by line, in the thrust fault's walls. As I ascend Mt. Gould's increasingly steep face – first stepping from stone to stone, then scrambling up flaky dolomite, then climbing sheer walls twice my height – I note the stones' changing colours. The transitions from one geological period to the next are abrupt, with discreet borders.

The gritty rock under my fingertips dates back to 1.5 billion years ago. It's as if I were clinging to the vertebrae of a slain Titan. The stone contains fossils from an era when the first plants and animals were nothing but a dream. In those days, the primordial sea had just begun to thicken with algae blooms. These pioneering cellular communities are preserved in rippling stromatolites that'll cut the shit out of you if you aren't careful.

Up at the summit, the crumbling pages of an inarticulate history



AT HOME IN THE ALPINE: Haystack Butte plays host to randy bighorns, grass-munching mountain goats, and carbon-spewing humanoids.

are laid bare before my eyes. Thin bands in the carved, tawny peaks record the sea level's continuous rise and fall. This upper section is divided by a black diorite sill, formed by a burst of magma that never reached the surface – evidence of a would-be volcano's coitus reservatus. Below that is a stunning blood-red stratum, suffused with hematite. This dissolved iron was oxidised by algae burps during a period when the ancient sea had subsided. Further down is a deep green layer, dyed by chlorite, that formed long before, when the water was high.

Off in the distance, where the thrust fault's edge meets the open plain, the chalky white remains of a dead ocean floor – older than Jehovah's grandpappy – now conveys snowmelt to the living conifers below. I'm reminded of a Vedic creation hymn, most likely composed by a Himalayan mystic:

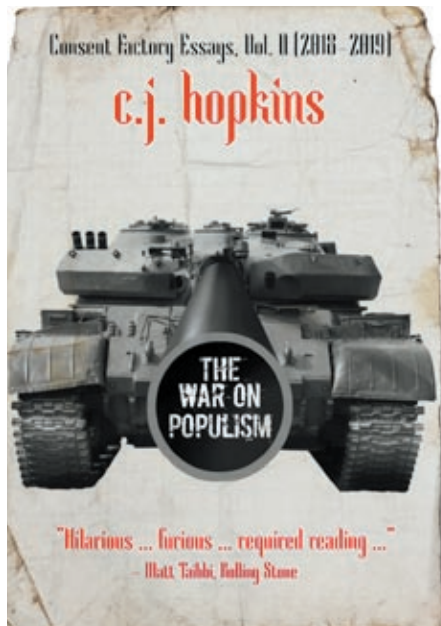
*But, after all, who knows,
and who can say
whence it all came,*

*and how creation happened?
The gods themselves
are later than creation,
so who knows truly
whence it has arisen?*

Uh, geologists do, you navel-gazing yo-yo. According to their research, this dazzling panorama, unmatched in all the world, was created by a bunch of dirt sloshing around an old ocean. Some might say this perspective has demystified the universe, but I don't think so. Scientists have simply added extensive footnotes to our sacred myths.

As we gaze at the sky, it's unclear whether our cosmos was designed to be beautiful – but maybe that's not important. What really matters is that we were made to experience beauty. Better get to it while the sun's still shining. **CT**

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. These days, he's based out of a survivalist bunker on wheels. His website is www.JOEBOT.xyz.



The War on Populism

Consent Factory Essays Vol. 2 (2018-2019)

C.J. Hopkins

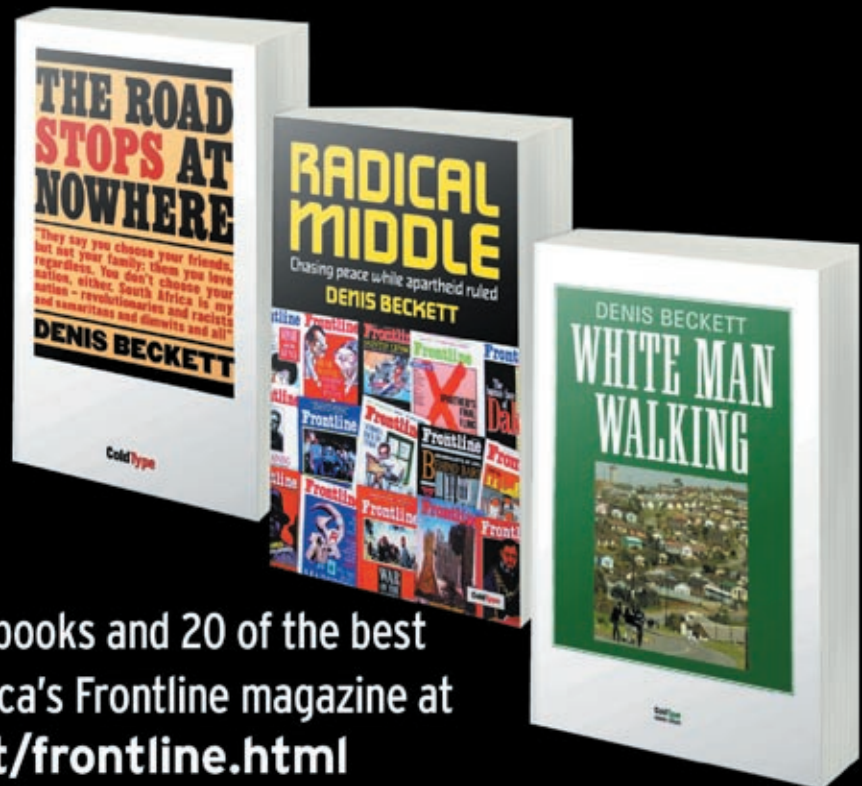
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C.J. Hopkins

Welcome to the Covidian Cult

*While you're sitting at home during the "second wave" lockdowns,
you just might want to brush up on history*

One of the hallmarks of totalitarianism is mass conformity to a psychotic official narrative. Not a regular official narrative, like the "Cold War" or the "War on Terror" narratives, but a totally delusional official narrative that has little or no connection to reality and that is contradicted by a preponderance of facts.

Nazism and Stalinism are the classic examples, but the phenomenon is better observed in cults and other sub-cultural societal groups. Numerous examples will spring

to mind: the Manson family, Jim Jones' People's Temple, the Church of Scientology, Heavens Gate, etc, each with its own psychotic official narrative: Helter Skelter, Christian Communism, Xenu and the Galactic Confederacy, and so on.

Looking in from the dominant culture (or back through time in the case of the Nazis), the delusional nature of these official narratives is glaringly obvious to most rational people. What many people fail to understand is that to those who fall prey to them (whether individual cult members or entire

totalitarian societies) such narratives do not register as psychotic. On the contrary, they feel entirely normal. Everything in their social "reality" reifies and reaffirms the narrative, and anything that challenges or contradicts it is perceived as an existential threat.

These narratives are invariably paranoid, portraying the cult as threatened or persecuted by an evil enemy or antagonistic force which only unquestioning conformity to the cult's ideology can save its members from. It makes little difference whether this antagonist is

mainstream culture, body thetans, counter-revolutionaries, Jews, or a virus. The point is not the identity of the enemy. The point is the atmosphere of paranoia and hysteria the official narrative generates, which keeps the cult members (or the society) compliant.

In addition to being paranoid, these narratives are often internally inconsistent, illogical, and ... well, just ridiculous. This does not weaken them, as one might suspect. Actually, it increases their power, as it forces their adherents to attempt to reconcile their inconsistency and irrationality, and in many cases utter absurdity, in order to remain in good standing with the cult. Such reconciliation is of course impossible, and causes the cult members' minds to short circuit and abandon any semblance of critical thinking, which is precisely what the cult leader wants.

Moreover, cult leaders will often radically change these narratives for no apparent reason, forcing their cult members to abruptly forswear (and often even denounce as "heresy") the beliefs they had previously been forced to profess, and behave as if they had never believed them, which causes their minds to further short circuit, until they eventually give up even trying to think rationally, and just mindlessly parrot whatever nonsensical gibberish the cult leader fills their heads with.

Also, the cult leader's nonsensical gibberish is not as nonsensical as it may seem at first. Most of us, upon encountering such gibberish, assume that the cult leader is trying to communicate, and that something is very wrong with

Cult leaders will often radically change the narratives for no apparent reason

his brain. The cult leader isn't trying to communicate. He is trying to disorient and control the listener's mind. Listen to Charlie Manson "rapping." Not just to what he says, but how he says it. Note how he sprinkles bits of truth into his stream of free-associated nonsense, and his repetitive use of thought-terminating clichés, described by Robert J. Lifton as follows:

"The language of the totalist environment is characterised by the thought-terminating cliché. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly selective, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorised and easily expressed. They become the start and finish of any ideological analysis." – *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism : A Study of "Brainwashing" in China*, 1961.

If all this sounds familiar, good. Because the same techniques that most cult leaders use to control the minds of the members of their cults are used by totalitarian systems to control the minds of entire societies: Milieu Control, Loaded Language, Sacred Science, Demand for Purity, and other standard mind-control techniques. It can happen to pretty much any society, just as anyone can fall prey to a cult, given

the right set of circumstances.

It is happening to most of our societies right now. An official narrative is being implemented. A totalitarian official narrative. A totally psychotic official narrative, no less delusional than that of the Nazis, or the Manson family, or any other cult.

Most people cannot see that it is happening, for the simple reason that it is happening to them. They are literally unable to recognise it. The human mind is extremely resilient and inventive when it is pushed past its limits. Ask anyone who has struggled with psychosis or has taken too much LSD. We do not recognise when we are going insane. When reality falls apart completely, the mind will create a delusional narrative, which appears just as "real" as our normal reality, because even a delusion is better than the stark raving terror of utter chaos.

This is what totalitarians and cult leaders count on, and exploit to implant their narratives in our minds, and why actual initiation rituals (as opposed to purely symbolic rituals) begin by attacking the subject's mind with terror, pain, physical exhaustion, psychedelic drugs, or some other means of obliterating the subject's perception of reality.

Once that is achieved, and the subject's mind starts desperately trying to construct a new narrative to make sense out of the cognitive chaos and psychological trauma it is undergoing, it is relatively easy to "guide" that process and implant whatever narrative you want, assuming you have done your homework.

And this is why so many people – people who are able to easily rec-

ognise totalitarianism in cults and foreign countries – cannot perceive the totalitarianism that is taking shape now, right in front of their faces (or, rather, right inside their minds). Nor can they perceive the delusional nature of the official “Covid-19” narrative, no more than those in Nazi Germany were able to perceive how completely delusional their official “master race” narrative was. Such people are neither ignorant nor stupid. They have been successfully initiated into a cult, which is essentially what totalitarianism is, albeit on a societal scale.

Their initiation into the Covidian Cult began in January, when the medical authorities and corporate media turned on The Fear with projections of hundreds of millions of deaths and fake photos of people dropping dead in the streets.

The psychological conditioning has continued for months. The global masses have been subjected to a constant stream of propaganda, manufactured hysteria, wild speculation, conflicting directives, exaggerations, lies, and tawdry theatrical effects. Lockdowns. Emergency field hospitals and morgues. The singing-dancing NHS staff. Death trucks. Overflowing ICUs. Dead Covid babies. Manipulated statistics. Goon squads. Masks. And all the rest of it.

Eight months later, here we are. The Head of the Health Emergencies Program at the WHO has basically confirmed an IFR of 0.14 percent, approximately the same as the seasonal flu. And here are the latest survival rate estimates from the Center for Disease Control:

Sweden, which is not playing ball with the official Covid-19 narrative, makes a mockery of the ongoing hysteria

Age 0-19	99.997%
Age 20-49	99.98%
Age 50-69	99.5%
Age 70+	94.6%

The “science” argument is officially over. An increasing number of doctors and medical experts are breaking ranks and explaining how the current mass hysteria over “cases” (which now includes perfectly healthy people) is essentially meaningless propaganda, for example, in this segment – <https://odysee.com/@hobeets:0/ard-scientists-call-for-second-phase:7> – on ARD, one of the big mainstream German TV channels. And then there is the existence of Sweden, and other countries which are not playing ball with the official Covid-19 narrative, which makes a mockery of the ongoing hysteria.

I’m not going to go on debunking the narrative. The facts are available. Not from “conspiracy - theorist” websites. From mainstream outlets and medical experts. From the Center for Fucking Disease Control. Which does not matter in the least, not to the members of the Covidian Cult. Facts do not matter to totalitarians and cult members. What matters is loyalty to the cult or the party.

Which means we have a serious problem, those of us to whom facts still matter, and who have been

trying to use them to convince the Covidian cultists that they are wrong about the virus ... for going on eight months at this point.

While it is crucial to continue reporting the facts and sharing them with as many people as possible – which is becoming increasingly difficult due to the censorship of alternative and social media – it is important to accept what we are up against. What we are up against is not a misunderstanding or a rational argument over scientific facts. It is a fanatical ideological movement. A global totalitarian movement ... the first of its kind in human history.

It isn’t national totalitarianism, because we’re living in a global capitalist empire, which isn’t ruled by nation-states, but rather, by supranational entities and the global capitalist system itself. And thus, the cult/culture paradigm has been inverted. Instead of the cult existing as an island within the dominant culture, the cult has become the dominant culture, and those of us who have not joined the cult have become the isolated islands within it.

I wish I could be more optimistic, and maybe offer some sort of plan of action, but the only historical parallel I can think of is how Christianity “converted” the pagan world ... which doesn’t really bode so well for us. While you’re sitting at home during the “second wave” lockdowns, you might want to brush up on that history. **CT**

C.J. Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org.

John Pilger

Eyewitness to the agony of Julian Assange

He was strip-searched, shackled, and prepared for transport to the Old Bailey, in a truck his partner, Stella Moris, described as an upended coffin

John Pilger watched Julian Assange's extradition trial from the public gallery at London's Old Bailey. He spoke with Timothy Erik Ström of Australia's *Arena* magazine.

Q: Having watched Julian Assange's trial firsthand, can you describe the prevailing atmosphere in the court?

THE prevailing atmosphere has been shocking. I say that without hesitation; I have sat in many courts and seldom known such a corruption of due process; this is due revenge. Putting aside the ritual associated with "British justice", at times it has been evocative of a Stalinist show trial. One difference is that in the show trials, the defendant stood in the court proper. In the Assange trial, the defendant was caged behind thick glass, and had to crawl on his knees to a slit in the glass, overseen by his guard, to make contact with his lawyers. His message,



Art: Anthony Jenkins / www.jenkinsdraws.com

whispered barely audibly through face masks, was then passed by post-it the length of the court to where his barristers were arguing the case against his extradition to an American hellhole.

Consider this daily routine of Julian Assange, an Australian on trial for truth-telling journalism. He was woken at five o'clock in his cell

at Belmarsh prison in the bleak southern sprawl of London. The first time I saw Julian in Belmarsh, having passed through half an hour of "security" checks, including a dog's snout in my rear, I found a painfully thin figure sitting alone wearing a yellow armband. He had lost more than 10 kilos in a matter of months; his arms had no muscle. His first words were, "I think I am losing my mind".

I tried to assure him he wasn't. His resilience and courage are formidable,

but there is a limit. That was more than a year ago. In the past three weeks, in the pre-dawn, he was strip-searched, shackled, and prepared for transport to the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey, in a truck that his partner, Stella Moris, described as an upended coffin. It had one small window; he had to stand precariously to look

out. The truck and its guards were operated by Serco, one of many politically connected companies that run much of Boris Johnson's Britain.

The journey to the Old Bailey took at least an hour and a half. That's a minimum of three hours being jolted through snail-like traffic every day. He was led into his narrow cage at the back of the court, then look up, blinking, trying to make out faces in the public gallery through the reflection of the glass. He saw the courtly figure of his dad, John Shipton, and me, and our fists went up. Through the glass, he reached out to touch fingers with Stella, who is a lawyer and seated in the body of the court.

We were here for the ultimate of what the philosopher Guy Debord called *The Society of the Spectacle*: a man fighting for his life. Yet his crime is to have performed an epic public service: revealing that which we have a right to know: the lies of our governments and the crimes they commit in our name. His creation of WikiLeaks and its failsafe protection of sources revolutionised journalism, restoring it to the vision of its idealists. Edmund Burke's notion of free journalism as a fourth estate is now a fifth estate that shines a light on those who diminish the very meaning of democracy with their criminal secrecy. That's why his punishment is so extreme.

The sheer bias in the courts I have sat in this year and last year, with Julian in the dock, blight any notion of British justice. When thuggish police dragged him from his asylum in the Ecuadorean em-

His creation of WikiLeaks revolutionised journalism, restoring it to the vision of its idealists

bassy – look closely at the photo and you'll see he is clutching a Gore Vidal book; Assange has a political humour similar to Vidal's – a judge gave him an outrageous 50-week sentence in a maximum-security prison for mere bail infringement.

For months, he was denied exercise and held in solitary confinement disguised as 'heath care'. He once told me he strode the length of his cell, back and forth, back and forth, for his own half-marathon. In the next cell, the occupant screamed through the night. At first he was denied his reading glasses, left behind in the embassy brutality. He was denied the legal documents with which to prepare his case, and access to the prison library and the use of a basic laptop. Books sent to him by a friend, the journalist Charles Glass, himself a survivor of hostage-taking in Beirut, were returned. He could not call his American lawyers. He has been constantly medicated by the prison authorities. When I asked him what they were giving him, he couldn't say. The governor of Belmarsh has been awarded the Order of the British Empire.

At the Old Bailey, one of the expert medical witnesses, Dr Kate Humphrey, a clinical neuropsychologist at Imperial College,

London, described the damage: Julian's intellect had gone from "in the superior, or more likely very superior range" to 'significantly below' this optimal level, to the point where he was struggling to absorb information and 'perform in the low average range'.

This is what the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Nils Melzer, calls "psychological torture", the result of a gang-like 'mobbing' by governments and their media skills. Some of the expert medical evidence is so shocking I have no intention of repeating it here. Suffice to say that Assange is diagnosed with autism and Asperger's syndrome and, according to Professor Michael Kopelman, one of the world's leading neuropsychiatrists, he suffers from "suicidal preoccupations" and is likely to find a way to take his life if he is extradited to America.

James Lewis QC, America's British prosecutor, spent the best part of his cross-examination of Professor Kopelman dismissing mental illness and its dangers as "malingering". I have never heard in a modern setting such a primitive view of human frailty and vulnerability.

My own view is that if Assange is freed, he is likely to recover a substantial part of his life. He has a loving partner, devoted friends and allies and the innate strength of a principled political prisoner. He also has a wicked sense of humour.

But that is a long way off. The moments of collusion between the judge – a Gothic-looking magistrate called Vanessa Baraitser, about whom little is known – and

the prosecution acting for the Trump regime have been brazen. Until the last few days, defence arguments have been routinely dismissed. The lead prosecutor, James Lewis QC, ex SAS and currently Chief Justice of the Falklands, by and large gets what he wants, notably up to four hours to denigrate expert witnesses, while the defence's examination is guillotined at half an hour. I have no doubt, had there been a jury, his freedom would be assured.

The dissident artist Ai Weiwei came to join us one morning in the public gallery. He noted that in China the judge's decision would already have been made. This caused some dark ironic amusement. My companion in the gallery, the astute diarist and former British ambassador Craig Murray wrote:

"I fear that all over London a very hard rain is now falling on those who for a lifetime have worked within institutions of liberal democracy that at least broadly and usually used to operate within the governance of their own professed principles. It has been clear to me from Day 1 that I am watching a charade unfold. It is not in the least a shock to me that Baraitser does not think anything beyond the written opening arguments has any effect. I have again and again reported to you that, where rulings have to be made, she has brought them into court pre-written, before hearing the arguments before her.

"I strongly expect the final decision was made in this case even before opening arguments were received".

The plan of the US Government throughout has been to limit the information available to the public

The absence of serious mainstream reporting of the proceedings is, at the very least, self-destructive

and limit the effective access to a wider public of what information is available. Thus we have seen the extreme restrictions on both physical and video access. A complicit mainstream media has ensured those of us who know what is happening are very few in the wider population.

There are few records of the proceedings. They are: Craig Murray's blog, Joe Lauria's live reporting on Consortium News and the World Socialist Website. American journalist Kevin Gosztola's blog, Shadowproof, funded mostly by himself, has reported more of the trial than the major US press and TV, including CNN, combined.

In Australia, Assange's homeland, the "coverage" follows a familiar formula set overseas. The London correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Latika Bourke, wrote this recently:

"The court heard Assange became depressed during the seven years he spent in the Ecuadorian embassy where he sought political asylum to escape extradition to Sweden to answer rape and sexual assault charges".

There were no "rape and sexual assault charges" in Sweden. Bourke's lazy falsehood is not uncommon. If the Assange trial

is the political trial of the century, as I believe it is, its outcome will not only seal the fate of a journalist for doing his job but intimidate the very principles of free journalism and free speech. The absence of serious mainstream reporting of the proceedings is, at the very least, self-destructive. Journalists should ask: who is next?

How shaming it all is. A decade ago, the *Guardian* exploited Assange's work, claimed its profit and prizes as well as a lucrative Hollywood deal, then turned on him with venom. Throughout the Old Bailey trial, two names have been cited by the prosecution, the *Guardian*'s David Leigh, now retired as "investigations editor" and Luke Harding, the Russiaphobe and author of a fictional *Guardian* 'scoop' that claimed Trump adviser Paul Manafort and a group of Russians visited Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy. This never happened, and the *Guardian* has yet to apologise. The Harding and Leigh book on Assange – written behind their subject's back – disclosed a secret password to a WikiLeaks file that Assange had entrusted to Leigh during the *Guardian*'s "partnership". Why the defence has not called this pair is difficult to understand.

Assange is quoted in their book declaring during a dinner at a London restaurant that he didn't care if informants named in the leaks were harmed. Neither Harding nor Leigh was at the dinner. John Goetz, an investigations reporter with *Der Spiegel*, was at the dinner and testified that Assange said nothing of the kind. Incredibly, Judge Baraitser stopped Goetz actually saying this in court.

However, the defence has suc-

ceeded in demonstrating the extent to which Assange sought to protect and redact names in the files released by WikiLeaks and that no credible evidence existed of individuals harmed by the leaks. The great whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg said that Assange had personally redacted 15,000 files. The renowned New Zealand investigative journalist Nicky Hager, who worked with Assange on the Afghanistan and Iraq war leaks, described how Assange took “extraordinary precautions in redacting names of informants”.

Q: What are the implications of this trial's verdict for journalism more broadly – is it an omen of things to come?

THE ‘Assange effect’ is already being felt across the world. If they displease the regime in Washington, investigative journalists are liable to prosecution under the 1917 US Espionage Act; the precedent is stark. It doesn’t matter where you are. For Washington, other people’s nationality and sovereignty rarely mattered; now it does not exist. Britain has effectively surrendered its jurisdiction to Trump’s corrupt Department of Justice. In Australia, a National Security Information Act promises Kafkaesque trials for transgressors. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation has been raided by police and journalists’ computers taken away. The government has given unprecedented powers to intelligence officials, making journalistic whistle-blowing almost impossible. Prime Minister Scott Morrison says Assange “must face the music”. The perfidious cruelty of his statement is reinforced by its

***Like a flailing rogue,
the US is spinning
us towards a world
war. Little of this
menace is reflected
in the media***

banality.

“Evil”, wrote Hannah Arendt, “comes from a failure to think. It defies thought for as soon as thought tries to engage itself with evil and examine the premises and principles from which it originates, it is frustrated because it finds nothing there. That is the banality of evil”.

Q: Having followed the story of WikiLeaks closely for a decade, how has this eyewitness experience shifted your understanding of what's at stake with Assange's trial?

I HAVE long been a critic of journalism as an echo of unaccountable power and a champion of those who are beacons. So, for me, the arrival of WikiLeaks was exciting; I admired the way Assange regarded the public with respect, that he was prepared to share his work with the “mainstream” but not join their collusive club. This, and naked jealousy, made him enemies among the overpaid and undertalented, insecure in their pretensions of independence and impartiality.

I admired the moral dimension to WikiLeaks. Assange was rarely asked about this, yet much of his remarkable energy comes from a

powerful moral sense that governments and other vested interests should not operate behind walls of secrecy. He is a democrat. He explained this in one of our first interviews at my home in 2010.

What is at stake for the rest of us has long been at stake: freedom to call authority to account, freedom to challenge, to call out hypocrisy, to dissent. The difference today is that the world’s imperial power, the United States, has never been as unsure of its metastatic authority as it is today. Like a flailing rogue, it is spinning us towards a world war if we allow it. Little of this menace is reflected in the media.

WikiLeaks, on the other hand, has allowed us to glimpse a rampant imperial march through whole societies – think of the carnage in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, to name a few, the dispossession of 37-million people and the deaths of 12-million men, women and children in the “war on terror” – most of it behind a façade of deception. Julian Assange is a threat to these recurring horrors – that’s why he is being persecuted, why a court of law has become an instrument of oppression, why he ought to be our collective conscience: why we all should be the threat.

The judge’s decision will be known on January 4. **CT**

John Pilger, journalist, author and film director, has won many distinctions for his work, including Britain’s highest award for journalism twice, an American ‘Emmy’ and a British Academy Award. His complete archive is held at the British Library. His website is www.johnpilger.com.

THE TRIALS OF JULIAN ASSANGE



Download these ColdType Specials at www.coldtype.net/Assange.html

William Eggleston

The road to the White House

Photographer's road trip pays homage to the hometown of a future president

It's exactly 44 years since photographer William Eggleston took a fateful road trip from Memphis to the small town of Plains, the Georgia home of Jimmy Carter who would, a month later, in November 1966, become the 39th President of the United States.

In sharp contrast to the insane aggression of the current election campaign that culminates (we hope) early this month, depending on Donald Trump's acceptance of the ballot results, Eggleston's photos of lonesome roads, train tracks, cars, gas stations and houses show an air of Southern tranquility.

The images – contained in the re-release of his book *Election Eve* by German publisher Steidl –





Facing Page: Sumter. Above: Mississippi. Below: Sumter.



“... a portrait of Plains as it will never be again, as even its residents may no longer be able to see it”



Above: Sumter. Below: Mississippi.

are mostly empty of people and form an intuitive, if unsettling, portrait of Plains, that is starkly different to the idealised image promoted by the media after carter's election victory.

Born in Memphis in 1939, Eggleston is regarded as one of the greatest photographers of his generation and a major American artist who has fundamentally changed how the urban landscape is viewed.

The original version of *Election Eve*, published in 1987, was his first and most elaborate artist's book, containing 100 original prints in two leather-bound volumes housed in a linen box. It was published by Caldecot Chubb in





Above: Bank parking lot, Plains.

New York in an edition of only five copies, and has since become Eggleston's rarest collectible book.

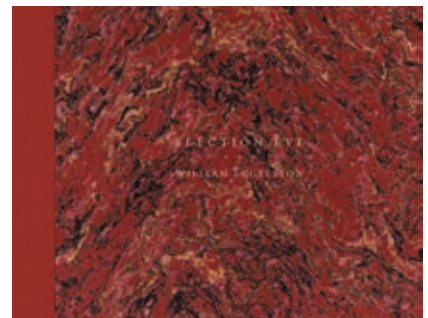
This new edition recreates the original sequence of photos in a single volume, making it available to the wider public for the first time.

In the book's preface, Lloyd Fonville explains how Eggleston "began taking photographs for his 'Plains Essay' even before he left his home in Memphis. And when he got to Sumter County, Georgia, he circled its most famous city warily, photographing the outlying countryside and

the nearby fields and villages. His reluctance to zero in too hastily on Carter's home town was an indication, partly, of his purpose in making this series of images.

"He wanted to record Plains in the true context of its life as a Southern town: as a tiny waystation on roads leading to other, more vital places ... as the hub of a very small agricultural wheel.

"Eggleston has given us a portrait of Plains as it will never be again, as even its residents may no longer be able to see it. Plains is now a juncture of history, an attraction, a symbol." – TS



ELECTION EVE

William Eggleston

Published by Steidl

www.steidl.com

US\$80 / Canada \$115



"If you ever witnessed my buddy Aleksandar wolf down one of these, you'd think he hadn't eaten in a week".

Linh Dinh

Aleksandar of Macedonia

Villages like Vladimirovo have been degraded, if not wiped out completely, but this trend must be reversed if humanity is to have a future

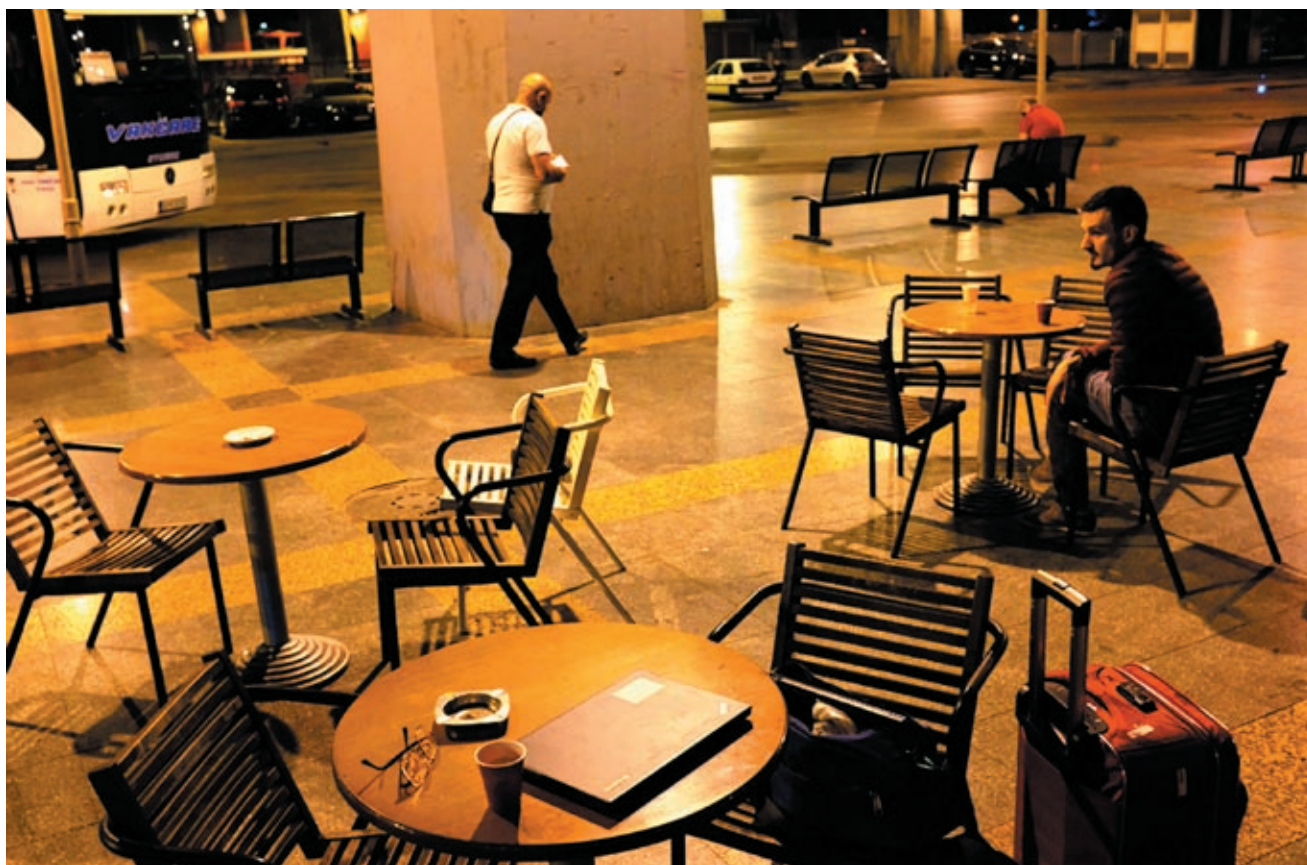
Can I be frontally honest and even a bit shameless with you? (No, not that, but maybe later.) What I'm trying to say, and do brace yourself here, what I'm really trying to bare, fess up and gently confide here, behind a curtain and under a sheet, sotto voce,

is that I simply do not like burek! *[Pastries made of a flaky dough, filled with meat, cheese or vegetables – Editor]*

Shit, man, but if you ever witnessed my buddy Aleksandar wolf down one of these, you'd think he hadn't eaten in a month, if ever. What's the hurry, Alex? It's hard

to take five steps in the Balkans without having another greasy burek slap you in the face, with bits of minced meat, cheese or spinach splattering from Subotica to Burgas, if not Istanbul.

I'm in North Macedonia, thanks to Alex. In 2016, he wrote me, "Would like to thank you about



"My all-night bus pulled into Skopje at 5 a.m. I had no idea what Alex looked like ..."

your wonderful description of your travels. It feels like am travelling myself." Answering, I vaguely expressed a wish to see his homeland. Adding, "When I just got to Germany, I took a wrong train, and a Macedonian woman helped me out. She was very lovely."

Seeing that I was in Belgrade two months ago, Alex insisted I come to Skopje, so I finally did. My all-night bus pulled into town at 5 a.m. There was a casino at the station, with two bald and burly guys standing outside, one very loud and smirking, his eyes lit up. Cab-bies addressed me in terse English. A travel agency advertised express buses daily to Istanbul. All roads still lead to Constantinople, you better believe it. I slid coins into the coffee machine. Revived,

I also felt grateful to have a smooth border crossing, because you just don't know, man, especially during this time of the coronavirus.

I had no idea what Alex looked like. Spotting me, he shouted like a Texan. His English was rapid and fluent, which made me suspect he had lived in the States, but Alex had only spent two months in Houston.

"Did you go anywhere else while you were there?"

"No, I was working".

Heading to Vladimirovo, we were in his tiny, beat up car, with his son sitting quietly in the back. It was still dark. Dim apartment blocks sped by. Now and then, a radiant gas station.

"How did you learn English?"

"I taught myself".

"No way, man! Seriously?"

"When I was a kid, I spent all my time at the US Information Agency, reading". Alex's English vocabulary is larger than most Americans'.

Alex has also worked with Brits and Americans, he said, mostly Texans. His current employer is Norwegian. As a project or inventory manager, Alex has been sent to Norway, Chile, Italy, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and for fun, he's travelled to Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Turkey and, of course, all over the former Yugoslavia. "But I've never paid for a plane ticket! I can't afford it". Although his €600 a month salary is excellent for Macedonia, he has a wife and two kids to support. Alex's son needs special care.



"We passed a beefy fellow cutting firewood with a tractor-rigged wood splitter.

Supplementing his income, Alex gives encyclopaedic walking tours of Skopje, and he's even won two TV quiz shows, with another appearance due next month. Nearly everything we've discussed, Alex knew way more about it than I did, not that's saying much. My ignorance is encyclopaedic.

Vladimirovo is just ten miles from Bulgaria. The 2002 census counted 861 people, with everyone Macedonian except for two Serbs, with no Gypsies or Albanians, which is extremely rare in North Macedonia. Now, Vladimirovo has less than 400 people, with the rest dead or emigrated. The easiest way out is to claim Bulgarian citizenship, through ancestry or brib-

ery, and just like that, you're in the European Union! About the only ones left are old folks, subsistence farmers and sheep shepherds.

"That's a very rough job. People don't know. Screaming at all these animals all the time is very stressful. Many of these shepherds have strokes or heart attacks. Most are alcoholics. Many of them can't get married. Who wants to marry a drunk that smells like sheep?"

Alex's maternal grandparents had a house in Vladimirovo. In its four bedrooms, 19 people slept. By 2000, it was so decayed, hardly anyone wanted it, but Alex's mom got half, which she then gave to Alex. After she broke a leg falling downstairs four years ago, Alex has been taking care of her. She

also has Alzheimer's.

"My mom gave me life twice. Once, when I was born, obviously, then she gave it to me again when I was eight. I loved Bruce Lee, you see. You know that movie where he fought in the glass house? I made my own nunchucks, with two pieces of wood, some chain and two nails. After I saw the movie, I went home, played with my nunchucks and crashed through a glass door". Alex had to laugh at the memory. "I was bleeding here and here", he pointed to his arm and neck, "but my mom did not panic. She stopped my bleeding and told my sister to call an ambulance. It arrived within 15 minutes! I was in the hospital for 23 days. I will always remember that. I will never abandon my mom. I will stay with



"When the inevitable heart attack knocks the barber over, he will slit the throat of his last customer".

her until the very end".

Vladimirovo is filled with picturesque but semi-abandoned buildings. Windows miss panes. Daub deprived walls expose wattle. Meandering around, Alex greeted or bantered with everyone, for this soil was his anchor, comfort, blood and deepest resonance, what we should all have. We passed a middle-aged man on his way to picking beans, and a beefy fellow cutting firewood with a tractor-rigged wood splitter. As sheep surged towards us, a dog angrily barked at his charge. A hippo sized pig begged to be petted.

"This is the church. The sexton was a very old man. When he allowed a candle to burn down almost the entire church, he was so heartbroken, he died soon af-

terwards". Alex shook his head. "Maybe two months afterwards".

Leading me to a chapel in an open field, Alex explained, "Saint Elijah is our village's patron saint. This is his chapel. Every year, there's a huge festival. Over there is where we cook the food. Last year, five thousand people came, but this year's celebration was cancelled because of the coronavirus".

When Alex said he was going to a nearby town, Berovo, for a haircut, I decided to join him, for the last one I had was nine months earlier, in Hoi An. With mostly white hair sprouting in all directions, I looked like a wild man or a bum.

Deep green and beige plastic strips curtained the barbershop's door. Barging through them, we found an old man sitting against the back wall, reading a newspaper. The tiny room was covered with pictures or calendars, some going back a decade. Relatives jostled with Jesus, Mary, soccer stars and even Tito, abutted by a crawling nude.

"He's 86-years-old," Alex said of the barber.

"How long have you been going here, Alex?"

"Forever!"

"And how long has he been a barber?"

Alex asked the old guy, then said, "Since he was sixteen!"

"Wow! So he has never had another job..."

“I wouldn’t think so”.

It was my turn to ease onto the ancient chair, which was crafted during the Ottoman Empire, probably, if not the reign of Philip II, Alexander’s daddy. As the old man clicked clicked his scissors all over my head, I thought that one of these days, when the inevitable heart attack knocks him over, he will slit the throat of his last customer, which could have been me that day. Guided by knobby fingers, the extra long razor nudged, glided and skated against my defenceless flesh, without somehow nicking.

“*Nul ne meurt avant son heure*”, Montaigne said, but that’s bullshit, amigo. Even if a man lives to be 150, he’s killed way too early, for each of us needs several lifetimes to learn or do anything, and, hopefully, right a fraction of our wrongs.

During several visits to Berovo, we always ate at the same place, for Alex had his habits, “In a small town like this, you can’t serve bad food, for words travel fast. Once people complain, you’re done. This place is great, and cheap!”

“How long have you eaten here?”

“Decades”.

Alex has his favourite waitress. When another showed up at our table, Alex quite cheerfully asked for Angela.

Thinking it a bit odd, I asked, “Was that rude?”

“No, no.”

“She’s not offended?”

“No.”

In her late 40’s, Angela has not had it easy, though you wouldn’t know it from her always cheerful

Say Macedonia and people will think of Alexander the Great and maybe Mother Teresa

demeanour. Her father was violent to his wife and children, so Angela married at 17 just to escape home. She then moved to southern Serbia. Her husband was a waiter who, soon enough, also beat her. They had a daughter and a son. After 15 years with this brute, Angela returned to Berovo.

She then emigrated to Switzerland to pick fruit, before being hired by a fellow Berovian to take care of his senile and incontinent mother. A successful immigrant, he owned a supermarket in Zurich. After the old woman died, Angela came home for good.

Last year, Angela visited Berlin for four days and had Chinese food for the first time, she told Alex with a bright smile. (She thought I was Chinese.) Always mirthful, Angela’s truly angelic.

Despite all of his travelling, Alex has never eaten Chinese, Japanese, Indian or Thai, and the one time he tried bratwurst, he thought it was awful. “I like my own food,” he said to me several times. Halfway through our meal, a stocky, cheerful man came to our table to say hello. We shook hands. Leaving, he said to me in English for no apparent reason, “Thank you very much!”

“He was a very good soccer player”, Alex said. “We call him

Savić, after Branko Savić, you know, the guy who played for the Red Star”.

“What does he do now?”

“He lives in Vladimirovo, but has a grocery store in Bevero. Each morning, he buys milk from farmers, then resells it to the dairy companies”.

That evening, we again ran into Savić, and again he said to me, “Thank you very much!” It’s his one English phrase.

At least for now, I’m running out of English phrases myself. You think it’s easy to weave, feather, dab, daub and scumble endlessly out of one’s ass? This quick sketch of Vladimirovo and Aleksandar of Macedonia will have to do.

Say Macedonia and people will think of Alexander the Great, if they’ve heard of him, and maybe Mother Teresa, who was born in Skopje. The capital’s recent remake into a rather strident Hellenic theme park has been much derided, and we’ll get to it, OK, soon enough. I’m just glad that my introduction to North Macedonia was through its down-to-earth, low-key and honest aspect, so many thanks, Alex.

All over the globe, villages like Vladimirovo have been compromised and degraded, if not wiped out completely, but this trend must be reversed if humanity is to have a future. but, though it’s hard to believe it during this grim and uncertain moment, that’s exactly what will happen. Soon. **CT**

Linh Dinh’s latest book is Postcards from the End of America. His photoblog is www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com.



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Trevor Grundy

Giuseppe Garibaldi: Hero of two worlds

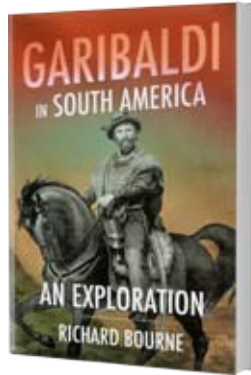
Giuseppe Garibaldi is best known for his invasion and conquest of Sicily in 1860 and his life-long fight for Italian unity. Not so well-known is the way he spent over twelve years of his life fighting tyranny in South America

Giuseppe Garibaldi (born in Nice 1807, died on the island of Caprera, north of Sardinia in 1882) was one of the greatest liberal, patriot, hero and soldiers of the 19th-century.

He was a hero of two continents, an international celebrity, and a political pop star long before the face of Che Guevara appeared on millions of student t-shirts during the Paris uprisings of 1968.

Remembered by most as the man who landed and led 1,000 red-shirted followers during the siege of Sicily and then Naples in 1860, Garibaldi, was offered a military command by Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. Then the Confederates came up with a bright idea – to make Garibaldi a general if he would fight for slavery and the southern states. Fortunately for Italy and Europe, he did neither.

Garibaldi is a hero of Western European liberals and revolutionaries. Born in Nice, son of a merchant shipman, he spent much of his youth sailing the Mediterranean. Soon he was caught up in the nationalist movement – the Risorg-



GARIBALDI IN SOUTH AMERICA: An Exploration

Richard Bourne

Hurst and Company

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imento – that put red shirts on the backs and guns into the hands of tens of thousands of young Italians who wanted rid of the Austrians and Roman Catholics who ruled various states.

He was one of the first to realise the power of the press, which played so vital a role explaining the Crimean and American Civil War to the public and which, almost overnight, turned fighting men into living legends.

In November 1833 he met

Giuseppe Mazzini in Genoa and was spellbound. He joined the Carbonari, an informal collection of secret societies dedicated to ousting Italy's self-imposed tyrants.

In 1833 he participated in a failed Mazzini-inspired insurrection in Piedmont and a court sentenced him to death. He fled to Marseille then went to the Beylik of Tunis before finding his way by boat to the Empire of Brazil where he took up the cause of the Rio Grande do Sul Republic in its attempt to separate from Brazil in 1835.

In Rio he joined a branch of Young Italy (and a local branch of the Freemasons) and was radicalised by young Italian revolutionaries who had made Latin America their exile base.

After helping to attack and take Laguna in 1839, he met the woman who changed his life and after her death lived on as a memory and then a legend.

Anna Maria Jesus de Ribeiro, commonly known as Anita, left her husband and eloped with the bearded, handsome Italian. She was his partner in war and a mother of four children, the first of Garibaldi's three wives. It was

Anita who taught him to ride horses, wear red shirts and dress like a gaucho. Their lives were extraordinary and Bourne tells their story well before going on to 1842 when Garibaldi took command of the Uruguayan fleet and raised an Italian legion – known as Redshirts – to fight during that country’s civil war.

Bourne writes: “In his lifetime he was a legendary figure. But the origins of his actual achievement did not lie in Italy. They were in South America. He spent over twelve formative years, from the of twenty eight until he was nearly forty-one in the southern part of the continent, roughly a third fighting for the breakaway republic of Rio Grande do Sol against the Brazilian emperor, and two-thirds battling for Montevideo and its Gobierno de la Defensa in a lengthy civil war in Uruguay.

“The Canadian-born press baron, Lord Beaverbrook, once said that anyone who would go on to do anything significant in life would have shown signs already in their twenties. This was certainly true of Garibaldi. His time in South America saw how an adventurer with a commitment to Italian unification through membership of the Young Italy movement could harden into a skilled and charismatic commander able to weld un-military volunteers into forces capable of overcoming adverse odds, on land and water.”

Recruitment was possible because of a substantial Italian presence in Montevideo – young and old Italians in exile with a longing for freedom throughout Latin America and, of course, in Italy.

The 19th-century historian George Macaulay Trevelyan wrote:

“The moral power of his personal presence, the smoldering fire that kindled in those small, deep eyes, the melody of that low, appealing voice, were his weapons that made up for artillery and good rifles and military training and steep, entrenched positions.”

The author Lucy Riall (*Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, Yale University Press, 2007) has written that Garibaldi’s life and experiences in South America are among the least known and most mythological of his career.

Bourne succeeds in vividly describing what Garibaldi did during these formative years, what he learnt and brought with him back to Europe, what happened after he left South America and how he and Anita are remembered in South America and Italy.

He adds: “In a depressing era of identity politics and narrow nationalism in the twenty-first century it is inspiring to recall a man who risked his life for two small republics in peril, who was an internationalist, a fighter against absolutism and the freedom of thought of people and of individuals.”

The reasonably short and easy to read book with a decent map and colour pictures is in four parts starting with Garibaldi’s journey from Nice to Rio de Janeiro, moving on to his return to Italy. It repeats, once again, details about this man’s contribution to Italian unity with Rome becoming its capital in 1871 to his death on Caprera on June 2, 1882 after suffering from arthritis which plagued him after receiving wounds during campaigns in South America and well Italy.

Garibaldi has never been short of admirers. But few, before Richard Bourne, have written about his formative years in South America. And this is not just a great adventure story. It’s a love story, too.

But however much we admire Garibaldi (and Bourne is obviously a huge fan) it’s hard to go along with the English historian A.J.P. Taylor who called the Italian warrior “the only admirable figure in modern history”.

At the 1907 centenary of Garibaldi’s birth the Italian ambassador to the United Kingdom said: “Legend is sometimes as truthful, at least in its spirit, and almost always more powerful and efficient than history, because it influences for centuries the mind, the feeling and the action of a nation. Garibaldi, who fought in two continents for liberty and independence, will perhaps in the distant future be considered, not as a real and living individual, but as the mythical and legendary personification of a period of history – of that period of history which was almost everywhere dominated by the great struggle for liberty.”

But legends belong to friend and foe alike. Benito Mussolini, who so admired Garibaldi and his Red Shirts was surprised to learn that one of the international brigade groups fighting his soldiers on the side of Franco in the Spanish Civil War were Italian socialists and communists who fought under the banner of the Garibaldi Battalion. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is author of ‘Memoir of a Fascist Childhood’, published by William Heinemann, London in 1998. His website is www.trevorgrundy.news

Andrew Fischer's Random Thoughts

Male bonding

Once in a while I experience a kind of “male bonding” with some other guy. This happens during a chance meeting when we intuitively understand each other, or instantly see what the other is trying to accomplish. Essentially, we both just “get it” – kinda like me and my editor! [*Whaaat? – Editor*] These rare events are a source of great satisfaction to me.

For example, in a parking lot, when a guy is backing out of his space at an angle and will need to use the wrong side of the lane to get past my car which is awaiting his spot.

Now, most drivers will insist on moving over to the correct side no matter how convoluted the effort required of us both. But occasionally the other guy “gets it” and drives “incorrectly” until our cars clear each other. I always wave or give a thumbs-up. Now you can call me sexist if you like, but I’ve yet to have a woman driver “get it” on a similar occasion.

Another situation is when, due to construction, traffic at an intersection has to be controlled by one or more ... well, traffic controllers. Usually the police perform this task, and they do a fairly decent job, although I always think of them deviously looking for reasons



to give me a ticket.

However, when civilians do the job – construction workers, for example – they tend to perform better than cops. Perhaps they don’t consider it work, but more of a challenge. On one occasion, the competence of a pair of these amateurs was overwhelming. No wasted time for motorists in any direction. It was, “You go; you stop”, like clockwork. They were simply masters of their intersectional universe. Since I knew no one else would, I stopped my car for a moment, to tell one of them that they were doing the best job of traffic control I’d ever seen. I believe I made his day.

Harry & Meghan

In a supermarket recently, I spotted the two Royal social climbers on a tabloid cover and referred to them, aloud, as worthless drones (the “bee” kind) – just like the rest of the royal family. The woman

Art: Pixabay.com
behind me in line shot a puzzled, dirty look in my direction, as if to say “this a-hole must be crazy”.

It was reported in September that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle may be worth less than they may have thought. Apparently the original estimated range of fees for the couple’s engagements was between \$750,000 and \$1-million USD per event, but it seems to have fallen to a paltry \$250,000 to \$400,000.

No need to pity the couple’s drop in “event value”, though, since they have just bought a \$15-million starter home in California. They’ve also reportedly signed a \$150-million deal with Netflix to produce “unspecified projects”. There they will join another pair of well-known “producers” and gifted social climbers, the Obamas.

Why the Prince and the Former Pauper should receive anything for babbling about whatever might be on their minds is beyond me. I wouldn’t listen to them if I had a free ticket and their venue was my backyard, so why anyone outside the British Isles would have any interest whatsoever in the pair is a mystery to me. What does the Royal Family do, anyway, apart from frittering away its £82.2-million annual stipend?

Well, according to Wikipedia, “the British royal family supports Queen Elizabeth II in her state and national duties. Each year the fam-

ily ‘carries out over 2,000 official engagements throughout the UK and worldwide’. Engagements include state funerals, national festivities, garden parties, receptions, and visits to the Armed Forces”. Nice – and nicely-paid – work if you can get it. Perhaps they need some assistance with the more interesting bits. Where do I sign on?

Courtroom lesson

Many years ago in LA-LA Land, I got a traffic ticket when an overzealous cop nabbed me for double-parking on a quiet two-way street. It was early Sunday morning and there was little traffic to impede while I was sitting in my taxi, but I guess he hadn’t reached his monthly ticket quota yet.

I soon received a “notice to appear” in the mail, and a month or so later I showed up at traffic court in Beverly Hills – along with about 100 other victims. As everyone grumbled about hav-

ing to spend untold hours there, I wondered how all our cases could possibly be heard in a single day. I also hadn’t seen many policemen lurking about the place, and I was pretty sure they’d have to appear to play their accuser roles to make the fines stick ... although, maybe not in California, I mused glumly.

Eventually the judge appeared. After a few preliminaries he announced to the standing-room-only crowd, “You have a choice – pay the fine or take the ‘points’. Of course you can always plead not guilty, but if you do there’s a 99 percent chance I’ll find you guilty”. It was simple and brilliant.

After some muddled murmuring among the assembled unfortunates, four big sliding doors at the back of the courtroom opened to reveal a pair of long tables and some white-shirted officials. A sign blared “Points” and another “Fine”. Everyone was surprised yet generally pleased, and after

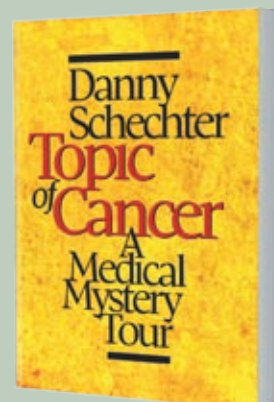
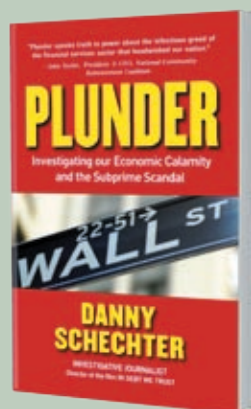
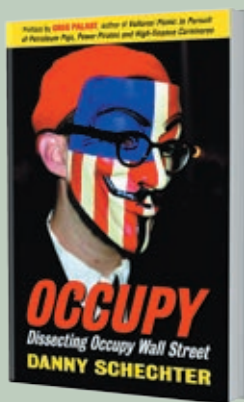
some buzzing quickly ambled outside to form two lines. Except a young Asian guy and me. Well, I was innocent, dammit!

After a while, the doors closed and the judge turned to us. He looked at my companion’s ticket. He’d been in an intersection when the light turned red. The man in the black robe asked a few questions; the accused clearly had a serious problem understanding English. The judge looked at my citation. “Impeding traffic? Pffftt”, he mumbled as he tossed it aside. After impressing us for ten minutes with his knowledge of traffic regulations, we were both found not guilty. I assumed my adjudicator was late for a round of golf with the mayor. **CT**

Andrew Fischer’s collection of short stories, Purgastories, is available at amazon.com. He also designs board games, which can be downloaded at no charge from www.boardgamegeek.com.

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