

INSIDE: AN ODYSSEY FOR JUSTICE ● WAGING WAR ON HANDCUFFED CHILDREN ● CONSUMER HELL!
● PAYING THE PRICE OF FREEDOM ● DEAR BONO

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Welcome to
**Orwell's
World**

**WAR IS
PEACE**

**LIES ARE
TRUTH**

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DAVID MICHAEL GREEN: Imploding political consciousness
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BREYTEN BREYTENBACH: NOTES FROM THE MIDDLE WORLD

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Editor: Tony Sutton
(editor@coldtype.net)

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Where truth and lies are indivisible

With their lies and deceit, President Obama and his generals are missing the real lessons of recent history, writes **John Pilger**

In his book *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell described a superstate called Oceania, whose language of war inverted lies that “passed into history and became truth. ‘Who controls the past’, ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’”

Barack Obama is the leader of a contemporary Oceania. In two speeches at the close of the decade, the Nobel Peace Prize winner affirmed that peace was no longer peace, but rather a permanent war that “extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan” to “disorderly regions and diffuse enemies”. He called this “global security” and invited our gratitude. To the people of Afghanistan, which America has invaded and occupied, he said wittily: “We have no interest in occupying your country.”

In Oceania, truth and lies are indivisible. According to Obama, the American attack on Afghanistan in 2001 was authorised by the United Nations Security Council. There was no UN authority. He said “the world” supported the invasion in the wake of 9/11 when, in truth, all but three of 37 countries surveyed by Gallup expressed overwhelming opposi-



tion. He said that America invaded Afghanistan “only after the Taliban refused to turn over [Osama] bin Laden”. In 2001, the Taliban tried three times to hand over bin Laden for trial, reported Pakistan’s military regime, and were ignored. Even Obama’s mystification of 9/11 as justification for his war is false. More

than two months before the Twin Towers were attacked, the Pakistani foreign minister, Niaz Naik, was told by the Bush administration that an American military assault would take place by mid-October. The Taliban regime in Kabul, which the Clinton administration had secretly supported, was no longer regarded as “stable” enough to ensure America’s control over oil and gas pipelines to the Caspian Sea. It had to go.

Safe haven?

Obama’s most audacious lie is that Afghanistan today is a “safe haven” for al-Qaeda’s attacks on the West. His own national security adviser, General James Jones, said in October that there were “fewer than 100” al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. According to US intelligence, 90 per cent of the Taliban are hardly Taliban at all, but “a tribal localised insurgency [who] see

To the people of Afghanistan, which America has invaded and occupied, Obama said wittily: “We have no interest in occupying your country”

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The embedded media reported this as “peace”, and American academics bought by Washington and “security experts” briefed by the Pentagon appeared on the BBC to spread the good news. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the opposite was true

themselves as opposing the US because it is an occupying power”. The war is a fraud. Only the terminally gormless remain true to the Obama brand of “world peace”.

Beneath the surface, however, there is serious purpose. Under the disturbing General Stanley McCrystal, who gained distinction for his assassination squads in Iraq, the occupation of one of the most impoverished countries is a model for those “disorderly regions” of the world still beyond Oceania’s reach.

This is a known as COIN, or counter-insurgency network, which draws together the military, aid organisations, psychologists, anthropologists, the media and public relations hirelings. Covered in jargon about winning hearts and minds, its aim is to pit one ethnic group against another and incite civil war: Tajiks and Uzbecks against Pashtuns.

The Americans did this in Iraq and destroyed a multi-ethnic society. They bribed and built walls between communities who had once inter-married, ethnically cleansing the Sunni and driving millions out of the country. The embedded media reported this as “peace”, and American academics bought by Washington and “security experts” briefed by the Pentagon appeared on the BBC to spread the good news. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the opposite was true.

Target areas

Something similar is planned for Afghanistan. People are to be forced into “target areas” controlled by warlords bankrolled by the Americans and the opium trade. That these warlords are infamous for their barbarism is irrelevant. “We can live with that,” a Clinton-era diplomat said of the persecution of women in a “stable” Taliban-run Afghanistan. Favoured western relief agencies, engineers and agricultural specialists will attend to the “humanitarian crisis” and so “secure” the subjugated tribal lands.

That is the theory. It worked after a

fashion in Yugoslavia where the ethnic-sectarian partition wiped out a once peaceful society, but it failed in Vietnam where the CIA’s “strategic hamlet program” was designed to corral and divide the southern population and so defeat the Viet Cong – the Americans’ catch-all term for the resistance, similar to “Taliban”.

Behind much of this are the Israelis, who have long advised the Americans in both the Iraq and Afghanistan adventures. Ethnic-cleansing, wall-building, checkpoints, collective punishment and constant surveillance – these are claimed as Israeli innovations that have succeeded in stealing most of Palestine from its native people. And yet for all their suffering, the Palestinians have not been divided irrevocably and they endure as a nation against all odds.

The most telling forerunners of the Obama Plan, which the Nobel Peace Prize winner and his strange general and his PR men prefer we forget, are those that failed in Afghanistan itself. The British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 20th century attempted to conquer that wild country by ethnic cleansing and were seen off, though after terrible bloodshed. Imperial cemeteries are their memorials. People power, sometimes baffling, often heroic, remains the seed beneath the snow, and invaders fear it.

“It was curious,” wrote Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “to think that the sky was the same for everybody, in Eurasia or Eastasia as well as here. And the people under the sky were also very much the same, everywhere, all over the world ... people ignorant of one another’s existence, held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same people who ... were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world.” **CT**

John Pilger received the Sydney Peace Prize in November. His latest book, *Freedom Next Time*, is now available in paperback.

The imploding political consciousness

David Michael Green wonders why and when his countrymen turned into political couch potatoes

If you're looking for a decent indicator of the political health of the United States, consider the following excerpt from a recent *Christian Science Monitor* article: "The decision by the White House Friday to not preempt the season premiere of the psychedelic crash-drama *Lost* for the State of the Union address reveals the surprising power of that much ridiculed stereotype: the American couch potato."

Well, at least no one can accuse us of not having our national priorities in order, eh?

Actually, that's only part of the story – and frankly the more benign part, to boot.

Presidents like to say, in their annual messages to Congress and the country, that "The state of the union is strong". Maybe Obama is bold enough to tell a whopper that big even in 2010. I guess when you've taken an entire country over the cliff lying about "hope" and "change", even a stinker that rude wouldn't be so egregious, relatively speaking.

In fact, the health of this country is tenuous, and that's on a real good day. All the obvious and tangible manifestations are there: massive unemployment, polarized wealth suitable for any banana republic,

broken government and political system, environmental catastrophe and more. It's almost as if our goal is to commit national suicide in order to keep a whole next generation of Jared Diamonds employed or something.

These are huge problems, they are nigh on intractable, and they are destructive in the extreme. Indeed, so grim is our situation that the only real hope looking forward is for a resurgence of common sense and mutual sacrifice allowing for at least the possibility of finding the national will to address these crises.

But I'm afraid that's where things really start to get grim.

If you're under the age of forty, you might not realize that things weren't ever thus in American politics. The current ugly nature of our political discourse is perhaps simultaneously the greatest 'victory' and greatest

tragedy of the regressive revolution in America these last thirty years. Not only has the state itself been captured for purposes of thorough looting by oligarchs, but the very political consciousness of the nation has been diluted and polluted – all while our faux patriotism is saluted – beyond recognition.

Government is bad. Government always screws up. Corporations are heroic. Greed

Not only has the state itself been captured for purposes of thorough looting by oligarchs, but the very political consciousness of the nation has been diluted and polluted – all while our faux patriotism is saluted – beyond recognition



COVER STORY: ORWELL'S WORLD / 2

Recent polls are showing that generic tea party candidates beat Republicans or Democrats amongst the electorate today. Part of what makes that as surprising and significant as it is, is that no one really knows what the movement stands for, apart from some inchoate rage against incumbents, taxes and spending

is good. Conservatism is about protecting freedom. Personal sacrifice for national improvement is for fools. Personal destruction is an appropriate form of politics. Hypocrisy is even more acceptable. There is one set of rules for elites, another for the rest of us.

All these form the fabric of our national ethos today, woven deeply into our political consciousness.

Regressives understand in ways that progressives tend to be clueless about, the simple idea that who narrates governs. The explanation for the right's visceral appreciation of this wisdom is likely rooted in the survival instinct at the core of the human creature's very DNA. When you're peddling an absolutely absurd and destructive pile of bullshit, even dressing it up in pretty pink ribbons isn't going to be enough. If you hope to have any prayer of making the sale, you gotta teach people from their earliest days that turds are really, really valuable. Get yours now!

This was one of Orwell's most powerful perceptions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a book loaded with crucial insights about society, politics, government and human nature. The state could expend endless resources battling for the supremacy of a certain type of politics. That's one option. Or, far more cleverly, it could just remove the possibility of imagining alternatives from the public's consciousness. Much easier. Much cheaper. This is why Orwell concentrated so much on language in his novel. He understood that action requires desire, desire requires imagination, and imagination requires language.

American politics and political culture have descended into a grim visage from what they once were, to something taking a form today of which Big Brother could be proud. It's quite true, of course, that there are always nasty actors out there, and that it has at times been worse than it is now. But what's discouraging about our moment is that it comes after, not before, those other times and the better ones that followed. Of course there will always be oscillations

from better to worse. But one expects that both will represent improvements over the betters and worses of the past.

But we, in fact, are moving in the opposite direction. The level of vitriol in American politics grows uglier everyday, and the absence of rationality more astonishing. Back in the day, mainstream political actors weren't in the habit of calling the president a fascist, or accusing him of seeking to murder senior citizens. They weren't so unsophisticated as to call him a socialist at the same time they labeled him a fascist. They weren't so intoxicated with their own venom as to believe that a president who so obediently serves the interests of Wall Street – to a degree that might have horrified even Richard Nixon – is some sort of maniacal leftist radical, bent on killing capitalism in America.

Recent polls are showing that generic tea party candidates beat Republicans or Democrats amongst the electorate today. Part of what makes that as surprising and significant as it is, is that no one really knows what the movement stands for, apart from some inchoate rage against incumbents, taxes and spending (but try to get them to specify what they'd cut, and you'll see how little content there actually is).

All of this represents the pinnacle (one hopes) of regressive efforts to realize Orwell's nightmare scenario. Americans feel rage – as they should – but they don't know what at, exactly, or why. And they certainly don't have the tools to envision better realities. What else could have happened after three decades of right-wing lies, intimidation and destruction? What else could be the product of presidents like Reagan and Bush, who so transparently served the interests of their class, but so effectively wrapped their predations in the maudlin cloth of the flag and the cranked up rhetoric of fear? What else could we expect from the vitriolic demonization of a so-called left so-called alternative like Clinton or Obama, whose politics are essentially the same as Reagan's or Bush's, sans the

more nauseating genuflections toward values that, truth be told (and it must never be, of course), only apply to the stupid little people in practice?

The practice of our politics is so broken today, but what pains me worse is that we have gone a long ways toward no longer even possessing the capability of imagining better alternatives. Good Americans – of generous intentions, thoughtful analysis and progressive dispositions – are losing the capacity to imagine genuine alternatives to an American politics which offers the choice between right, far right and hysterical right, all of them differing only in the shading of the patina they spray over their common oligarchical core. No presidents could possibly better serve the interests of the plutocracy than Bill Clinton and Barack Obama (indeed, finding any sort of meaningful dividing line between the White House and Wall Street is an increasingly difficult task). And yet those on the right in America foam at the mouth in their rage at these communist infiltrators, while some progressives foolishly believe that Obama is trying his darndest to be a good lad, against a tough situation he's inherited.

This condition represents an utter failure of the imagination, and therefore the startling 'success' of the regressive framing effort. This limitation of what is conceivable and the concomitant diminishing of expectations is the greatest triumph of right-wing marketing, and it's Orwellian to its core. What makes it especially startling is that the alternatives in question are so commonsensical and so proximate in real life form, and yet even some progressives in America have been trained to lower their expectations enough to ignore the existence of these ideas and models. What could be more basic than removing gushing profits and massive bureaucratic waste from a country's healthcare system, especially one that is groaning so clangorously under the burdens of runaway costs? What could be easier to figure out than nationalized healthcare,

when every other developed country in the world already does it? And yet such ideas were nowhere remotely near consideration throughout these long months of tortuous negotiations over 'reform' of what actually amounts to the care of corporate health in America. And yet even the most pathetic feints in the direction of real solutions – a public option or the extension of Medicare benefits – were immediately dispatched with, so that the profiteers' victory could be unequivocally complete.

Military spending is another excellent example. This country drops twice as much on 'defense' as what is spent by every other country in the world combined, and we do that despite having not a single state enemy (you know, the kind you could actually use such a military against) anywhere on the horizon. And we do that despite having a nuclear deterrent arsenal that means sure suicide for anyone stupid enough to invade America or even seriously provoke the country. But even if none of that were true, and even if we were spending just a little bit more than necessary for national defense, what might one logically expect of the character of political debate in a country that cannot afford to educate its students, cannot provide healthcare for its citizens, and cannot maintain its infrastructure? What about in a country that cannot do those things, and which also happens to be so deeply in the hole financially that the Treasury Department has been relocated to the floor of the Pacific Ocean? What would you expect to see in a country like that? Perhaps a wee discussion of spending those bucks a bit differently? Would that be so bizarre?

And yet, do we see such a conversation about reducing these obscene expenditures anywhere on the political landscape? Can anyone name a mainstream politician who advocates these views? Can anyone find a major political party saying we need to cut defense spending in half – so that we 'only' spend as much as all the other 195 countries of the world combined – and then use

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COVER STORY: ORWELL'S WORLD / 2

We recognize that both major political parties are worthless, though I don't think we quite understand why. We were sensible enough to vote for what was advertised as 'change' in the last presidential election. But not sensible enough to demand that we actually got it after inauguration day

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

the proceeds to provide healthcare for all?

We could go on and on here. Where is the great movement for saving the planet from the destruction of global warming, even if it means foregoing that SUV? Where is that most commonsensical call to divorce special interests and their money from American politics? Where are remotely sensible policies on guns or drugs or crime? And so on, and so on. None of this is even close to happening, and it is regressivism's great triumph in removing from the realm of the politically imaginable even those things which are so transparently sensible, even those things which exist en masse in every other developed democracy in the world, even those that fairly scream out for adoption at home.

This failure of the imagination demonstrates better than anything else the full measure of our political impoverishment. What can you say to a country so far gone that it not only cannot swerve the car – even as head-on collision with a speeding freight train is only seconds away – but cannot even imagine swerving it?

“Good night and good luck” certainly comes to mind. But little else.

There are a few signs of hope, of course. Americans at least know enough to know that we're not doing well, which is more than you can say for the good folks of Oceania. We recognize that both major political

parties are worthless, though I don't think we quite understand why. We were sensible enough to vote for what was advertised as 'change' in the last presidential election. But not sensible enough to demand that we actually got it after inauguration day.

And we're also not smart enough to understand why we're dissatisfied with what we've got. But then, how could we be if watching “the psychedelic crash-drama *Lost*” on television is more important than the biggest single night of the year on the calendar of our national political discourse? And what an appropriate show to hold out for, eh? Could it get any better than *Lost*? I dunno. Is there a show out there called *Lost, Stupid and Too Lazy to Stop Getting Punked*, perhaps?

Our problem isn't that the Obama administration is socialist, but rather that it is a captive of the worst elements of capitalism. Our problem isn't that our politicians make awful decisions that have nothing to do with advancing our interests, but rather that we keep tolerating politicians who do that. Our problem isn't that we chose the wrong ideological alternative, but rather that we have so little to choose from.

Indeed, our deepest problem is that we can't even imagine anymore that there could be real choice.

But, hey: Shhhhh!

You're not allowed to say that.

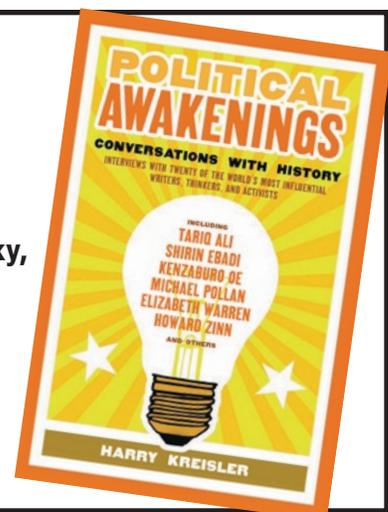
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The lies I learned at school

The United States military does not defend freedom; it's a threat to the nation's freedom, writes **Kevin Carson**

Barrack Obama's Nobel acceptance speech included this self-congratulatory little gem:

"But the world must remember that it was not simply international institutions – not just treaties and declarations – that brought stability to a post-World War II world. Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea, and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans."

Before Mr. Obama dislocates a shoulder patting himself on the back, maybe we should look at the record.

When it comes to guaranteeing stability and promoting democracy, the United States' record is clear. "Global security" and "stability" mean the security and stability of a particular global order guaranteed by the United States – a global order that reflects the interests of the coalition of class forces that control the American government.

The United States' record with regard to "enabling democracy" is also clear. When it

has best served the interests of the corporate world order to replace a dictatorship with a formal democracy, the United States has done so. But when it has best suited the interests of corporate power to overthrow a democracy by force, the United States government has not hesitated to do so.

A lot of American blood has, been shed in battlefields around the world. Even more blood has been shed by the people who lived in those countries, fighting American soldiers. And the wars in which all that blood has been shed have had little to do with the prosperity, freedom, or other interests of the people where the wars were fought.

The list of killing fields, stained with "the blood of our citizens" – and of many other people – is indeed a long one. It includes the millions killed by military regimes and death squads in Central America, from the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954 to U.S. support for the Contras' terrorism in the 1980s. It includes the victims of the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone of Latin America,

installed with the support of Operation Condor in the '60s and '70s. It includes the hundreds of thousands massacred by Suharto (with the CIA's Jakarta station drawing up the hit lists) and millions more by Mobutu.

"Freedom," in operational

A lot of American blood has, indeed, been shed in battlefields around the world. Even more blood has been shed by the people who lived in those countries, fighting American soldiers



If you look at all the foreign “threats” the U.S. government “defends” itself against, strangely enough they mainly involve what some country on the other side of the world is doing within a few hundred miles of its own border

terms, has translated into whatever degree of freedom was compatible with secure profits for United Fruit Company and ITT – which wasn't much.

More often than not, the United States has intervened to protect the corporations who own the world from the people who live in it. As Noam Chomsky put it, the Cold War in practical terms can be summed up as a war by the U.S. against the Third World, and by the USSR against its satellites, with the “threat” of the opposing superpower in both cases serving mainly as a pretext. It's a lot like Emmanuel Goldstein described the three rival superpowers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: three sheaves of corn propping each other up, and enabling one another to defend their respective internal systems of power.

One of the most central items in the American creed is the belief that the troops “protect our freedom.” By definition, any war the United States fights is to “defend our freedoms.” Just watch the cable news shows, or read your local newspaper's editorials on Veteran's Day and Memorial Day, if you don't believe it. If any one belief is central to the ideology of One Hundred Percent Americanism, this is it.

But it doesn't bear much looking into. I once saw JCS Chairman Richard Myers on C-SPAN, addressing the Army War College, criticizing China (with a straight face) for having military forces beyond its “legitimate defensive needs.” This from the highest-ranking military officer in a global superpower whose military budget exceeded those of the rest of the world combined.

When most people of common sense think of “defending our country,” the first thing that comes to mind is probably defending against an actual military attack on the territory of the United States. But if you look at all the foreign “threats” the U.S. government “defends” itself against, strangely enough they mainly involve what some country on the other side of the world is doing within a few hundred miles of its own borders. Most of them don't even have the logistical capability to project force more

than a few hundred miles outside their own borders. So if you think about it, it's only fair that the U.S. military “defend our country” and “protect our freedoms” on the other side of the world. If Uncle Sam weren't generous enough to meet them more than half-way, we'd never get to have any wars.

Myers' comments about China, and the nature of the other “threats” the U.S. national security state points to, provide an interesting glimpse into what “American exceptionalism” is really all about. The United States is the only country in the world that is permitted to define as “excessive military capabilities” the ability to successfully resist an American attack.

The United States is the only country with the right to define as “aggression” what another country does in its own immediate vicinity on the other side of the world – while the United States itself intervenes militarily all over the globe to force others to obey its will. The United States is the only country which is allowed to define a “threat” as another country's ability to disobey the orders of the global hegemon within a few hundred miles of its own borders. By definition, a “threat” is any country that doesn't do what it's told.

So when Liz Cheney criticizes Obama for not believing in American exceptionalism, she's all wet. He believes in it, all right. As Chomsky pointed out, American liberals, as much as American conservatives, share the implicit assumption that “we own the world.” They may believe that Vietnam or Iraq was a “mistake,” but never for one second do they question the premise that the United States has the right to intervene.

Let's get something clear. The United States' military does not “defend our freedom.” There hasn't been a war in my lifetime that involved a genuine foreign military threat to our freedom, and the United States government has been actively involved in suppressing freedom around the world for decades. The United States government is a threat to our freedom, and the freedom of people everywhere. **CT**

*Kevin Carson is a Research Associate at www.C4SS.org He is author of *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy and Organization Theory: An Individualist Anarchist Perspective**

Consumer hell!

How do we break a system which now permeates every aspect of our lives? asks **George Monbiot**

Who said this? “All the evidence shows that beyond the sort of standard of living which Britain has now achieved, extra growth does not automatically translate into human welfare and happiness.” Was it a. the boss of Greenpeace, b. the director of the New Economics Foundation, or c. an anarchist planning the next climate camp?

None of the above. It was: d. the former head of the Confederation of British Industry, who currently runs the Financial Services Authority. In a recent interview, Lord Turner brought the consumer society’s most subversive observation into the mainstream¹.

In our hearts most of us know it is true, but we live as if it isn’t. Progress is measured by the speed at which we destroy the conditions which sustain life. Governments are deemed to succeed or fail by how well they make money go round, regardless of whether it serves any useful purpose. They regard it as a sacred duty to encourage the country’s most revolting spectacle: the annual feeding frenzy in which shoppers queue all night, then stampede into the shops, elbow, trample and sometimes fight to be the first to carry off some designer junk which will go into landfill before the sales next year. The madder the orgy, the greater the triumph of economic management.

As the *Guardian* revealed this month, the British government is now split over product placement in TV programmes: if it implements the policy proposed by Ben Bradshaw, the culture secretary, plots will revolve around chocolates and cheeseburgers and ads will be impossible to filter, perhaps even to detect. Mr Bradshaw must know that this indoctrination won’t make us happier, wiser, greener or leaner; but it will make the television companies £140m a year².

Though we know they aren’t the same, we can’t help conflating growth and well-being. Recently, for example, the *Guardian* carried the headline “UK standard of living drops below 2005 level”³. But the story had nothing to do with our standard of living. Instead it reported that per capita gross domestic product is lower than it was in 2005. GDP is a measure of economic activity, not standard of living. But the terms are confused so often that journalists now treat them as synonyms. The low retail sales of previous months were recently described by this paper as “bleak”⁴ and “gloomy”⁵. High sales are always “good news”, low sales are always “bad news”, even if the product on offer is farmyard porn. I believe it’s time that the *Guardian* challenged this biased reporting.

Those who still wish to conflate welfare and GDP argue that high consumption by

Governments regard it as a sacred duty to encourage the country’s most revolting spectacle: the annual feeding frenzy in which shoppers queue all night, then stampede into the shops, elbow, trample and sometimes fight to be the first to carry off some designer junk which will go into landfill before the sales next year

BORN TO SHOP?

In its practical effects, consumerism is a totalitarian system: it permeates every aspect of our lives. Even our dissent from the system is packaged up and sold to us in the form of anti-consumption consumption, like the “I’m not a plastic bag”

the wealthy improves the lot of the world’s poor. Perhaps, but it’s a very clumsy and inefficient instrument. After some 60 years of this feast, 800m people remain permanently hungry. Full employment is a less likely prospect than it was before the frenzy began.

In a new paper published in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, Sir Partha Dasgupta makes the point that the problem with gross domestic product is the gross bit⁶. There are no deductions involved: all economic activity is accounted as if it were of positive value. Social harm is added to, not subtracted from, social good. A train crash which generates £1bn worth of track repairs, medical bills and funeral costs is deemed by this measure as beneficial as an uninterrupted service which generates £1bn in ticket sales.

Most importantly, no deduction is made to account for the depreciation of natural capital: the overuse or degradation of soil, water, forests, fisheries and the atmosphere. Dasgupta shows that the total wealth of a nation can decline even as its GDP is growing. In Pakistan, for example, his rough figures suggest that while GDP per capita grew by an average of 2.2% a year between 1970 and 2000, total wealth declined by 1.4%. Amazingly, there are still no official figures which seek to show trends in the actual wealth of nations.

You can say all this without fear of punishment or persecution. But in its practical effects, consumerism is a totalitarian system: it permeates every aspect of our lives. Even our dissent from the system is packaged up and sold to us in the form of anti-consumption consumption, like the “I’m not a plastic bag” which was supposed to replace disposable carriers but was mostly used once or twice before it fell out of fashion, or lucrative new books on how to live without money.

Orwell and Huxley proposed different totalitarianisms: one sustained by fear, the other partly by greed. Huxley’s nightmare has come closer to realisation. In the nurs-

eries of the *Brave New World*, “the voices were adapting future demand to future industrial supply. ‘I do love flying,’ they whispered, ‘I do love flying, I do love having new clothes ... old clothes are beastly ... We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending’”⁷. Underconsumption was considered “positively a crime against society”⁸. But there was no need to punish it. At first the authorities machine-gunned the Simple Lifers who tried to opt out, but that didn’t work. Instead they used “the slower but infinitely surer methods” of conditioning⁹: immersing people in advertising slogans from childhood. A totalitarianism driven by greed eventually becomes self-enforced.

Let me give you an example of how far this self-enforcement has progressed. In a recent *Guardian* comment thread, a poster expressed an idea which I have now heard a few times. “We need to get off this tiny little world and out into the wider universe. ... if it takes the resources of the planet to get us out there, so be it. However we use them, however we utilise the energy of the sun and the mineral wealth of this world and the others of our planetary system, either we do use them to expand and explore other worlds, and become something greater than a mud-grubbing semi-sentient animal, or we die as a species.”¹⁰

This is the consumer society taken to its logical extreme: the Earth itself becomes disposable. This idea appears to be more acceptable in some circles than any restraint on pointless spending. That we might hop, like the aliens in *Independence Day*, from one planet to another, consuming their resources then moving on, is considered by these people a more realistic and desirable prospect than changing the way in which we measure wealth.

So how do we break this system? How do we pursue happiness and well-being rather than growth? I came back from the climate talks Copenhagen depressed for several reasons, but above all because,

listening to the discussions at the citizens' summit, it struck me that we no longer have movements; we have thousands of people each clamouring to have their own visions adopted. We might come together for occasional rallies and marches, but as soon as we start discussing alternatives, solidarity is shattered by possessive individualism. Consumerism has changed all of us. Our challenge is now to fight a system we have internalised. **CT**

George Monbiot's latest book is Bring On The Apocalypse

Notes

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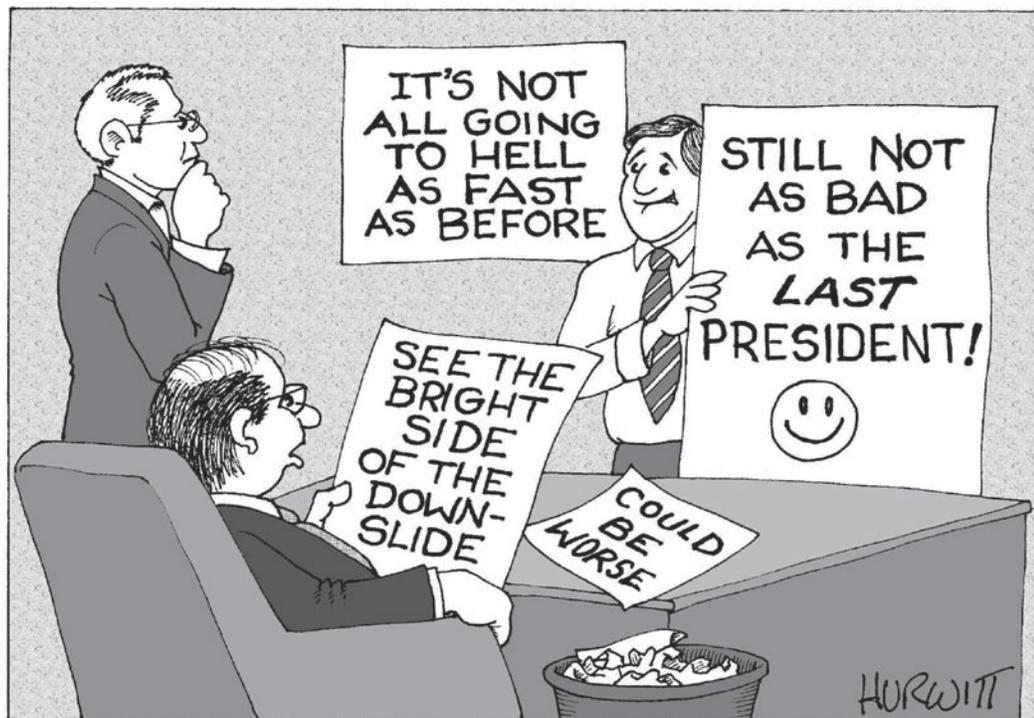
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We no longer have movements; we have thousands of people each clamouring to have their own visions adopted

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



“So far nothing really grabs me like *“Yes We Can”* used to!”

Paying the price of freedom

Fred Reed wants to know if he can get a quarterly discount

He pulled the young African aside for further screening and discovered in his mouth a condom filled with black powder and a detonator

On February 17, at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, DC, a young Nigerian terrorist named Farouk Abdul al Faisal attempted to board United Airlines flight 1497 to Stuttgart, Germany. He had eluded detection by the FBI, and was not on the Terrorist Watch List. He seemed to have succeeded in his aims.

Al Faisal had not counted on an alert TSA employee, as none had been encountered before. TSA agent Michael Trabinney noticed that Farouk's cheeks were puffed out strangely. He pulled the young African aside for further screening and discovered in his mouth a condom filled with black powder and a detonator. Trabinney sounded the alarm and Farouk was arrested. The Department of Homeland Security immediately closed the airport for three days, saying that, since the terrorist was in custody and posed no further threat, extreme measures were necessary. Travel snarled around the world as flights were diverted or canceled.

Janet Napolitano, the chief of DHS, said in a press conference that the event "showed the lengths to which enemies of our freedoms will go. In order to keep Americans safe, the Department will initiate mouth exams on all boarding passengers. Henceforth no condoms will be allowed on board."

A contract for three billion dollars was issued to buy latex detectors, and an additional agent was added at each security gate in the nation, at a salary of \$60,000 a year. They told barefoot passengers to "Say ah."

President Obama, according to some being worried about seeming soft on national security, announced that he would talk with his counterparts in other countries about requiring oral exams, and would fund research into automated ah-scanners. Manufacturers of dental equipment received development contracts totaling \$1.2 billion.

Broken jaw

The new measures went relatively smoothly, though there were isolated glitches. A woman with a broken jaw wired shut was pulled out of line, interrogated for hours, and arrested for refusing to answer questions except to say "Ummm, ummm." A TSA agent at Houston International, hired under federal affirmative-action guidelines, confiscated a latex glove, saying that it looked like a multiple-use condom and you never could be too careful with terrorists.

Following the implementation of the new measures, airline traffic fell five percent.

Then in early June a fifteen-year-old kid in Dubuque posted, to an Egyptian website,

under the name of Sheik Wasabi, a disturbing story. While in Cairo, said “Sheik Wasabi,” he had met a radical Islamic plastic surgeon who was fitting female martyrs with explosive breast-implants. The teenager then forgot about his post, having received a new X Box. However, some thirty people saw the post and called the FBI, which ignored them.

Finally Maxwell Bjorn, president of the instrument-manufacturer Artful Devices Inc., called Janet Napolitano directly. He had done the calculations, he said. A D-cup could unquestionably bring down an airliner. The only way to protect our democracy, he said, would be either to install automated palpators, or use x-rays. Fortunately for America his firm happened to have suitable designs, at \$2.2 million each.

Napolitano chose x-rays, reasoning that while ugly women might prefer palpation, others would find it invasive.

The American Medical Association prepared a brief arguing that the radiation would raise cancer rates, particularly in frequent fliers. The surgeons in the membership scotched the brief, viewing it as being restraint of trade.

Napolitano defended the new machines on national television, telling the country that, “cancer rates would go up slightly, but freedom isn’t free. It has a price. Throughout the history of our great nation, patriots have given their lives to defend our way of life. We, too, must be willing to bear the burden.” She then flew to an appointment in a private Citation.

Passenger traffic fell fifteen percent. Napolitano said that this was a good thing, as “it gives our enemies fewer targets. We must make it as difficult as possible to attack our freedoms.”

For a while, terror seemed to have been defeated. Distant events changed the situation drastically.

In Afghanistan, the CIA ran drone strikes against Moslems from a remote and secret base in rural Helmand. Day after day the Predators took off to blow up villages

that might or might not harbor a terrorist, thus protecting our freedoms. The base employed a young Afghan driver, Abdul al Hafetz. For reasons of security Abdul was always patted down carefully when he came on base, though he had worked for the Agency for over a year.

On the fourth of October, a month since his sister had been killed by a drone strike on her wedding day, Abdul drove up to the gate of the base. He was patted down. As always, nothing untoward was found. He walked into the main building and blew up in a shattering explosion that left thirteen drone operators dead.

None of the Americans in Afghanistan could think of a reason for this senseless act of carnage. The depth of Islamic hatred of our freedoms was simply incomprehensible.

Investigators wanted to know how he had smuggled the explosives into the compound. There was not enough left of Abdul to answer the question. The blast had been powerful. The volume of explosive necessary would have been far too great to have slipped past a careful pat-down. The possibility was considered that a drone-operator had mistaken the compound for a birthday celebration and attacked it. This didn’t make sense, though, because the roof had clearly blown upward. The detonation had come from within.

Dozen balloons

The true explanation was chilling. In what was thought to be an al Qaeda safe house in Kabul, there was found a manual explaining the mystery. An extremist who hated our democracy could swallow a dozen balloons containing in aggregate over three kilograms of pentaerythritol tetranitrate, or PETN. A detonator built into a watch would cause it to explode. In a sense, the new technique should have been expected. Drug smugglers had long used the same means to get drugs past customs.

Janet Napolitano rose to the occasion. She called a press conference and said,

Investigators wanted to know how he had smuggled the explosives into the compound. There was not enough left of Abdul to answer the question

SATIRE

“Starting today, all passengers will have their stomachs pumped prior to boarding. This will include pilots and cabin crew. We cannot let our democracy be destroyed by extremists.”

“these are difficult times and al Qaeda’s continuing assault on our way of life makes sacrifices necessary. Starting today, all passengers will have their stomachs pumped prior to boarding. This will include pilots and cabin crew. We cannot let our democracy be destroyed by extremists.”

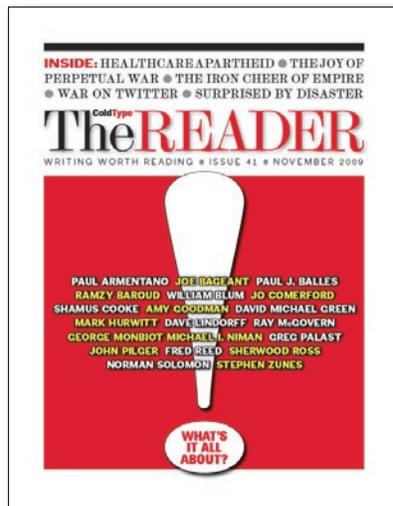
Twenty-seven airliners that had flown to Europe refused to come back, and overall air traffic dropped forty-six percent. Upon Napolitano’s pro-active announcement that automated rectal exams would be instituted to further protect our freedoms, traffic fell another ten percent, except in San Francisco.

Over the next two months, seven airlines declared bankruptcy and went into

Chapter 11. Most foreign airlines announced that they would no longer fly to the United States. Boeing was ordered by TSA to retrofit automatic wrist-restraints on existing aircraft, and Artful Devices, Inc. won a twelve billion dollar contract for an integrated explosive-sniffer, puff-analyzer, millimeter-wave panty-viewer, shoe-x-rayer, stomach pump, CAT-scanner and nitrate-sniffing automated dildo. Our freedoms, at last, were safe. **CT**

Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. His web site is www.fredoneverything.net

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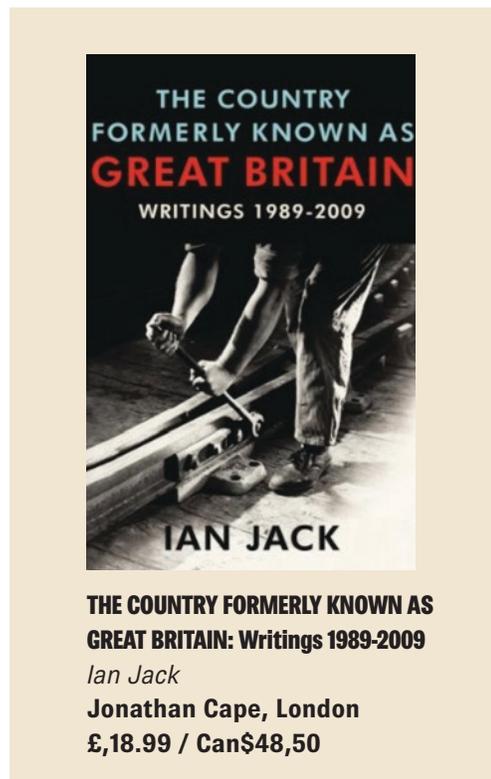
Blitz spirit

An excerpt from the new book, *The Country Formerly Known As Great Britain*, by **Ian Jack**, published by Jonathan Cape

This essay was originally published in Granta magazine in 2005

Generalisations about the national psyche – supposing there is one – must always be treated with suspicion. In 1997, the great crowds who mourned the death of the Princess of Wales with their tears, flowers and candles were taken as evidence that British behaviour had utterly changed. We were at last in touch with our feelings, prepared to show them, to hug strangers, to weep and tear our hair. We would never be the same again. Eight years later, in July this year [2005], our alleged conversion to the open emotions of (say) Brazil had been forgotten. The traditional strengths of stoicism, resilience and understatement hadn't, after all, died with the princess in her Paris car crash. They were merely sleeping, to spring awake when three terrorist bombs went off in London tube trains and a fourth on a London bus, killing fifty-six people including the four bombers and injuring hundreds of others. London's response to the bombs showed what Londoners were made of, we would be cheerful, we would not be cowed, we would carry on as usual. We showed 'the spirit of London', the same spirit of our citizen forebears during their bombing by the Luftwaffe – 'the Blitz' – in 1940 and 1941.

How such conclusions are reached, from



London's response to the bombs showed what Londoners were made of, we would be cheerful, we would not be cowed, we would carry on as usual

what evidence, it is always difficult to know, but on 7 July, 2005, they were reached very quickly, perhaps with the understanding that the wish can be father of the fact. Speeches by politicians, messages on websites, pieces to camera by television reporters, columnists in the next day's newspapers – all of them spoke of the calm and quiet resolution of Londoners. One commentator daringly ascribed it to the domestic, unthreatening

When the policeman reached the surface after his day's brave work he said that he had "never felt so lonely". I nearly cried at that, and for most of the day I felt sad and fearful, 'unhinged' might be the word

scale of London's architecture; many others saw it exemplified by the sight of hundreds of thousands of Londoners walking quietly home that evening in the complete absence of buses and tubes (and those crowded pavements of one-way human traffic certainly were a striking sight, unknown even in the Blitz, though caused by pure necessity rather than feelings of communal solidarity).

For the sociological record, my own very commonplace experience was this. That morning I got to the bus stop much later than usual, around 10.30. For that time of day there was a surprisingly big crowd – the orderly London bus queue disintegrated years ago – and very few buses, all of them full. My mobile phone wouldn't work. I got a taxi and the driver pushed his window back and asked me if I had heard the news, and I thought for a second that the Queen must have died, and then he told me about the bombs – three or four buses hit, an unknown number of tubes, no casualty figures, lots of rumour. "I'd fucking hang the fuckers, no questions asked," he said. "I'd fucking hang them, whoever did it." Even for a man in an England football shirt, he was a champion swearer and ranter and I was glad to step out of his cab. In the office, people were listening to the radio and looking at the BBC website. On a landline – the mobile phone networks were still down – I checked that my wife and children were safe at work and in school. They had no reason to be on the number 30 bus or on the Piccadilly or Circle lines, but we use all of them sometimes and their routes and stations are very close; King's Cross under a mile away. And then I worked as usual and in the evening walked home to watch the continuous news on television, following the same pattern the next day. Many kind emails arrived hoping that we were safe and well. It was only then, perhaps, that I understood that seen from far away (Tel Aviv, Delhi, New York) I was at the centre rather than the fringe of a global drama. On Friday night, my wife told me of the passenger on the number 30 who, before he got impatient with the bus's slow

progress and got off, had noticed a young man next to him who kept fiddling with something in his backpack. I had a nightmare in which I saw a similar thing but couldn't leave the bus. Then, in Saturday's newspaper, I read an account of one policeman's experience working underground in the narrow tunnel of the Piccadilly line, in the carriage where so many had died. Blood, oppressive heat, a multitude of body parts (the blast had nowhere to go). When the policeman reached the surface after his day's brave work he said that he had "never felt so lonely" I nearly cried at that, and for most of the day I felt sad and fearful, 'unhinged' might be the word. The attack on London had inevitably come; others would follow – would they ever end? – and, much though I like London (my home for thirty-five adult years), there are safer places to live.

The mood passed. The next day, Sunday, I took a friend from Chicago who is interested in railways to have a look at the civil engineering works at St Pancras station, where the new fast line to Paris will start, stopping on its way at the site for the London Olympics in 2012, which were announced the day before the bombs. We walked around new embankments and looked at the cranes and the earth-movers. A forgotten swathe of London, once occupied by freight yards and more recently by crack addicts, is being re-developed and spruced up. This is London as an advertising agency might see it – confident, multicultural, new and yet old, the fancy Victorian Gothic of the old terminus surviving among undecorated concrete and glass. Then, more or less by accident, my friend and I got to King's Cross. Outside the station, relatives had pinned up pictures of men and women who could only be described as 'missing' because they were not yet confirmed dead. There were flowers, messages of support, and television crews. It was a hot, sunny day. As we stood on the pavement across the road, I realised that a hundred feet or so under my feet, men were still working in the tunnel to retrieve pieces of the bomb, and of the tissue and bone of

the people, the ex-people, whose friends and relatives hoped against hope were still alive.

How can we stand such a thought, such proximity? I don't know, but we do. Later in the day my children passed though King's Cross on the Victoria line and were interested to see that the train slowed at the station but didn't stop. Nothing much more was said about it.

In this, there is nothing special about London. New York, Madrid, Jerusalem, Baghdad; people there have suffered equal or far greater terrors and carried on. That London has a special spirit must be a myth. But myths can be helpful – their point isn't their trueness – and to imagine that you are part of some resilient tradition – that you are resilient simply because of where you live – may help rather than harm you, so long as you don't buy it completely, remembering that you are only flesh and blood.

—————

The myth came out of the last months of 1940. just like this year's terrorist attack, the German bombing of London had been long awaited, and with an even greater fatalism. As the historian and anthropologist Tom Harrison wrote thirty-five years later, "the idea that attack from overhead would become the final, totally devastating stage in coming wars grew [to] near-obsession – comparable, say, to the one-time belief of strict Christian sects in a burning hell for the unredeemed." The first big raid occurred on 'Black Saturday', 7 September, a fine day towards the end of a fine summer. Another writer, Ritchie Calder, watched it from his garden on the Surrey Downs, "with a detachment which surprised and rather shocked me" – until the sight of London, apparently on fire from end to end, filled him with 'dread and horror'. As more German planes came in from the coast, the family took a break from its cricket game and had tea. "How silly that sounds! How callous and inconsequential! Yet how much in keeping with the strange unreality of it all!"

Calder wrote that in a small book, *The Lesson of London*, published in 1941 as one of

a series called the Searchlight Books, which were edited by T. R. Fyvel and George Orwell and also included Orwell's famous essay 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius'. Calder's book is very good – a mixture of eye-witness reporting from ruined east London and a castigation of poor planning by the authorities – and in it he notes that "the old standards of courage disappeared in the common and unconscious heroism of ordinary individuals", often meaning people who did no more than continue to come to work. Very early on in the war the celebration of quiet 'ordinariness' became a dominant theme – the thinking British patriot's weapon of choice – which was a kind of miracle given that Britain then was a class-conscious country with the largest empire the world had ever seen, and quite literally pompous. But it was lucky in its writers, its radio producers and its film-makers, men such as Harrison, Calder, Orwell and Humphrey Jennings who had in the 1930s made journeys from backgrounds of relative privilege to discover and document the working class. Their commitment to a certain demotic idea of Britain, at war or at peace, gave British propaganda the ring of modest truth, and an appeal to the egalitarian instincts of Roosevelt's America.

The key contribution was made by Humphrey Jennings and another documentary director, Harry Watt, in a ten-minute film called, for foreign audiences, *London Can Take It* and for British audiences, *Britain Can Take It* (presumably to prevent resentment of the capital in other British cities which were also being bombed). As Kevin Jackson writes in his biography of Jennings, the film was "perhaps the most influential work he ever made – one of the few films that have played some small part in changing the course of history" It was shot in September 1940, soon after the night bombing started and when the outcome of both the Blitz and the war was far from clear. The British army had been evacuated from Dunkirk only months before; France was occupied; the Soviet Union and the USA still neutral. In

'The idea that attack from overhead would become the final, totally devastating stage in coming wars grew [to] near-obsession – comparable, say, to the one-time belief of strict Christian sects in a burning hell for the unredeemed'

BOOK EXCERPT / 1

It is also fair to wonder how long London would have continued to 'take it' had the bombing gone on at the rate of the first few months

Britain, a terrorised population and defeat were strong possibilities, though not ones countenanced by *London Can Take It*. The film showed ordinary people coping – old people asleep in air-raid shelters, a woman kicking broken glass aside as she collects milk from the doorstep, commuters continuing to commute across the rubble – as on the soundtrack the American journalist and broadcaster Quentin Reynolds delivers his fiercely optimistic commentary. “I am a neutral reporter. I have watched the people of London live and die ... I can assure you, there is no panic, no fear, no despair in London town.”

It was finished in ten days, and Reynolds took it immediately to the USA, where a special screening was arranged for Roosevelt. Soon afterwards – by 25 October – it had taken enough at the American box office to be judged “a wild success” by the British Ministry of Information. The ‘Spirit of the Blitz’ had been born.

The film was not untrue to its subject; many diaries and records from the period attest to a remarkably matter-of-fact reaction to being bombed. But like any piece of art it was highly selective in its truths: no body parts, no grief in a city where, between September 1940 and May 1941, about 20,000 civilians died from the detonation of 18,800 tons of high explosives dropped from above. Other British towns did not react so stoically. After severe raids on Plymouth and Clydebank, smaller targets than London where the effects of bombing were more obvious, many in their populations took to camping in the nearby hills. And it is also fair to wonder how long London would have continued to ‘take it’ had the bombing gone on at the rate of the first few months. A film called *Dresden Can Take It* would seem unlikely, though *Falluja Can Take It* must never be ruled out.

About a mile away from my house there is a cemetery, the Abney Park Cemetery, which was laid out by a private company in the nineteenth century to accommo-

date the growing number of the London dead who failed to qualify for burial in the graveyards of Anglican parish churches – that is for Jews, atheists, Nonconformists, and I imagine Muslims too, had any of their bereaved come knocking. It has some large and well-tended memorials, including those to the Booth family, who founded the Salvation Army, but mostly it is overgrown and tumbledown. Nicely so: it looks like a wood rather than a cemetery, with rambling paths through the trees, crazily tipped gravestones, and cracked monuments in the shrubbery.

One now neglected memorial was erected by the Metropolitan Borough of Stoke Newington to those people in the borough who died in the wartime bombing. A lot of the lead has been picked from the stone, but it’s still possible to read the inscription: ‘Death is but crossing the world as friends do the seas, they live in one another still.’ Underneath, the dead are listed beneath the names of the streets they lived and died in. The street that suffered most grievously was Coronation Avenue, where on 13 October 1940 a bomb (more probably a stick of bombs) landed and killed ninety-five people. The names suggest it was quite a Jewish street: two Coopersteins, three Edelsteins, one Katz, two Danzigers, two Krakowskys, etc. Perhaps one of them was the man described by Ritchie Calder in his chapter: ‘The Courage of London’, the little German Jew who looked up at a dogfight over the East End, his tattered beard quivering with excitement, and cried, “Our Spitfire boys are wunderbar.”

I’ve never seen flowers at this memorial, or any other sign of care. It all seems so long ago. What most remains is a folk memory of that time, the stoicism that has been so beautifully enshrined in films and literature.

CT

Ian Jack edited the Independent on Sunday between 1991 and 1995 and Granta magazine from 1995 to 2007. He now writes regularly for the Guardian.

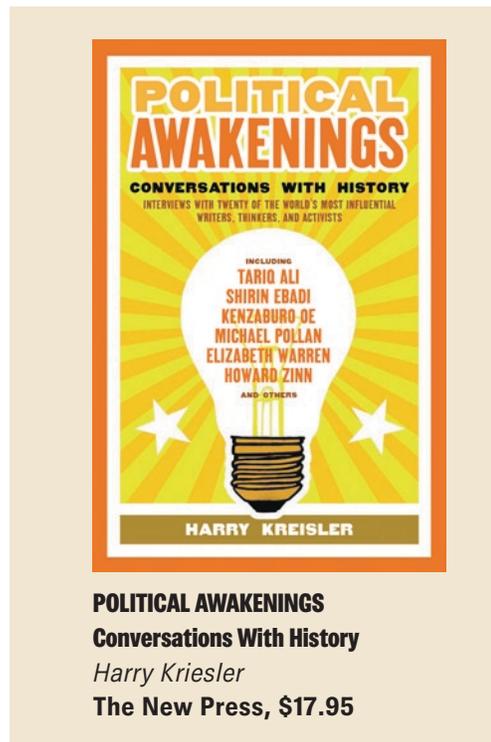
Oliver Stone's political awakening

An excerpt from *Political Awakenings: Conversations With History*, by Harry Kreisler, published by The New Press

A novel, a movie, or a memoir can distill the essence of war, revolution, or the human struggle. The work of art becomes a form of resistance by raising important questions about what human beings and nations do to one another and by mobilizing the audience to see, understand, and resist destruction, oppression, and war. **Oliver Stone's** political awakening came out of his experiences as a marine in Vietnam. That historical moment shaped his quest to understand the roots of that conflict and to convey through movies his insights about leadership, policy, and the human toll of war. This interview with **Harry Kreisler** was conducted on April 17 and June 27, 1997

Harry Kreisler: *What would you identify as key to making a movie great?*

Oliver Stone: There is the magic that occurs, very Frankensteinian, actually. The director is Dr. Frankenstein, if he's a good director. He is the doctor, playing, experimenting with the chemicals, and trying to bring them into some kind of collusion where they match, where they complement one another. You can have everybody very talented in your chemistry set, you can have the best cinematographer, the best designer, the best actors, the best script, and miss. I do think the scientist can screw up



The director is Dr. Frankenstein, if he's a good director. He is the doctor, playing, experimenting with the chemicals, and trying to bring them into some kind of collusion where they match, where they complement one another

the experiment by misapplying the chemicals in the right quantities.

So we have the chemicals and the body parts, but there is that indefinable electric spark that transfers the gluten into life. When, where, angle of attack, trajectory, and just plain luck control the spark and whether it does or does not come to full, blooming life.

There is this magic thing, but based, I believe, on fundamental basics of good

We all have nightmares, we all have really horrifying fears. Mine may be being eaten by a giant snake or something

writing, drama, and character.

Among the body parts and chemicals: social breadth; galvanic excitement; burning commitment; a well-written if not great script; tolerant yet urgent direction; lighting that is both body and shadow and brings forth a rounded humanity; a camera that sees with the eye of *someone*, the god in the tapestry; actors that add the *je ne sais quoi* to the script, that added dimension of popping it off the page, making the audience feel they care more about these particular faces than people in their own life; and finally, a presence in time, a rightness to your moment, which is part marketing but mostly an indefinable moment of the zeitgeist – which in other words is “destiny.” Each filmmaker has a destiny, each filmmaker of merit, I believe, has in him a few films that will strike that chord with destiny.

Lastly and above all, it is like sperm getting up the uterine canal and making it – that is to say, the odds are long, but if the desire for life is powerful, it will somehow emerge.

What is distinctive about movies as an art form?

Film is distinctive because it can cut through time with editing. Montage can create a three-dimensional space, great sensuality. There’s an electrical thing about movies. And I’ve noticed it, because I’ve written a lot of things that I’ve been able to direct and see how it works, and I am amazed constantly. Often something that will work on paper does not work when you see it on film. It sounds like a contradiction, but sometimes stuff that isn’t so great on paper will be dynamite, it’ll be electric, because something – the look of an actor, the sensuality of a touch, the caress, an angle, the camera catches the light in a certain moment of time and it’s just, what I call, magic. So those are elements that are very electric, stormy.

I always consider that when you tell a story on paper, it takes a certain amount of

time to read. It has a given length, sort of a real time. But there’s something about movies that always amazes me, their transcendence of time. There’s a tremendous compression. It takes pages to read and to understand, but when you see it, it takes less than thirty seconds or sixty seconds to really get it. Because all of a sudden you’re in history. You’re in *Michael Collins*, for example, you’re in Ireland, in Dublin in the 1920s, and you get it. You understand that all mankind has struggled in this same way, that there are classical verities that are true.

Movies tend to make optimistic the realities of life. Things are harsher, whether it’s war in *Platoon* or caveman existence in *Quest for Fire*, or history. In *A Man for All Seasons*, it looks very fine, but the people probably stank to holy heaven. They had terrible breath and terrible dentistry and doctoring, and people died and there were all kinds of things like that that are not in movies. You don’t smell the stink of the medieval ages. Greece, for example, has never been rendered honestly in its sensuality or its homosexuality. You don’t see these truths in movies, to a large degree; it’s very hard to get behind the canvas and go in. But you can, and in those moments that you do, that is when it comes alive. I hope, I really believe, that people know in their primal unconsciousness, which Jung talked about, there might be those moments that we all recognize from history. We feel that is right. The collective unconscious memory of the human race. In fear itself, the concept of fear that we all experience when we run into objects that frighten us. Fear may very well be a caveman fear of the predator, of the giant lizard chasing them – maybe that’s what Steven Spielberg connects with so well in *The Lost World*.

We all have nightmares, we all have really horrifying fears. Mine may be being eaten by a giant snake or something. Perhaps I was in some ancient time. I’m terrible at horror movies, by the way. I get scared so easily. My son sits there and he’s amazed that I just can’t watch some of that stuff

that he watches. It's partly, probably, the fear of being eaten by a giant lizard.

Is that why, sometimes, there are scenes in a particular movie that people remember and they want to see them again and again?

You can in one second, in one frame, see something that will spark you as divine or genius. That's what great art is to me, the remembrance of it. You see, it can be a very great experience but unless it somehow registers in your consciousness in some form inside the witness, it does not succeed on my terms. What is it that happens in movies, when you work so hard and all of a sudden it just makes perfect sense in a twenty-second scene or a three-minute scene? That's the scene that everyone will remember.

Do different people see different things in those great scenes?

Absolutely. I believe in the blind man and the elephant here. I do believe that movies are subject to a million interpretations. Everyone is a critic, everyone can do it better. My father used to kid me. Whenever we saw movies when I was a kid he said, "We could do it better, kiddo." Everyone is a movie director in their own mind.

Everyone has different reactions. I've met people who will go to a movie that I can't stand and they say that they saw that movie ten times. There's something they like and identified in that movie, and I don't see it. Whereas the reverse is also true. So the movie critic thing is a dangerous thing because whose opinion is it? Consider the source. And also, how do we criticize a movie in terms of its achievement or acknowledge its objective? Do we say, "This movie, I may not agree with the objective, but this is what the objective is and the filmmakers are trying to do this." That would be an honest criticism, it seems to me. Not, "How disgusting, this is a terrible subject." Or, "No one should be allowed to see this." There's this censorship going on,

and that's not genuine criticism.

What happens to us when we watch movies?

I think you get in touch with your dream life, definitely. Or the collective dream life. Sometimes you're watching the eyes or the chemistry, or some aura that's coming off of the actor. That's why we have movie stars, I presume. It doesn't matter what they're in, people want to watch them. There's something, perhaps, primal about that. I guess what I'm talking about is something in the pre-brain, the dream-life brain of human beings.

I'm curious, did your experience in Vietnam make it inevitable that you would work with historical materials in your movies?

I think that anyone that lives through his life is going to end up dealing with his history. And his history sometimes interacts with public events. And I think often in my life, my private sector has kind of come into collision with the public sector. And I'm looking back on my life and I realize that the toll that I had to pay, or that my generation had to pay, to get through that period was unnecessary. It was unnecessary because it was all a series of expedient political decisions by Johnson and Nixon. And it changed the course of our lives and time forever. And it's hard to get back, because once you've lost that spot of innocence, perhaps, that you had when Kennedy got killed and then Nixon performed his acts, his sinister designs, all that shaped us to the way we are now. We're all shaped by it. Life became what it did in America as a result of that, and that's what's fascinating. How do you avoid it? You make movies about historical periods so that you can avoid it. You can make, I guess, comedies where there's no social inter-reaction — although even *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* posits an economic strata: that Jim Carrey has to exist in an economic level. He's never running out of money, even if he's a cable guy. In any film there's always a historical implication.

Vietnam was unnecessary because it was all a series of expedient political decisions by Johnson and Nixon. And it changed the course of our lives and time forever

When I got to the infantry, I really saw life smack up in front of my face. It was a non-cerebral exercise. Six inches in front of my face – survive!

What's quite amazing about Platoon and about Born on the Fourth of July, it's really the experience of the people, the soldiers who felt these decisions from the bottom up. Would you comment on that?

That's probably perhaps one of the most significant things I learned over there was that there's sort of a perceived life that you get when you're raised. College students get it, you read it in books; your thinking is perceptions that have been taught to you. Very Pavlovian in a way. And when I got to the infantry, I really saw life smack up in front of my face. It was a non-cerebral exercise. Six inches in front of my face – survive! You have to rely on your sense, your smell, your sight – all your senses come into play. Tactile. As a result, you never can get quite back. It's a question of what is authentic in your life, finally. What are your real feelings? How do you really feel about the way you are? How you are alive, what you are here for – once you ask yourself these questions (they're all Socratic ones, I guess), once you get into that arena, how do you go back into believing what "they" tell you?

You believe in recording the pain and the suffering as an entry point for the audience to experience a catharsis, and for the American people, in the case of your movies, to experience the trauma that was Vietnam.

You know, you don't set out to do that. You set out to be authentic to yourself and to put down the way that you feel it and you know it and you interpret it. And then others sometimes can key into it and get it. But a lot of people can see my movies, and they tell me they enjoy them or they don't, but they don't get into deeper analysis. Some people will say, "I was very moved by the picture," but may not even understand what feelings were working on them. *Natural Born Killers*, for example, evoked a very strong negative feeling in people. And I thought that that was the same thing to me as positive, because it's just a working out of feeling, that they were regurgitating at the picture. People who saw *Born on the*

Fourth of July said that they were healed because they felt that they were restructured. I don't know how true that is. But the films work at you on an emotional level and you make of it what you can. And these movies are like Greek dramas. These are shards of the Greek vases that will endure. I hope movies endure.

Does a filmmaker's ability to tap into our feelings enable them to address a national experience?

Oh, I think so. I think that it happened in the Depression with the films of Frank Capra. At that time, of course, there was no television and people really looked to movies. Maybe with David Wark Griffith earlier on, Chaplin and the stars they found – a longing was answered. But perhaps a lot of people wanted to believe. It's interesting that when economic times were the hardest, that's when many people embraced liberalism. But then Capra dealt very strongly with the fear of the ruling classes of losing control to this liberalism. I think that he was probably always criticized for his point of view but I think he was beloved, in a way, until after the war. I think he kind of lost touch with his America, or America may have lost touch with itself after World War II, with the rise of Nixon and McCarthy. So there was no place for Capras. And it's interesting that the picture he did make, which was almost the great film of the '40s, *It's a Wonderful Life*, is really almost like a '30s movie, when you look at it. It's a harkening back to an optimism at a time when people cared about each other, and so forth. They don't in *It's a Wonderful Life*. The banks get bigger and bigger and practically ruin the man's life.

In some ways you're both radical and conservative. Your movies shake people up, but their goal seems to be also to restore the community to itself and its true story.

Movies have to make money, you've got to make them so they're exciting, they're gripping, people want to go see them.

That's a very hard thing to do because people are more and more jaded, it seems, from the hours of television and the speed of modern life. So how do you make it exciting to tell the story? Well, first of all you have to make the character strong so that people can follow that. And then hopefully that character can integrate with the background of the social situation that people can recognize. I'd love to do historical pictures more, but I don't know if I can. One of my fantasies in my life has been that I was granted access with a camera to go back in time, and to film the actual campaign of Alexander crossing into India through Iran and Persia. And I swear if I came back with that film and put it out there, that I would be attacked on all sides by the historians for having distorted the truth. I guarantee you, if I had been there, that that's what would have happened.

Let's talk about that, because you work between personal narrative and historical narrative. One runs into the problem, let's look at Nixon for example, where you told Nixon's personal story and created a character who's a Nixon for all time. On the other hand, you have historical "facts" in there that may be proven wrong. How do you want people to look at your movies in the future, distinguishing between the personal narratives and the historical facts?

Let's say I'm dead wrong about the facts, and time goes on. Fine. But you know I never put out a history, I put out a dramatic history. And that was labeled as such. I have the right to interpretation as a dramatist. I research. It's my responsibility to find the research. It's my responsibility to digest it and do the best that I can with it. But at a certain point that responsibility will become an interpretation. And I will move on into closed-doors meetings, I will invent dialogue, I will create the fabric of a historical drama. I will come out with my interpretation. If I'm wrong, fine. It will become part of the debris of history, part of the give and take. You know, the movie will either work on its own

terms, as a drama, in 2100, or it will also be perceived as having been historically perceptive. Shakespeare's dramas, thank God for him, lasted better as dramas than they did as history plays, didn't they? But that's not to say that they're wrong today.

Some have raised a concern that young people may not know history or read history, but instead see your movies and come to believe that they're absolutely true.

I hear that all the time. It's an amazingly, to me, superficial statement because first of all it implies that the teaching community has failed utterly to share a sense of history with their students. But secondly, movies have always existed to me as illusions. I've always accepted them as such. When I was a child, I'd see a movie, I took it for what it was, I enjoyed it. And if I believed it I would tend to be more interested in knowing more about it. Lawrence of Arabia – I went out and I bought *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. When I saw *A Man for All Seasons*, I read Robert Bolt's book.

The world of analysis, the world of second opinion, reasserts itself very quickly. It's a natural given that if you're interested in a subject as the result of a movie, you will move on and learn more about it. If anything, if you can get somebody interested in something and get them excited, that's great. You should be praised for having opened the debate and having asked the right questions.

Every historical film that has been made has been called into question in some way. But generally speaking, the non-literal person, the person who would enjoy a movie, would tend to view a movie as a first draft, would deepen his perception with reading around it. I mean, books are another medium. Books can go into more depth. But don't tell me for one second that a person who writes a book is more objective than a person who makes a movie. I don't buy that, because so many historians have axes to grind and have subjected their own judgment to their own perception and their

Don't tell me for one second that a person who writes a book is more objective than a person who makes a movie. I don't buy that

I'm not the dyed-in-the-wool liberal leftist that is painted by people who want to simplify and categorize me. I don't believe in left or right. I don't believe in liberal or conservative. I believe in both

own subjectivity, and partisanship in some cases. It goes on all the time. And every history, in fact, is an omission of facts, because there are too many facts to put in any history. Most historians will tell you that they make very discrete judgment as to what facts to omit in order to make their book into some shape, some length that can be managed.

I study history in order to give an interpretation. There are just too many facts to include in any historical work, if you have it all before you. I am not trying to be a historian and a dramatist: I'm a dramatist, a dramatic historian, or one who does a dramatic interpretation of history.

Let's talk about politics. How would you characterize your political philosophy?

In political terms, what is important is that you lived a life. I would vote for the man who's lived life, who's done different occupations, who's been out in the real world and struggled to make a living, struggled to raise a family, struggled with life as it exists. So I'd vote for experience, honest experience. I always feel comfortable with those type of leaders and with the Roman political philosophy. I'm very worried about professional politicians such as Mr. Clinton or Richard Nixon, in a way. I think experience will teach you a combination of liberalism and conservatism. We have to be progressive and at the same time we have to retain values. We have to hold onto the past as we explore the future. It's a very delicate balance. That's the nature of existence. I was very influenced by Edmund Burke. So I'm not the dyed-in-the-wool liberal leftist that is painted by people who want to simplify and categorize me. I don't believe in left or right. I don't believe in liberal or conservative. I believe in both.

The "great man in history": do you subscribe to that theory?

I'm of two minds. I do believe there are leaders who are like lightning and they come along and they lead. The Lincolns of

the world, the Alexander the Greats, they do exist. They have existed. Julius Caesar. They are men made for the moment. De Gaulle comes to mind most recently. Perhaps of all the politicians I've lived through, I'd say Kennedy.

At the same time, I'm of the mind that, like John Steinbeck said in his screenplay of *Zapata*: there is no one strong leader who can be held hostage or killed; each person is a leader in himself. It's because the people have the strength. Steinbeck paid homage to that in *The Grapes of Wrath*, too, which I think was really brilliant, the Tom Joad idea of everyone being on the move, the whole country, you can't stop it. I love that idea.

In your movies the other presence is what, in Nixon, the young lady at the Lincoln Memorial calls "the beast," which I take to be "the system," the way it all hangs together, and which can grind people down.

I do see "the beast" in its essence as the System, with a capital "S," which grinds the individual down to meaninglessness, Camus's insignificance. It's a system of checks and balances that drives itself from

1. the power of money and markets;
2. state power, government power;
3. corporate power, which is probably greater even than state power;
4. the political process or election through money, which is therefore in tow to "the system"; and,
5. the media, which mostly protects the status quo and their ownerships and interests like Doberman pinschers. That would cover, I believe, all the beasts.

In this brief discussion, you've talked about what you do and your role as that of an artist. You're a storyteller, you're a historian in a way. And you're involved in a kind of a healing process in society. These roles – artist, healer, historian – do they conflict as you make a movie?

I don't think so. Probably at the very beginning of time we were all in this tribe,

right? And we all sat around the cave and some guy would tell the stories, you know. Homer would get there and he'd say, well there was this great battle and he did that, that family did this. And probably half of it was bullshit. But it went down into the history books because that was the first dramatic historian. Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, they were all interpreting the various kings and rulers of their time. Socrates was interpreted by Plato. So where do we cross the line? Where do we get our first histories? All our histories have been debated. The interpretive battle. Now, there are facts, yes; there are memos; but even on paper, people are very careful about what they write. I think that historians underestimate that. Because I think historians are themselves subject to vanity and affectation.

What should be the role of a filmmaker in society, given all we've said about film and so on, and its capacity for dealing with historical materials?

I don't see that there is a defined role because that suggests obligation and I don't think that the type of people who take this up would be in service or be "class president." People who are dramatists, at least I can speak for myself, tend to be rebellious, tend to go against the grain. Sometimes it can be the role, like in Indian tribes, of the guy who walks backwards. There's a special name in shamanistic terminology, the *heyoka*, the man or woman who is certainly interested in liberation for himself or herself first, but then that person perhaps can help others to be liberated. The raising of consciousness. Attacking Authority with a big "A"; not just being an attacker and a contrarian, but creating a body of work unto

itself which is positive in itself. It's creative.

My dad always used to say to me, "They don't need all these schools. They should just live their life, get there and open their school under a tree, and if anyone wants to go and listen to them, they go and they listen to them. They'll find their own way."

What is the role of the movies in preparing us for the future?

Movies can really be a creative machinery. They can evoke a spiritual life, a higher ideal, models that are both negative and positive, or a paradigm for society to function by. That is, not just a comic book, but a mirror. I always think that life is more complicated than any movie. Life is chaos.

I'm waiting for the dramatist who will really capture the complexity of life. As great as they are, movies are all limited. A work of drama is inherently confined. Our lives are long, long – years and years. **CT**

*Oliver Stone makes movies as a producer, screenwriter, and director. Stone has been nominated for ten Academy Awards and has won three Oscars, for writing *Midnight Express* and directing *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Platoon*. Stone served in Vietnam, was wounded twice, and received the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.*

*Harry Kreisler, executive director of the Institute of International Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, has interviewed hundreds of men and women in politics and the arts over the last 25 years. He is also the executive producer of the online program *Connecting Students to the World* and former editor-in-chief of *Globetrotter*, a Web site for global affairs.*

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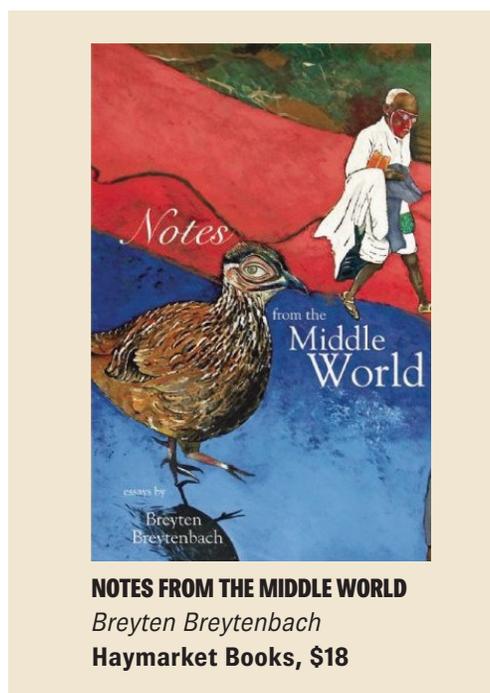
You screws!

An excerpt from the new book, *Notes from The Middle World*, by **Breyten Breytenbach**, published by Haymarket Books

I never thought the day would come when I, an ex-convict (a *bandiet* as we say in South Africa), would be asked to address an international gathering of screws in peaceful and antiseptic surroundings like here in Leeuwarden in the Dutch “countryside”

In a long life of strange encounters – discussing land rights with Aborigines in Sydney, their eyes so dark they must glow in the night, talking revolution with Tuaregs perched on their camels on a sand dune outside Timbuktu, the heads swathed in indigo cloth, exchanging philosophical thoughts with an aged courtesan in a Saigon bar, her thighs flabby but still softly white, or visiting the shivering silence-layers of millions of Monarch butterflies clustering to tall pines on the high mountain peaks of Michoacan, a smokeless pyre of prayers – this, for me, must rate as one of the most unexpected. I never thought the day would come when I, an ex-convict (a *bandiet* as we say in South Africa), would be asked to address an international gathering of screws in peaceful and antiseptic surroundings like here in Leeuwarden in the Dutch “countryside”

It is a tall order. After all, you collectively must know far more about the subject, I’d even say the *condition*, than I or any other prisoner ever could. This is why you are here in congress, coming as you do from your institutions in Cambodia and Tajikistan and Peru and Italy and all the other barely visible outcrops of what I’d call the Middle World – to exchange experiences and refine methods. I heard you speak of inmates as *economic units* and your honorable compounds as enterprises; I observed



how at night you got drunk on cigars and gin and thigh-slapping prison stories, and I tried to be as unnoticed as possible in your comradely company. What could I, the only reprobate Christian among a pride of lions, tell you? Wouldn't it be utterly preposterous for me to want to teach grandmothers how to suck eggs or old dogs new tricks?

Do I even *want* to talk about prison? Can I still do so? Years ago, I went to listen to Jorge Luis Borges, the ancient mariner as blind Argentine an author giving a talk in Paris. Afterwards, somebody in the audi-

ence asked him whether he had committed suicide recently. No, he answered, he had given it up for quite some time already. “I’ve lost my hand.” Similarly, I can claim I haven’t been “inside” for a while now and I normally resent all attempts at dragging me back, particularly when coming from the sentimentally deprived (and depraved) or the vicarious heart-eaters and self-shitters who wallow in victimization and heroism by proxy. I can affirm that it is already a life ago since I last died.

(The story is told about how Borges, director of the National Library in Buenos Aires, his eyes watery and white with darkness, would leave his office every night and then wait patiently on the sidewalk of a busy thoroughfare for some Samaritan to guide him across to the literary café on the other side where he’d meet his cronies. And one night as he waited again a hand grabbed hold of his elbow and they started crossing the street with its blaring vehicles. As they arrived on the other side the anonymous person let go of Borges’ arm and said, “Thank you, kind sir, for helping me across; not many people are that considerate to a poor blind man anymore.”)

Borges was a great visitor of labyrinths. In my own prison writings I too have repeatedly used the metaphor of the Minotaur, the strange dark beast living in the empty heart of the maze whose head you must cut off and bring out if you want to continue living and, perhaps, save the city. Or even just to save face, because to the prisoner pushing or doing his time the Minotaur is ultimately himself, the Mirror. And the prisoner searches for his face the way a monster dreads the looking glass.

The myth echoes with ironies. When Theseus, who went into the Place (the Sanctuary) to kill the Minotaur, emerges with the severed head dripping blood, he forgets to give the correct signal of victory and the king his father jumps into the sea in despair. Does this imply that one’s “inside” knowledge is of no consequence to the “outside” world? That one cannot con-

vey experience? That there is no way of being intimate with strangers?

Of course, I only need to close my eyes to be back inside with the same overpowering sense of apathy and resignation, of having no power or say over my own destiny or even destination, and the same urgent and concrete need to start making the right connections for survival: how to get hold of some extra sugar, forbidden reading matter, a decent pair of pants that will actually fit, string for sending messages down the corridor... Already I’m slipping back into that parallel world as familiar as an underground. It was to be living in the mirror as in a sea, secret and senseless and selfish like the shellfish. Everything that exists outside you can find inside as well, though perhaps distorted, bloated, or flattened. My nostrils would pick up the smell of the many nuances of grayness, of living rot; my ears become more alert because my view will be restricted. The clanging reverberations of steel doors and bare corridors replace the murmur of a carpeted world. I am stripped of the comfort of a known aesthetic hierarchy: the shadows on the wall have the same value and beauty as a Rembrandt painting. I shall also slip back into our own vernacular. If you ask somebody how he’s doing, he will say, “I survive”; the word for friend is “connection”; thinking is described as “eating head”; the outside world is referred to as “the States,” an unattainable mirage. One prison I was in – Pretoria Maximum Security where people used to be executed, given one lesson only in the art of flying with no wings and with ropes around their necks – was known to us, wryly, as Beverley Hills; the Diepkloof prison of Johannesburg (“Diepkloof” means Deep Gulch), now as desperately overcrowded as ever, is still called Sun City by the inmates. Maybe these fancy names are in reaction to the warders always saying: “Don’t think this is a five-star hotel!”

At night there will be the murmur and the sighs of shellfish devouring one another, the slow crackle of skin being torn;

One prison I was in – Pretoria Maximum Security where people used to be executed, given one lesson only in the art of flying with no wings and with ropes around their necks – was known to us, wryly, as Beverley Hills

Prisoners have fertile though unoriginal imaginations and lots of time. We quickly learn to wag tail even as we accumulate a specific experience. You may say we become experts on the laws and customs of incarceration

with daylight maybe the severed head of an unlucky sacrifice will be found perched on the windowsill of a crowded cell, its disembodied smile obsequious to the masters for when you have devoured the flesh of the beast you are left with a grin of teeth, and nobody will know who the killers were but people will have crusts of dried blood around the lips. I am told the “punishment” of a recalcitrant gang member or the induction of a fresh arrival is now to be gang-raped and thus infected with HIV. Why should the innocent be allowed to live? What else can we pass on to one another except the knowledge of death?

All contact with my fellow humans will be reduced to the basic expressions and tricks of desire and fear. I once more start inventing a past and imagining a future so as to circumvent the present or imbue it with some sense of purpose. Purpose is always invented. The human animal is alive again – sentimental, superstitious, sly.

This, the above, I thought I’d left behind; that the slate had been wiped clean and the state evacuated; no more lingering decayed shellfish smells. But the memories keep on returning. On streets or in trains I instinctively recognize my compatriots of misfortune, all those skulking survivors – by a crude tattoo, a slope of the shoulders, the hands clasped in front of the body as those of shivering addicts, a weary or furtive glance, a misfit appearance, a dead-fish quality. The ghosts, the shuffling people from some submerged Atlantis, are alive and roaming the world as if exiled from the “normal” world of prison.

I am not telling you anything new, am I? How could I possibly? You would have identified the description I just gave as that of the “institutionalized” condition where “normal” life and relations exist behind the walls and not outside among the “civilians.” This conditioning, by the way, I believe happens to just about everyone kept in some form of confinement or detention for more than two years. Prison *creates*

prisoners. In fact, it may fabricate zombies or *model prisoners*.

It is a common fantasy among inmates that everything will come right – particularly since we are all innocent or at the very least victims of circumstances and of society – if only we could tell the warders who we really are, exactly what it is like seen from our side of the coin, and especially what you ought to do to shine the money and make it all work more profitably.

Prisoners have fertile though unoriginal imaginations and lots of time. We quickly learn to wag tail even as we accumulate a specific experience. You may say we become experts on the laws and customs of incarceration. Ah, we know the answer to the perennial conundrum of Crime and Punishment. Just ask us and we’ll bark forever.

It does not follow, strange as it may seem, that the solutions proposed by inmates though often of the utopian variety will necessarily be less repressive. The truth is that most prisoners are morbidly fascinated, enthralled even, by prison life. I have often been struck by the fact that babies are more interested in one another than in their respective parents, the dogs walked by their masters are aware only of other dogs they cross, and prisoners passing one another in the corridors and courtyards or in the court cells seem to be oblivious of the warders escorting them. We’d soar at the chance to hiss or to smile even though we’d be punished afterwards. And I remember how in prison only news relating to our closed world would jump off the pages of the newspapers and be discussed passionately while the explosion of an atom bomb or the soggy sucking saga of a Clinton would go unnoticed.

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No later than last night I was asked whether prisoners hold grudges against their guards. I think not. True, in some ways our reciprocal “strangeness” may be permanently pickled in the sourness of power relations – when I arrived at the airport two

days ago I was fetched and brought here in a taxi that I had to share with the head warden of an institution from some remote Caucasian republic; he spoke not a word intelligible to me, but regularly burped or farted noisily, whereupon he would swivel his head on its thick neck and look at me with a ferocious glare of disapproval and accusation...

But we are after all of one family, are we not? We inhabit one archipelago; we live on the same premises (in fact, in most countries we will be stealing each other's food); if we get the chance we kill one another; we are cut off from the outside world by the same walls. We have to make do with one another. We are the Siamese, stuck like the prick in the arid asshole.

Imprisonment has been with us ever since man started organizing communal life according to the rules of the strongest, from the time the top dog first howled. If I may digress: it is interesting how many of the basic and immemorial human activities or institutions all start with a **P** in English — **Power**, **Politics**, **Pussy**, **Poetry**, **Prostitution**, **Prison**, **Prick**...

And since the very beginning of time there must have been warders occupying this strange and difficult and exposed and perhaps unenviable **P**osition as the interface of the power relationship between society and those of its members considered to be beyond the **P**ale, however temporarily so and without regard as to how such law is written and then read. Yes, it is expected of you to be both the custodians of agreed upon norms of repression and **P**unishment and the agents of rehabilitation, reinsertion, and social healing. You **P**oor, **P**oor **P**eople!

I don't think it should be my task here to engage you upon the merits and the demerits of protecting society (we will keep that secret among us prisoners if you don't mind), and the equal if contradictory need to uplift the fallen individual, to get him to look at the Mountain; nor to talk about

right and *wrong*, or the social and economic causes of crime, or cultural untranslatability, or racism, or the fundamentalist urges for revenge, or the fact that if penal conditions reflected popular wishes we'd still have capital punishment all over the world today and not just in backward and crude democracies such as the United States and China and Iran, or about the muffled sounds made by the forgotten god in his burrow.

Perhaps, I'd just briefly like to insist that you who are gathered in this august hall have by dint of your own experiences and your intimate knowledge (maybe even your incestuous knowledge) the possibility to make the larger world more aware of the texture of implications proper to penal life. Maybe you, having wiped your **P**enises on our under**P**ants, can tell what the naked backside of the prisoner looks and feels like from your vantage point on the **P**arapets. This is more than we can say about ourselves. In many a way, dismal or otherwise, you who neither groan nor sob are the representatives, the acceptable face of us prisoners to the States, and you ought to flash your mirrors to signal that there's more to life than can be seen on the surface. Why, you may show the world that the moon is a dog!

Meanwhile, here is what I want to tell *you* finally, and if I may say so from my own limited experience: There can be no chance to escape the "living death" of existence in the labyrinth except by respecting and maintaining and developing the dignity and the sense of responsibility of the individual inmate. That, and that the senses ought to be kept alive at all costs, for without antennae the shellfish are little more than bait; that family links ought thus to be encouraged; and that the prisoner must be given the chance to be gainfully employed. The most depressing aspect of being "inside" is to not be able to help your loved ones "outside." It is the only way to break the wheel of cause and grinding. (If the intention or

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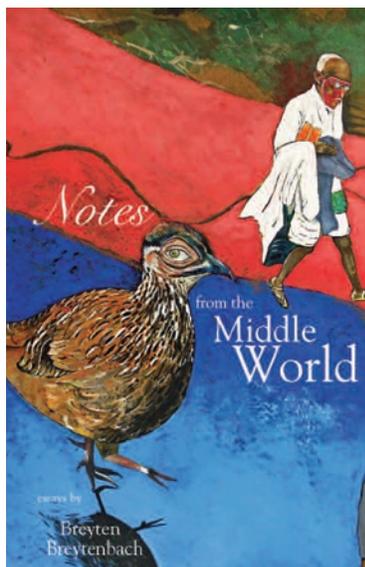
Exactly an hour later, it is guaranteed, one will be executed – choked or hit behind the ear or shot or electrocuted

the better option is indeed to break it.) Or to bring out the bleeding decapitated head of the defaced or defecated one for the benefit of society. If that is what you want.

P.S. When one has had enough of prison, when one wishes to sound the retreat, one's removal can be accommodated. Simple procedures are set out on posters against the walls of the barracks: all that's needed is to report at the main gate that one intends to abscond; there one will be taken into custody and brought to the superintendent's office. Exactly an hour later, it is guaranteed, one will be executed – choked or hit behind the ear or shot or electrocuted (specifications can be negotiated) – with the official explanation acceptable to all parties that death occurred during an escape caper ... As a stranger in these parts one concentrates on learning the language. One wants to master it well so that the discourse may be effortless and impeccable on that decisive day when one has to go to the main entrance/exit. In reality, the moment of

presentation will be defined entirely by one's capacity for handling the language ... It is to be surmised that the final hour in the superintendent's office, the mano a mano, eyeball to eyeball in a confined space, will be the transitional phase to a critical foreclosure. Rather like an oral examination ... What is spoken of there? This is the half-bull, half-human secret of our lives! Is this then the epiphany of closing all accounts and stopping to count? Could it be the last tilt at explanation, cracking teeth on mysteries, confession, bargaining, and justification? One then wants to have the language inside, to be ready and unburdened for that ultimate hour. **CT**

Breyten Breytenbach, a native of South Africa, is a distinguished painter, activist and writer. From 1975-1982, he was a political prisoner serving solitary confinement in South African prisons. Today, Breytenbach is a Global Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at New York University.



Notes from the Middle World is a beautiful and heartwrenching book. In dialogue with the dead and the living—Mahmoud Darwish, Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama—Breytenbach journeys through the "Middle World," an imagined space beyond borders and exile, toward a vision of justice for the "un-citizens" post-modernity has dispossessed.

Notes from the Middle World

Breyten Breytenbach, \$18, ISBN 978-1-931859-91-2

"It is impossible to stop our ears against the excruciating power of what Breyten Breytenbach has to say." —Nadine Gordimer

"This wonderful book . . . is written with a wild heart and an unrelenting eye, and is fueled by the sort of rage that produces great literature." —*The Washington Post*

"Obviously the greatest Afrikaner poet of this generation... No one elevated the Boer language to such pure beauty and no one wielded it so devastatingly against the apartheid regime as its exiled poet Breyten Breytenbach." —*The New Yorker*

"No white South African writer has penetrated as deeply into his own country as Breytenbach—and none has been as successful in the flowering of his art in exile." —Donald Woods

Breyten Breytenbach is an internationally distinguished painter and writer. From 1975–1982, he was a political prisoner, held in solitary confinement in a South African prison. Today, he is a Global Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at NYU.

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Pictures of war you aren't supposed to see

If we saw the true horror of war, we wouldn't be so keen to justify or glorify it, says **Chris Hedges**

War is brutal and impersonal. It mocks the fantasy of individual heroism and the absurdity of utopian goals like democracy. In an instant, industrial warfare can kill dozens, even hundreds of people, who never see their attackers. The power of these industrial weapons is indiscriminate and staggering. They can take down apartment blocks in seconds, burying and crushing everyone inside. They can demolish villages and send tanks, planes and ships up in fiery blasts. The wounds, for those who survive, result in terrible burns, blindness, amputation and lifelong pain and trauma. No one returns the same from such warfare. And once these weapons are employed all talk of human rights is a farce.

In Peter van Agtmael's *2nd Tour Hope I Don't Die* and Lori Grinker's *Afterwar: Veterans From a World in Conflict*, two haunting books of war photographs, we see pictures of war which are almost always hidden from public view. These pictures are shadows, for only those who go to and suffer from war can fully confront the visceral horror of it, but they are at least an attempt to unmask war's savagery.

"Over ninety percent of this soldier's body was burned when a roadside bomb hit his vehicle, igniting the fuel tank and burning two other soldiers to death," reads the caption in Agtmael's book next to a

photograph of the bloodied body of a soldier in an operating room. "His camouflage uniform dangled over the bed, ripped open by the medics who had treated him on the helicopter. Clumps of his skin had peeled away, and what was left of it was translucent. He was in and out of consciousness, his eyes stabbing open for a few seconds. As he was lifted from the stretcher to the ER bed, he screamed 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,' then 'Put me to sleep, please put me to sleep.' There was another photographer in the ER, and he leaned his camera over the heads of the medical staff to get an overhead shot. The soldier yelled, 'Get that fucking camera out of my face.' Those were his last words. I visited his grave one winter afternoon six months later," Agtmael writes, "and the scene of his death is never far from my thoughts."

"There were three of us inside, and the jeep caught fire," Israeli soldier Yossi Arditi, quoted in Grinker's book, says of the moment when a Molotov cocktail exploded in his vehicle. "The fuel tank was full and it was about to explode, my skin was hanging from my arms and face — but I didn't lose my head. I knew nobody could get inside to help me, that my only way out was through the fire to the doors. I wanted to take my gun, but I couldn't touch it because my hands were burning."

Arditi spent six months in the hospital.

As he was lifted from the stretcher to the ER bed, he screamed 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,' then 'Put me to sleep, please put me to sleep'

The veterans trotted out for viewing are those who are compliant and palatable, those we can stand to look at without horror, those who are willing to go along with the lie that war is about patriotism and is the highest good

He had surgery every two or three months, about 20 operations, over the next three years.

“People who see me, see what war really does,” he says.

Filmic and most photographic images of war are shorn of the heart-pounding fear, awful stench, deafening noise and exhaustion of the battlefield. Such images turn confusion and chaos, the chief element of combat, into an artful war narrative. They turn war into porn. Soldiers and Marines, especially those who have never seen war, buy cases of beer and watch movies like *Platoon*, movies meant to denounce war, and as they do so revel in the despicable power of the weapons shown. The reality of violence is different. Everything formed by violence is senseless and useless. It exists without a future. It leaves behind nothing but death, grief and destruction.

Chronicles of war, such as these two books, that eschew images and scenes of combat begin to capture war’s reality. War’s effects are what the state and the press, the handmaiden of the war makers, work hard to keep hidden. If we really saw war, what war does to young minds and bodies, it would be harder to embrace the myth of war. If we had to stand over the mangled corpses of the eight schoolchildren killed in Afghanistan this month and listen to the wails of their parents we would not be able to repeat clichés about liberating the women of Afghanistan or bringing freedom to the Afghan people. This is why war is carefully sanitized. This is why we are given war’s perverse and dark thrill but are spared from seeing war’s consequences. The mythic visions of war keep it heroic and entertaining. And the press is as guilty as Hollywood. During the start of the Iraq war, television reports gave us the visceral thrill of force and hid from us the effects of bullets, tank rounds, iron fragmentation bombs and artillery rounds. We tasted a bit of war’s exhilaration, but were protected from seeing what war actually does.

The wounded, the crippled and the dead

are, in this great charade, swiftly carted off stage. They are war’s refuse. We do not see them. We do not hear them. They are doomed, like wandering spirits, to float around the edges of our consciousness, ignored, even reviled. The message they tell is too painful for us to hear. We prefer to celebrate ourselves and our nation by imbibing the myth of glory, honor, patriotism and heroism, words that in combat become empty and meaningless. And those whom fate has decreed must face war’s effects often turn and flee.

Girlfriend’s visit

Saul Alfaro, who lost his legs in the war in El Salvador, speaks in Grinker’s book about the first and final visit from his girlfriend as he lay in an army hospital bed.

“She had been my girlfriend in the military and we had planned to be married,” he says. “But when she saw me in the hospital – I don’t know exactly what happened, but later they told me when she saw me she began to cry. Afterwards, she ran away and never came back.”

The public manifestations of gratitude are reserved for veterans who dutifully read from the script handed to them by the state. The veterans trotted out for viewing are those who are compliant and palatable, those we can stand to look at without horror, those who are willing to go along with the lie that war is about patriotism and is the highest good. “Thank you for your service,” we are supposed to say. They are used to perpetuate the myth. We are used to honor it.

Gary Zuspann, who lives in a special enclosed environment in his parent’s home in Waco, Texas, suffering from Gulf War syndrome, speaks in Grinker’s book of feeling like “a prisoner of war” even after the war had ended.

“Basically they put me on the curb and said, okay, fend for yourself,” he says in the book. “I was living in a fantasy world where I thought our government cared about us and they take care of their own. I believed

it was in my contract, that if you're maimed or wounded during your service in war, you should be taken care of. Now I'm angry."

I went back to Sarajevo after covering the 1990s war for the *New York Times* and found hundreds of cripples trapped in rooms in apartment blocks with no elevators and no wheelchairs. Most were young men, many without limbs, being cared for by their elderly parents, the glorious war heroes left to rot.

Despair and suicide grip survivors. More Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than were killed during it. The inhuman qualities drilled into soldiers and Marines in wartime defeat them in peacetime. This is what Homer taught us in *The Iliad*, the great book on war, and *The Odyssey*, the great book on the long journey to recovery by professional killers. Many never readjust. They cannot connect again with wives, children, parents or friends, retreating into personal hells of self-destructive anguish and rage.

"They program you to have no emotion – like if somebody sitting next to you gets killed you just have to carry on doing your job and shut up," Steve Annabell, a British veteran of the Falklands War, says to Grinker. "When you leave the service, when you come back from a situation like that, there's no button they can press to switch your emotions back on. So you walk around like a zombie. They don't deprogram you. If you become a problem they just sweep you under the carpet."

"To get you to join up they do all these advertisements – they show people skiing down mountains and doing great things – but they don't show you getting shot at and people with their legs blown off or burning to death," he says. "They don't show you what really happens. It's just bullshit. And they never prepare you for it. They can give you all the training in the world, but it's never the same as the real thing."

Those with whom veterans have most in common when the war is over are often those they fought.

"Nobody comes back from war the same," says Horacio Javier Benitez, who fought the British in the Falklands and is quoted in Grinker's book. "The person, Horacio, who was sent to war, doesn't exist anymore. It's hard to be enthusiastic about normal life; too much seems inconsequential. You contend with craziness and depression."

"Many who served in the Malvinas," he says, using the Argentine name of the islands, "committed suicide, many of my friends."

"I miss my family," reads a wall graffiti captured in one of Agtmael's photographs. "Please God forgive the lives I took and let my family be happy if I don't go home again."

Next to the plea someone had drawn an arrow toward the words and written in thick, black marker "Fag!!!"

Look beyond the nationalist cant used to justify war. Look beyond the seduction of the weapons and the pornography of violence. Look beyond Barack Obama's ridiculous rhetoric about finishing the job or fighting terror. Focus on the evil of war. War begins by calling for the annihilation of the others but ends ultimately in self-annihilation. It corrupts souls and mutilates bodies. It destroys homes and villages and murders children on their way to school. It grinds into the dirt all that is tender and beautiful and sacred. It empowers human deformities – warlords, Shiite death squads, Sunni insurgents, the Taliban, al-Qaida and our own killers – who can speak only in the despicable language of force. War is a scourge. It is a plague. It is industrial murder. And before you support war, especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, look into the hollow eyes of the men, women and children who know it. **CT**

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent who covered conflicts for two decades in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. His latest book is Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle.

Look beyond Barack Obama's ridiculous rhetoric about finishing the job or fighting terror. Focus on the evil of war. War begins by calling for the annihilation of the others but ends ultimately in self-annihilation

Waging war on handcuffed children

Revenge is not a legal justification for war, even if we try to persuade ourselves it is a sane one, writes **David Swanson**

At the same time that the puppet president of Afghanistan is demanding the arrest of the troops who shot the handcuffed children, the puppet government of Iraq is facing up to the refusal of the United States to seriously prosecute the Blackwater assassins of innocent Iraqis

The occupied government of Afghanistan and the United Nations have both concluded that U.S.-led troops recently dragged eight sleeping children out of their beds, handcuffed some of them, and shot them all dead. While this apparently constitutes an everyday act of kindness, far less intriguing than the vicious singeing of his pubic hairs by Captain Underpants, it is at least a variation on the ordinary American technique of murdering men, women, and children by the dozens with unmanned drones.

Also this month in Afghanistan, eight CIA assassins (see if you can find a more appropriate name for them) were murdered by a suicide bombing that one of them apparently executed against the other seven. The Taliban in Pakistan claims credit and describes the mass-murder as revenge for the CIA's drone killings. And we thought unmanned drones were War Perfected because none of the right people would have to risk their lives. Oops. Perhaps Detroit-bound passengers risked theirs unwittingly.

The CIA has declared its intention to seek revenge for the suicide strike. Who knows what the assassination of sleeping students was revenge for. Perhaps the next lunatic to try blowing up something in the United States will be seeking revenge for whatever Obama does to avenge the victims (television viewers?) of the Crotch

Crusader. Certainly there will be numerous more acts of violence driven by longings for revenge against the drone pilots and the shooters of students.

In a civilized world, the alternative to vengeance is justice. Often we can even set aside feelings of revenge as long as we are able to act so as to deter more crime. But at the same time that the puppet president of Afghanistan is demanding the arrest of the troops who shot the handcuffed children, the puppet government of Iraq is facing up to the refusal of the United States to seriously prosecute the Blackwater assassins of innocent Iraqis. Justice will not be permitted as an alternative to vengeance – the mere idea is anti-American.

CIA vengeance

No one so much as blinks at the CIA's avowal of vengeance for the recent suicide attack, never mind the illegality, because the entire illegal war on Afghanistan/Pakistan was launched and is still maintained as a pretended act of revenge for the crimes of 9-11. Of course, we're not bombing the flight schools or the German and Spanish hotels. Of course, we admit that there are fewer than 100 members of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Of course we openly seek massive permanent bases and an oil pipeline. Of course, Obama's decisions are all electoral calculations computed by the cal-

culus of cowardice. Of course, we're prosecuting the Butt Bomber as a criminal, just as we always used to prosecute criminals as criminals. Of course, revenge would not be a legal justification for war even if we could persuade ourselves it was a sane one. But the war is publicly understood as revenge, the resistance by its victims is understood as revenge, the escalation is understood as revenge for the resistance, and an eye for an eye slowly makes the whole world blind.

Not a freak blip

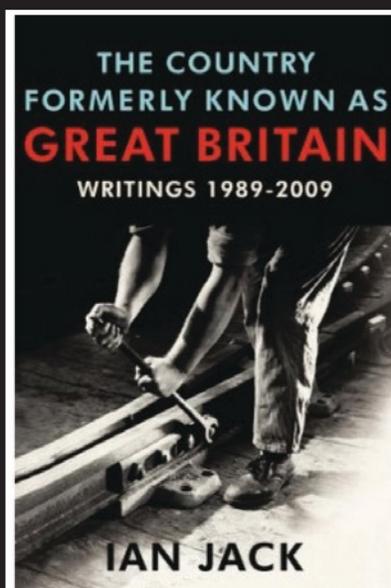
But here's what we've forgotten: nothing is ever remotely as horrible as war. So, nothing can ever constitute a justification for launching or escalating or continuing a war. Dragging children out of bed and killing them is not a freak blip in the course of a war. It is war reduced to a comprehensible scale. It's less war, not worse war. Everything we are spending our grandchildren's unearned pay on, borrowed from China at great expense, all of it is for the murdering of human beings. And it will remain so for eternity, no matter how many times you chant "Support Duh Troops."

I know many soldiers and mercenaries had few other options, given our failure to invest in any other industries. I know they've been lied to. I know they're scared and tired. But they wouldn't be there if we brought them home. And I support a full investment in their physical and mental and economic recovery. What I don't support is anyone participating in these wars, and that includes every single American who is not putting every spare moment into demanding that Congress stop forking over the money.

It's blood money. It's payment for murder. It cannot be defended. It cannot be permitted. We must stop it now – www.defundwar.org. We must shut down – www.peaceoftheaction.org – the place it comes from.

Not another dime. Not another dollar. Not another death. Not another thought of revenge. **CT**

David Swanson is the author of the new book Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union published by Seven Stories Press.



'Jack is a remarkably readable and acute cultural critic and historian. He's smart, proportionate, discerning and (rarest of rarities) decent. To me, this book is indispensable' – Richard Ford, the Guardian

THE COUNTRY FORMERLY KNOWN AS GREAT BRITAIN

WRITINGS 1989- 2009

IAN JACK

Jonathan Cape, London

£20 (UK) \$48.50 (Canada)

America's greediest ...

Sam Pizzigati spotlights a few executives who did very well, thank you, during the recession

The Great Recession's greedy don't just sit on Wall Street. They occupy perches of power throughout the reeling U.S. economy

Has picking a year's greediest "top ten" ever been easier? We don't think so. We could, this year, fill an entire top ten just with bankers from Goldman Sachs – or JP-Morgan Chase or any of a number of other Wall Street giants.

All sport executive suites packed with power suits who fanned the flames that melted down the global economy, then helped themselves, after gobbling down billions in bailouts, to paydays worth mega millions – at a time when, in over half our states, over a quarter of America's kids are living off food stamps.

Now that's greed. But that's also not the whole picture. The Great Recession's greedy don't just sit on Wall Street. They occupy perches of power throughout the reeling U.S. economy. So we've tried, in this our latest annual ranking of avarice, to survey that bigger picture.

Where does all this greed come from? We humans have always, of course, had greed among us. But levels of greed vary enormously from one historical epoch to another – and from one society to another.

What determines which societies see the most greed and grasping? In a word: inequality. The more wealth concentrates, the more greed grows. The United States remains the most unequal nation in the developed world. Next year, we suspect,

will bring us still another bumper crop of greedy.

10: Richard Anderson

America's airlines have been flying, for the most part, under the media radar ever since the nation's banks went into meltdown mode, and that suits Delta CEO Richard Anderson just fine.

Delta, now the world's biggest airline, has been richly rewarding Anderson ever since he became the airline's top exec in September 2007. If folks were paying attention, they might wonder why. Delta, after all, lost \$8.9 billion in 2008. In 2009, Delta and other U.S. carriers, says the International Air Transport Association, will likely lose a combined \$1 billion.

Passengers are certainly feeling this red ink. Delta and other carriers have been trimming seating capacity, a move, notes the *Orlando Sentinel*, designed to "enable them to raise ticket prices more often." Delta is also squeezing passengers with airport bag fees. In August, the airline's bag charges bounded to \$20 for the first bag and \$30 for the second.

Anderson and his family, meanwhile, don't just fly free on Delta. The airline also pays the taxes due on Anderson's free tickets – and lots more, too.

For agreeing to become Delta's chief, 28 months ago, Anderson picked up \$8.5 mil-

lion in stock awards. Seven months later, another \$3.4 million. Six months after that, to celebrate the Delta-Northwest merger, more options to buy Delta stock, worth \$7.3 million, and more actual shares, worth \$6.1 million.

With all those rewards, Anderson must be devoting every waking hour to making Delta soar, right? Well, almost every waking hour. Anderson has been spending some of his precious hours serving on the corporate board of Medtronic, a medical tech firm. In 2009, from the good people at Medtronic, he'll pocket \$188,000 for his directorship services.

9: George David/Marie Douglas-David

This power couple hit the headlines last March, with a nasty divorce trial. We tried to pick the most greedy of the pair. We failed. Here's why.

The 67-year-old George David, the former CEO of defense contracting powerhouse United Technologies, comes with impeccable greed credentials. In the four years after the 9/11 attacks, David hauled home bigger paydays than any other defense executive, over \$200 million in all, including \$88.3 million in 2004, a sum that made him that year's top-paid CEO.

Taxpayers, noted the Institute for Policy Studies Executive Excess CEO pay report in 2006, provide a third of United Technologies annual operating income.

But George has found his match in avarice. Marie Douglas-David, a Wall Street investment banker before she married George in 2002, signed a pre-nup before her wedding day that entitled her to \$20,000 a week should the marriage break up, a not unreasonable possibility given the 30-year age gap between the two.

The couple did separate last year and this past spring went to court after Marie sued to overturn the pre-nup. She demanded \$53,000 a week. Marie needed extra cash, said her lawyers, to cover her basic expenses. Among those basics: "\$4,500 a week for clothes, \$8,000 for travel, and

\$1,500 for eating out."

8: Steve Wynn

Last February, Las Vegas gaming industry kingpin Steve Wynn announced an across-the-board wage and hour cutback for all employees at his resort empire. The total savings for Wynn Resorts: between \$75 and \$100 million.

In November Wynn Resorts announced a special \$4-per-share dividend. Total cost of the dividend payout to Wynn Resorts: \$492 million. Total dividend check that will go to Steve Wynn: \$88.6 million.

Wynn currently rates 141st on the annual *Forbes* list of America's 400 richest. But his fortune has faded some \$900 million, to just \$2.3 billion now, since last year. A typical American family, according to Census Bureau figures, would have to work nearly 18,000 years to make \$900 million.

Wynn, ever the trooper, isn't crying in his cocktails over his near-billion-dollar misfortune. He "rang in" the 2009 new year skimming the Caribbean on a 183-foot mega yacht, then went on to spend lovely winter days dodging gossip columnists on the Riviera and in the Alps.

7: Robert Rubin

Back in 1997, then-Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin won huzzahs the world over for his efforts to fix the Asian financial crisis. One crisis "solved," Rubin proceeded to help create another – by brokering the 1999 deal that repealed the New Deal's most important financial industry reform legislation.

That reform, the Glass-Steagall Act, essentially prevented investment banks from speculating with the cash commercial banks and insurance companies were collecting from depositors and policy holders. Glass-Steagall would be weakened over the years, but still had enough oomph, at century's end, to prevent Citicorp from finalizing a merger with Travelers Group insurance.

Citi, America's biggest bank, and Travel-

Anderson has been spending some of his precious hours serving on the corporate board of Medtronic, a medical tech firm. In 2009, from the good people at Medtronic, he'll pocket \$188,000 for his directorship services

TOP TEN

He took home \$100 million betting on oil futures and other commodities in 2008 – after picking up a quarter-billion over the previous five years – and stood to receive another \$100 million this year

ers needed Glass-Steagall eliminated. Rubin obliged. His contacts and credibility, notes Public Citizen president Robert Weissman, helped speed repeal through Congress – and paved the way for the wild Wall Street run that crashed the U.S. economy.

Rubin, a Goldman Sachs alum before his stint at Treasury, would go on to join the newly merged Citigroup as a senior strategist. Citi, betting heavily on subprimes, would go on to lose over \$65 billion during Rubin's stint, and, this past January, Rubin formally resigned his Citi duties.

Overall, Rubin pocketed \$126 million in cash and stock for his Citi labors. But he seems to regard his years at the bank as something akin to public service. Declared Rubin in one exit interview: "I bet there's not a single year where I couldn't have gone somewhere else and made more."

6: Andrew Hall

If you happen to be Andrew Hall, the world's most celebrated commodity trader, you don't care what other people think. Hall waged a four-year battle – against his neighbors in the posh Connecticut town of Southport – to keep a 80-foot-long concrete sculpture on his lawn.

The neighbors won, and Hall had to remove the concrete eyesore. He promptly replaced it with two garishly painted "cartoonlike" sculptures of cars.

Hall can afford plenty of sculptures. He took home \$100 million betting on oil futures and other commodities in 2008 – after picking up a quarter-billion over the previous five years – and stood to receive another \$100 million this year.

But his employer, Citigroup, balked. Citi, by that time, was sitting on \$45 billion in taxpayer bailout dollars, and handing \$100 million to Hall, the honcho of Citi's commodity-trading subsidiary, would have created a PR disaster for the bank – and the Obama administration as well.

Hall didn't care. He demanded his trading fee. Citi ended up having to sell off Hall's subsidiary, at a bargain basement price, to

end the Hall headache.

Our story, to be sure, does have a happy ending – for Hall, Citi, and federal pay czar Kenneth Feinberg. Hall will get his \$100 million, but not until next year. That deferral let Citi claim a zero pay expense for Hall in 2009, and Citi's pay outlays for the year now show up about \$100 million less than last year.

This accounting razzmatazz helped skew the 2009 executive pay totals for the seven biggest bailout basket cases and enabled pay czar Feinberg to claim that pressure from his office had, "on average," reduced executive cash comp at the seven by an impressive – and thoroughly misleading – 90 percent.

5: John Chambers

Earlier this year, with lawmakers mulling over legislation to limit CEO pay, a high-powered New York business group convened a "Task Force on Executive Compensation" to show that corporations could clean up their own act.

The final report from this task force, issued this fall, asked companies to commit themselves to executive pay that's "fair" and "clearly aligned with actual performance." Among the first half-dozen companies to make that commitment: Cisco, the Internet networking giant.

Just days later, a federal filing revealed that Cisco was awarding "discretionary bonuses" to its five top executives for the fiscal year that ended this past July. Why "discretionary"? The company couldn't give the execs regular bonuses since all five missed their "performance" targets.

Cisco says the five execs delivered "solid financial performance" while facing "tough economic challenges." Not that solid. Cisco has laid off over 1,500 workers since the economy turned challenging. Cisco CEO John Chambers, for his part, has pocketed \$232.7 million over the last five years.

Back in 2000, Cisco reigned briefly as the world's biggest company, as measured by total share value. Then the dot.com

bubble burst. But Chambers unloaded a ton of shares before the bubble popped – and cleared a \$156 million windfall.

The janitor who cleaned Cisco's executive suites that year, observed the San Jose *Mercury News* at the time, would have to work 8,653 years to earn what Chambers made in one.

4: Rupert Murdoch

Billionaires never rest. They don't let their assets rest either. Take media mogul Rupert Murdoch, for instance. Three years ago, Murdoch shelled out an estimated \$30 million for a 183-foot yacht he calls the *Rosehearty*. He's apparently enjoying his investment. Billionaire-watchers have sighted him holidaying offshore with actor Mel Gibson and crooner Billy Joel.

But what do billionaires do when they can't find an aging celebrity to join them aboard? They rent their boats out, says *Superyacht World* – discreetly, of course, through charter agencies that never reveal the boat's actual owner.

But sometimes that identity does slip out. Murdoch's *Rosehearty*, an enterprising reporter has disclosed, charters for just under \$300,000 per week. Murdoch's "exceptionally solicitous staff" comes included in the fee.

Speaking of fees, Murdoch has launched a crusade to force Web surfers to pay for the newspaper articles they read online. One reason: His take-home last year from the News Corp. – the base of his media empire – dropped 14 percent to \$27.5 million.

3: Mark Hurd

Computer printer ink, a high-tech financial analyst pointed out a few years ago, "costs more per drop than expensive perfume." Mark Hurd, the CEO at Hewlett-Packard since 2005, wouldn't have it any other way.

HP, under Hurd, has been busy squeezing every bit of revenue possible out of the printer ink cash cow. Last year, HP upped ink prices up at double the inflation rate. The typical \$30 ink cartridge, *SmartMoney*

reported this past June, costs \$3 to make.

Hurd apparently enjoys cutting wages and jobs as much as raising prices. In May, he axed 6,000 workers off the HP payroll and cut paychecks for the survivors from 5 to 15 percent.

Hurd did take a 20 percent salary cut himself for 2009. But "salary" in 2008 only accounted for \$1.45 million of Hurd's \$26.04 million in cash compensation. He took in another \$7.9 million in new stock awards – and cleared still another \$10.1 million cashing out previously awarded stock options.

Hurd's CEO stint at HP has so far seen about 40,000 employees lose their jobs.

2: Richard Scott

Mike Snow, a regional health care executive, earlier this month recalled that evening a dozen years ago when his then-boss, Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. CEO Richard Scott, revealed to Snow and the rest of the company's top management that the FBI had just raided the firm's El Paso office.

Scott defiantly declared the government had no case. Mike Snow and his fellow execs lustily applauded. Remembers Snow: "Like so many others that night, I drank the Kool-Aid."

The federal government went on to indict key Columbia/HCA personnel for "bilking Medicare while simultaneously handing over kickbacks and perks to physicians who steered patients to its hospitals." The company ended up pleading guilty to 14 felonies and paying \$1.7 billion in criminal and civil fines.

The board of Columbia/HCA, then the nation's biggest for-profit hospital chain, would go on to ease Scott out the door, but ever so gently. He left with a \$10 severance package and stock worth \$300 million.

This past spring, Richard Scott burst back into the news, pouring more Kool-Aid as the moving force behind the year's first media blitz designed to demonize the Obama administration's drive for health care reform.

Hurd did take a 20 percent salary cut himself for 2009. But "salary" in 2008 only accounted for \$1.45 million of Hurd's \$26.04 million in cash compensation. He took in another \$7.9 million in new stock awards – and cleared still another \$10.1 million cashing out previously awarded stock options

TOP TEN

For more casual water fun, Ellison takes to the seas on his 453-foot mega yacht, the Rising Sun, a boat he co-owns with Hollywood mogul David Geffen. This five-story little ship boasts 82 rooms and a basketball court that doubles as a helicopter pad. The construction cost in 2004: \$200 million

If President Obama ever gets his way, Scott warned in one ad that his multimillion campaign ran, bureaucrats will “decide the treatments you receive, the drugs you take, even the doctors you see.” Scott’s ads would set the “Tea Party” tone for the year’s health care debate – and help leave tens of millions of Americans without affordable health care, a state of affairs that has never bothered Scott, originally a corporate attorney specializing in buyout deals. As Scott used to rail back in his CEO days: “Do we have an obligation to provide health care for everybody? Where do we draw the line? Is any fast-food restaurant obligated to feed everyone who shows up?”

1: Larry Ellison

Larry Ellison appeared on our “greediest” list last year. He may appear every year. No one may better personify, personally and professionally, the self-absorption, arrogance, and insensitivity that separates the merely greedy from the greediest.

In 2008, Ellison, the CEO of Oracle business software, contested the \$166.3 million tax appraisal on his Northern California estate. The assessment appeals panel gave him a \$3 million tax refund in a ruling that will cost the local school system an annual \$250,000, the cost of hiring and supplying three teachers.

Ellison, the holder of a \$27 billion fortune, spent a good bit of 2009 sparing no expense to build a yacht speedy enough to win next year’s America’s Cup, the world’s top sailing race. His new racing yacht has

a \$10-million mast “18-stories tall and sails large enough to cover a baseball infield.” Some 30 designers and scientists spent 130,000 hours putting the vessel together.

For more casual water fun, Ellison takes to the seas on his 453-foot mega yacht, the Rising Sun, a boat he co-owns with Hollywood mogul David Geffen. This five-story little ship boasts 82 rooms and a basketball court that doubles as a helicopter pad. The construction cost in 2004: \$200 million.

On the business side, Ellison did his best in 2009 to top the \$557 million he took home as Oracle’s CEO in 2008. His magic formula: Ellison’s a serial merger. He buys companies, takes their customers, and fires their workers. His top 2009 gobble-up: Silicon Valley’s Sun Microsystems.

The Sun merger, analysts believe, will almost certainly end up eliminating more jobs than the 5,000 positions lost when Oracle bought out rival PeopleSoft.

And did we mention the dividends? Oracle this past spring announced plans to pay out its first dividend. The announcement, CNBC estimated, meant a \$57.5 million quarterly check for Ellison in May and another \$230 million in dividend checks over the next 12 months.

In 2009, the old Silicon Valley joke still rang true: “What’s the difference between God and Larry Ellison? Answer: God doesn’t think he’s Larry Ellison.” **CT**

Sam Pizzigati is editor of TooMuch Online – www.toomuchonline.org – and author of Greed And Good (Apex Press)

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The Quiet American

Uri Avnery on the idealist meddlers who have brought chaos and misery to the Middle East

The Quiet American was the hero of Graham Greene's novel about the first Vietnam War, the one fought by the French.

He was a young and naïve American, a professor's son, who had enjoyed a good education at Harvard, an idealist with all the best intentions. When he was sent to Vietnam, he wanted to help the natives to overcome the two evils as he saw them: French colonialism and Communism. Knowing absolutely nothing about the country in which he was acting, he caused a disaster. The book ends with a massacre, the outcome of his misguided efforts. He illustrated the old saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Since this book was written, 54 years have passed, but it seems that the Quiet American has not changed a bit. He is still an idealist (at least, in his own view of himself), still wants to bring redemption to foreign and far-away peoples about whom he knows nothing, still causes terrible disasters: in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now, it seems, in Yemen.

The Iraqi example is the simplest one.

The American soldiers were sent there to overthrow the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein. There were, of course, also some less altruistic objectives, such as taking control of the Iraqi oil resources and stationing an American garrison in the

heart of the Middle Eastern oil region. But for the American public, the adventure was presented as an idealistic enterprise to topple a bloody dictator, who was menacing the world with nuclear bombs.

That was six years ago, and the war is still going on. Barack Obama, who opposed the war right from the start, promised to lead the Americans out of there. In the meantime, in spite of all the talking, no end is in sight. Why? Because the real decision-makers in Washington had no idea of the country which they wanted to liberate and help to live happily ever after.

Iraq was from the beginning an artificial state. The British masters glued together several Ottoman provinces to suit their own colonial interests. They crowned a Sunni Arab as king over the Kurds, who are not Arab, and the Shiites, who are not Sunni. Only a succession of dictators, each of them more brutal than his predecessor, prevented the state from falling apart.

The Washington planners were not interested in the history, demography or geography of the country which they entered with brutal force. The way it looked to them, it was quite simple: One had to topple the tyrant, establish democratic institutions on the American model, conduct free elections, and everything else would fall into place by itself.

Contrary to their expectations, they

For the American public, the adventure was presented as an idealistic enterprise to topple a bloody dictator, who was menacing the world with nuclear bombs

ROADS TO HELL

If they had had any knowledge of the country they were about to invade, they might have, perhaps, hesitated. Afghanistan has always been a graveyard for invaders

were not received with flowers. Neither did they discover Saddam's terrible atom bomb. Like the proverbial elephant in the porcelain shop, they shattered everything, destroyed the country and got bogged in a swamp.

After years of bloody military operations that led nowhere, they found a temporary remedy. To hell with idealism, to hell with the lofty aims, to hell with all military doctrines – they're now simply buying off the tribal chiefs, who constitute the reality of Iraq. The Quiet American has no idea how to get out. He knows that if he does, the country may well disintegrate in mutual bloodletting.

Two years before entering the Iraqi swamp, the Americans invaded the Afghan quagmire. Why? Because an organization called al-Qaeda ("the basis") had claimed responsibility for the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York. Al-Qaeda's chiefs were in Afghanistan, their training camps were there. To the Americans, everything was clear – there was no need for second thoughts (neither, for that matter, for first thoughts.)

If they had had any knowledge of the country they were about to invade, they might have, perhaps, hesitated. Afghanistan has always been a graveyard for invaders. Mighty empires had escaped from there with their tails between their legs. Unlike flat Iraq, Afghanistan is a country of mountains, a paradise for guerrillas. It is the home of several different peoples and uncounted tribes, each one fiercely jealous of its independence.

The Washington planners were not really interested. For them, it seems, all countries are the same, and so are all societies. In Afghanistan, too, American-style democracy must be established, free and fair elections must be held, and hoppla – everything else will sort itself out.

The elephant entered the shop without knocking and achieved a resounding victory. The Air Force pounded, the army conquered without problems, al-Qaeda disap-

peared like a ghost, the Taliban ("religious pupils") ran away. Women could again appear in the streets without covering their hair, girls could attend schools, the opium fields flourished again, and so did Washington's protégés in Kabul.

However – the war goes on, year after year, the number of American dead is rising inexorably. What for? Nobody knows. It seems as if the war has acquired a life of its own, without aim, without reason.

An American could well ask himself: What the hell are we doing there?

The immediate aim, the expulsion of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, has ostensibly been achieved. Al-Qaeda is not there – if it ever really was there.

I wrote once that al-Qaeda is an American invention and that Osama Bin-Laden has been sent by Hollywood's Central Casting to play the role. He is simply too good to be true. That was, of course, a bit of an exaggeration. But not altogether. The US is always in need of a world-wide enemy. In the past it was International Communism, whose agents were lurking behind every tree and under every floor tile. But, alas, the Soviet Union and its minions had collapsed, there was an urgent need for an enemy to fill the void. This was found in the shape of the world-wide jihad of al-Qaeda. The crushing of "World Terrorism" became the overriding American aim.

That aim is nonsense. Terrorism is nothing but an instrument of war. It is used by organizations that are vastly different from each other, which are fighting in vastly different countries for vastly different objectives. A war on "International Terror" is like a war on "International Artillery" or "International Navy".

A world-embracing movement led by Osama Bin-Laden just does not exist. Thanks to the Americans, al-Qaeda has become a prestige brand in the guerrilla market, much like McDonald's and Armani in the world of fast food and fashion. Every militant Islamist organization can appropriate the name for itself, even without a

franchise from Bin-Laden. American client regimes, who used to brand all their local enemies as “communist” in order to procure the help of their patrons, now brand them as “al-Qaeda terrorists”.

Nobody knows where Bin-Laden is – if he is at all – and there is no proof of his being in Afghanistan. Some believe that he is in neighboring Pakistan. And even if he were hiding in Afghanistan – what justification is there for conducting a war and killing thousands of people in order to hunt down one person?

Some say: OK, so there is no Bin-Laden. But the Taliban have to be prevented from coming back. Why, for god’s sake? What business is it of the US who rules Afghanistan? One can loathe religious fanatics in general and the Taliban in particular – but is this a reason for an endless war?

If the Afghans themselves prefer the Taliban to the opium dealers who are in power in Kabul, it is their business. It seems that they do, judging by the fact that the Taliban are again in control of most of the country. That is no good reason for a Vietnam-style war. But how do you get out? Obama does not know. During the election campaign he promised, with a candidate’s foolhardiness, to enlarge the war there, as a compensation for leaving Iraq. Now he is stuck in both places – and in the near future, it seems, he will be stuck in a third war, too.

During the last month, the name of Yemen has been cropping up more and more often. Yemen – a second Afghanistan, a third Vietnam.

The elephant is raring to enter another shop. And this time, too, it doesn’t care about the porcelain.

I know very little about Yemen, but enough to understand that only a madman would want to be sucked in there. It is another artificial state, composed of two different parts – the country of Sanaa in the North and the (former British) South. Most of the country is mountainous terrain, ruled by bellicose tribes guarding their independence. Like Afghanistan, it is an ideal

region for guerrilla warfare.

There, too, is an organization that has adopted the grandiose name of “Al-Qaeda of the Arab Peninsula” (after the Yemenite militants united with their Saudi brothers). But its chiefs are interested in world revolution much less than in the intrigues and battles of the tribes among themselves and against the “central” government, a reality with a history of thousands of years. Only a complete fool would lay his head on this bed.

The name Yemen means “country on the right”. (If one looks towards Mecca from the West, Yemen is on the right side and Syria on the left.) The right side also connotes happiness, and the name of Yemen is connected to al-Yamana, an Arabic word for being happy. The Romans called it Arabia Felix (“Happy Arabia”) because it was rich through trading in spices.

(By the way, Obama may be interested to hear that another leader of a superpower, Caesar Augustus, once tried to invade Yemen and was trounced.)

If the Quiet American, in his usual mixture of idealism and ignorance, decides to bring democracy and all the other goodies there, that will be the end of this happiness. The Americans will sink into another quagmire, tens of thousands of people will be killed, and it will all end in disaster.

It may well be that the problem is rooted – inter alia – in the architecture of Washington DC.

This city is full of huge buildings populated with the ministries and other offices of the only superpower in the world. The people working there feel the tremendous might of their empire. They look upon the tribal chiefs of Afghanistan and Yemen as a rhinoceros looks down at the ants that rush around between its feet. The Rhino walks over them without noticing. But the ants survive. Altogether, the Quiet American resembles Mephistopheles in Goethe’s Faust, who defines himself as the force that “always wants the bad and always creates the good”. Only the other way round. **CT**

Some say: OK, so there is no Bin-Laden. But the Taliban have to be prevented from coming back. Why, for god’s sake? What business is it of the US who rules Afghanistan?

Uri Avnery is an Israeli peace activist who has advocated the setting up of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. He served three terms in the Israeli parliament (Knesset), and is the founder of Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc)

Haiti: The right testicle of hell

Blackwater before drinking water: A brief history of a Haitian holocaust, by **Greg Palast**

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson finally showed up after three days. With what? It was dramatically deployed – without any emergency relief supplies. It has sidewinder missiles and 19 helicopters

1. Bless the President for having rescue teams in the air almost immediately. That was President Olafur Grimsson of Iceland. On Wednesday, Jan 13, the AP reported that the President of the United States promised, “The initial contingent of 2,000 Marines could be deployed to the quake-ravaged country within the next few days.” “In a few days,” Mr. Obama?

2. There’s no such thing as a ‘natural’ disaster. 200,000 Haitians have been slaughtered by slum housing and IMF “austerity” plans.

3. A friend of mine called. Do I know a journalist who could get medicine to her father? And she added, trying to hold her voice together, “My sister, she’s under the rubble. Is anyone going who can help, anyone?” Should I tell her, “Obama will have Marines there in ‘a few days’”?

4. China deployed rescuers with sniffer dogs within 48 hours. China, Mr. President. China: 8,000 miles distant. Miami: 700 miles close. US bases in Puerto Rico: right there.

5. Obama’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, “I don’t know how this government could have responded faster or more comprehensively than it has.” We know Gates doesn’t know.

6. From my own work in the field, I know that FEMA has access to ready-

to-go potable water, generators, mobile medical equipment and more for hurricane relief on the Gulf Coast. It’s all still there. Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, who served as the task force commander for emergency response after Hurricane Katrina, told the *Christian Science Monitor*, “I thought we had learned that from Katrina, take food and water and start evacuating people.” Maybe we learned but, apparently, Gates and the Defense Department missed school that day.

7. Send in the Marines. That’s America’s response. That’s what we’re good at. The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson finally showed up after three days. With what? It was dramatically deployed – without any emergency relief supplies. It has sidewinder missiles and 19 helicopters.

8. But don’t worry, the International Search and Rescue Team, fully equipped and self-sufficient for up to seven days in the field, deployed immediately with ten metric tons of tools and equipment, three tons of water, tents, advanced communication equipment and water purifying capability. They’re from Iceland.

9. Gates wouldn’t send in food and water because, he said, there was no “structure ... to provide security.” For Gates, appointed by Bush and allowed to hang around by Obama, it’s security first. That was his lesson from Hurricane Katrina. Blackwater

before drinking water.

10. Previous US presidents have acted far more swiftly in getting troops on the ground on that island. Haiti is the right half of the island of Hispaniola. It's treated like the right testicle of Hell. The Dominican Republic the left. In 1965, when Dominicans demanded the return of Juan Bosch, their elected President, deposed by a junta, Lyndon Johnson reacted to this crisis rapidly, landing 45,000 US Marines on the beaches to prevent the return of the elected president.

11. How did Haiti end up so economically weakened, with infrastructure, from hospitals to water systems, busted or non-existent – there are two fire stations in the entire nation – and infrastructure so frail that the nation was simply waiting for “nature” to finish it off?

Don't blame Mother Nature for all this death and destruction. That dishonor goes to Papa Doc and Baby Doc, the Duvalier dictatorship, which looted the nation for 28 years. Papa and his Baby put an estimated 80% of world aid into their own pockets - with the complicity of the US government happy to have the Duvaliers and their voodoo militia, Tonton Macoutes, as allies in the Cold War. (The war was easily won: the Duvaliers' death squads murdered as many as 60,000 opponents of the regime.)

12. What Papa and Baby didn't run off with, the IMF finished off through its “austerity” plans. An austerity plan is a form of voodoo orchestrated by economists zombified by an irrational belief that cutting government services will somehow help a nation prosper.

13. In 1991, five years after the murderous Baby fled, Haitians elected a priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who resisted the IMF's austerity diktats. Within months, the mili-

tary, to the applause of Papa George HW Bush, deposed him. History repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce. The farce was George W. Bush. In 2004, after the priest Aristide was re-elected President, he was kidnapped and removed again, to the applause of Baby Bush.

14. Haiti was once a wealthy nation, the wealthiest in the hemisphere, worth more, wrote Voltaire in the 18th century, than that rocky, cold colony known as New England. Haiti's wealth was in black gold: slaves. But then the slaves rebelled - and have been paying for it ever since.

From 1825 to 1947, France forced Haiti to pay an annual fee to reimburse the profits lost by French slaveholders caused by their slaves' successful uprising. Rather than enslave individual Haitians, France thought it more efficient to simply enslave the entire nation.

15. Secretary Gates tells us, “There are just some certain facts of life that affect how quickly you can do some of these things.” The Navy's hospital boat will be there in, oh, a week or so. Heckuva job, Brownie!

16. Note just received from my friend. Her sister was found, dead; and her other sister had to bury her. Her father needs his anti-seizure medicines. That's a fact of life too, Mr. President.

Urgently recommended reading - The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, the history of the successful slave uprising in Hispaniola by the brilliant CLR James. **CT**

Greg Palast is the author of Armed Madhose, The Best democracy Can Buy and Democracy and Regulation. This essay was first published by Huffingtonpost at www.huffingtonpost.com

Papa and his Baby put an estimated 80% of world aid into their own pockets - with the complicity of the US government happy to have the Duvaliers and their voodoo militia, Tonton Macoutes, as allies in the Cold War

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

<http://coldtype.net/joe.html>



Save Vestas, Save the Planet demonstration in support of the occupation at the wind turbine plant at Newport Isle of Wight, England.

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Dear Bono...

Alison Weir has a message for the U2 front man:
Your Palestinian Gandhis exist ... in graves and in prison

Dear Bono,

In your recent column in the *New York Times*, “Ten for the Next Ten,” you wrote: “I’ll place my hopes on the possibility – however remote at the moment – that ... people in places filled with rage and despair, places like the Palestinian territories, will in the days ahead find among them their Gandhi, their King, their Aung San Suu Kyi.”

Your hope has already been fulfilled in the Palestinian territories.

Unfortunately, these Palestinian Gandhis and Kings are being killed and imprisoned.

On the day that your op-ed appeared hoping for such leaders, three were languishing in Israeli prisons. No one knows how long they will be held, nor under what conditions; torture is common in Israeli prisons.

At least 19 Palestinians have been killed in the last six years alone during nonviolent demonstrations against Israel’s apartheid wall that is confiscating Palestinian cropland and imprisoning Palestinian people. Many others have been killed in other parts of the Palestinian territories while taking part in nonviolent activities. Hundreds more have been detained and imprisoned.

Recently Israel has begun a campaign to incarcerate the leaders of this diverse

movement of weekly marches and demonstrations taking place in small Palestinian villages far from media attention.

The first Palestinian Gandhi to be rounded up in this recent purge was young Mohammad Othman, taken on Sept. 22 when he was returning home from speaking in Norway about nonviolent strategies to oppose Israeli oppression and land confiscation. He has now been held for 107 days without charges, much of it in solitary confinement.

The second was Abdallah Abu Rahma, a schoolteacher and farmer taken from his home on Dec. 10, the only one to be charged with a crime. After holding him for several days, Israel finally came up with a charge: “illegal weapons possession” – referring to the peace sign he had fashioned out of the spent teargas cartridges and bullets that Israel had shot at nonviolent demonstrators – *See page 65 of this issue.* (One such cartridge pierced the skull of Tristan Anderson, an American who was photographing the aftermath of a nonviolent march, causing part of his right frontal lobe to be removed.)

The third was Jamal Jumah’, a veteran leader in the grassroots struggle, who was taken by Israeli occupation forces on Dec. 16th and is now being held in shackles and often blindfolded during Kafkaesque Israeli military proceedings.

After holding him for several days, Israel finally came up with a charge: “illegal weapons possession” – referring to the peace sign he had fashioned out of the spent teargas cartridges and bullets that Israel had shot at nonviolent demonstrators

SEEKING GANDHI

Modeling their action on images of Dr. Martin Luther King, they marched arm-in-arm, believing that Israel would not kill them and that the world would care. They were wrong on both counts. Israeli forces immediately shot six dead and injured many more

Palestinians have been engaging in non-violence for decades.

When I was last in Nablus I learned of a massive nonviolent demonstration that had occurred in 2001 – estimates range from 10,000 to 50,000 Palestinian men, women, and children taking part in a non-violent march. All sectors of Nablus had joined together in organizing this – public officials, diverse parties, religious, secular, Muslim, Christian.

Modeling their action on images of Dr. Martin Luther King, they marched arm-in-arm, believing that Israel would not kill them and that the world would care. They were wrong on both counts. Israeli forces immediately shot six dead and injured many more. And no one even knows about it. At my organisation, If Americans Knew we are currently working on a video to try to remedy the last part; there's nothing we can do about the dead.

But there's a great deal you can do, Bono. You can use your talent and celebrity to tell

the world these facts. You can write a *New York Times* op-ed about the Palestinian Gandhis in Israeli prisons and call for their freedom. You can sing of these Palestinian Martin Luther Kings you wished for, and by singing save their lives.

For the reality is that nonviolence is only as powerful as its visibility to the world. When it is made invisible through its lack of coverage by the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, CNN, Fox News, et al, its practitioners are in deadly danger, and their efforts to use nonviolence against injustice are doomed.

In the *New York Times* you publicly proclaimed your belief in nonviolence. Now is your chance to demonstrate your commitment.

CT

Alison Weir is executive director of If Americans Knew – www.ifamericansknew.org – which provides information about Israel-Palestine. She can be reached at contact@ifamericansknew.org

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An Odyssey for justice

Ramzy Baroud pays tribute to the international volunteers who are pledged to ending the siege of Gaza

The recent actions of people from around the world in support of the Palestinian people in Gaza have arguably represented the closest manifestation of international solidarity since the International Brigades against fascism during the Spanish Civil War.

A bold assertion? Admittedly, I may not be as in tune with reality as I should be. Born and raised in a Gaza refugee camp where most refugees felt that no one cared about their plight, it was easy to believe that nothing could possibly break away from the ever tenuous and redundant support of Arab and other countries – whose solidarity went no further than hollow words of condemnation. The recent noble action by activists from all over the world therefore seem like an unprecedented act of solidarity which, dare I believe, indicates the direct mass involvement of civil society as a real party in the ongoing Palestinian struggle for political and human rights.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), when various European powers were turning blind eye to the atrocities committed in Spain, almost 40,000 men and women, representing 52 countries, made the decision to fight fascism. The global consciousness culminating in such a direct, unprecedented action was absolutely baffling considering the lack of powerful communication technology available then.

The 2,800 American volunteers included a black man – Canute Frankson – who was a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He wrote to a friend from Madrid in 1937, “Why am I, a Negro who have fought through these years for the rights of my people, here in Spain today? Because we are no longer an isolated minority group fighting hopelessly against an immense giant. Because ... we have joined with, and become an active part of, a great progressive force, on whose shoulders rest the responsibility of saving human civilization from the planned destruction of a small group of degenerates ... Because if we crush fascism here we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world from the vicious persecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler's fascist heels.”

How pertinent these words are, as one reads with anxiousness, pride and exhilaration the notes and messages that have come in from Cairo, El Arish and Gaza. They convey the support of countless people, who have demonstrated with blood and tears their commitment to humanity in Palestine, and indeed everywhere.

The Gaza Freedom March, a coalition of several groups, consisted of 1,362 activists from more than 40 countries who were on a mission to cross to Gaza and, along with Israeli, Palestinian and international peace

Two pig's ears and a poster of the French flag stapled to the door; a pig's snout dangled from the doorknob. 'White power' and 'Sieg heil' were spray-painted on one side ... and 'France for the French' on the other”

INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE

Most European Muslims strongly identify with their religion, which has preserved their sense of community, and helped maintain a degree of cultural cohesion and a semblance of collective identity at a time when many in Europe are losing theirs

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an internationally-syndicated columnist and the editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His latest book is *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (Pluto Press, London)

activists, to march simultaneously to the Israeli Erez checkpoint. That border point, along with a few others, has completely cut off Palestinians in Gaza from the outside world, leaving 1.5 million people in a frightening state of siege. Gaza has been embroiled in the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe for years due to the Palestinian people's exercise of their democratic rights. The people of Gaza have endured one-sided wars, and have been left to exist in a state of near starvation.

The valiant peace warriors of Viva Palestina have truly set new standards for how far a peace and justice activist is willing to go to back up his/her words with actions. Many millions around the world watched – despite the mainstream media's shameless disregard of the unfolding drama – as nearly 500 activists and their 200 vehicles, laden with badly needed medical supplies for besieged Gaza, took off on a historic odyssey to break the siege. Just as they neared Gaza, they were forced by the Egyptian government to backtrack due to a technicality, and then began an arduous journey across the desert and sea and several countries. And as they approached Gaza again, in the Egyptian port of El Arish, they were blocked and dozens were left injured.

The Gaza Freedom March was similarly met with intimidation, assaults and violence.

These are not Palestinians, but internationals. From Malaysia to South Africa, from the UK to the U.S., men, women, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, people of different cultural and political backgrounds showed themselves as unified in their belief in justice and human rights. While Palestine has always enjoyed universal solidarity, with many fearless activists – who can forget Rachel Corrie? – a collective action of this magnitude and of this level of commitment is a new addition to a conflict that has been reduced over time to that of beleaguered Palestinians and a militarily powerful Israel.

The Gaza Freedom March, Viva Palestina, the Free Gaza Movement, and others are

redefining the conventional discourse pertaining to the Middle East's most intricate and protracted conflict. Civil society is not a group of NGOs to be strategically funded and manipulated by Western governments, but encompasses powerful, self-assured and truly representative communities from all over the world; people can be united beyond religion and ideology, and collectively cross continents, seas and deserts to put their beliefs into action.

African brothers and sisters

The activists' ability to overcome the shameful silence of the mainstream media also highlights the importance of alternative media as the single most important tool in achieving camaraderie. "Throughout the Gaza Freedom March presence in Cairo, our brothers and sisters from the South African delegation dynamically articulated the connections between injuries that indigenous Africans suffered under the white supremacist regime in Pretoria and the inequalities that Palestinians now face at the hands of the Israeli government," wrote Joshua Brollier, a coordinator for Voices For Creative Non-Violence, in the *Palestine Chronicle*.

Many heroes and heroines emerged from the activists' action-packed journey to Gaza. Hedy Epstein, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor whose parents both perished in Auschwitz, deserves a special mention. She went on a hunger strike when she, along with many others were blocked from entering Gaza. Epstein didn't stand in solidarity with the Palestinians despite the Holocaust, but because of the Holocaust.

Similarly many activists drew their solidarity from their specific experiences and have fought for democracy and justice back at home.

Maybe I am in tune with reality after all. Maybe the words and actions of our African America hero Canute Frankson weren't in vain. Maybe the quest for justice can in fact cross all physical and psychological boundaries. One thing is for sure, though. Gaza is not alone; in fact, it never was. **CT**

The American elite

William Blum has words of warning about the boy wonders who run – or are about to run – our world

Lincoln Gordon died a few weeks ago at the age of 96. He had graduated summa cum laude from Harvard at the age of 19, received a doctorate from Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, published his first book at 22, with dozens more to follow on government, economics, and foreign policy in Europe and Latin America. He joined the Harvard faculty at 23. Dr. Gordon was an executive on the War Production Board during World War II, a top administrator of Marshall Plan programs in postwar Europe, ambassador to Brazil, held other high positions at the State Department and the White House, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, economist at the Brookings Institution, president of Johns Hopkins University. President Lyndon B. Johnson praised Gordon's diplomatic service as "a rare combination of experience, idealism and practical judgment".

You get the picture? Boy wonder, intellectual shining light, distinguished leader of men, outstanding American patriot.

Abraham Lincoln Gordon was also Washington's on-site, and very active, director in Brazil of the military coup in 1964 which overthrew the moderately leftist government of João Goulart and condemned the people of Brazil to more than 20 years of an unspeakably brutal dictatorship. Human-rights campaigners have long maintained

that Brazil's military regime originated the idea of the *desaparecidos*, "the disappeared", and exported torture methods across Latin America. In 2007, the Brazilian government published a 500-page book, *The Right to Memory and the Truth*, which outlines the systematic torture, rape and disappearance of nearly 500 left-wing activists, and includes photos of corpses and torture victims. Currently, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is proposing a commission to investigate allegations of torture by the military during the 1964-1985 dictatorship. (When will the United States create a commission to investigate its own torture?)

In a cable to Washington after the coup, Gordon stated – in a remark that might have had difficulty getting past the lips of even John Foster Dulles – that without the coup there could have been a "total loss to the West of all South American Republics". (It was actually the beginning of a series of fascistic anti-communist coups that trapped the southern half of South America in a decades-long nightmare, culminating in "Operation Condor", in which the various dictatorships, aided by the CIA, cooperated in hunting down and killing leftists.)

Gordon later testified at a congressional hearing and while denying any connection to the coup in Brazil he stated that the coup was "the single most decisive victory of freedom in the mid-twentieth century."

In a cable to Washington after the coup, Gordon stated – in a remark that might have had difficulty getting past the lips of even John Foster Dulles – that without the coup there could have been a "total loss to the West of all South American Republics"

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Reports are that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Norway is now in conference to determine whether to raise the maximum number of wars allowed to ten. Given the committee's ignoble history, I imagine that Obama is taking part in the discussion. As is Henry Kissinger

Listen to a phone conversation between President Johnson and Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, April 3, 1964, two days after the coup:

MANN: I hope you're as happy about Brazil as I am.

LBJ: I am.

MANN: I think that's the most important thing that's happened in the hemisphere in three years.

LBJ: I hope they give us some credit instead of hell.¹

So the next time you're faced with a boy wonder from Harvard, try to keep your adulation in check no matter what office the man attains, even – oh, just choosing a position at random – the presidency of the United States. Keep your eyes focused not on these “liberal” ... “best and brightest” who come and go, but on US foreign policy which remains the same decade after decade. There are dozens of Brazils and Lincoln Gordons in America's past. In its present. In its future. They're the diplomatic equivalent of the guys who ran Enron, AIG and Goldman Sachs.

Of course, not all of our foreign policy officials are like that. Some are worse.

And remember the words of convicted spy Alger Hiss: Prison was “a good corrective to three years at Harvard.”

Mothers, don't let your children grow up to be Nobel Peace Prize winners

In November I wrote:

Question: How many countries do you have to be at war with to be disqualified from receiving the Nobel Peace Prize?

Answer: Five. Barack Obama has waged war against only Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. He's holding off on Iran until he actually gets the prize.

Well, on December 10 the president clutched the prize in his blood-stained hands. But then the Nobel Laureate surprised us. On December 17 the United States fired cruise missiles at people in ... not Iran, but Yemen, all “terrorists” of

course, who were, needless to say, planning “an imminent attack against a U.S. asset”.² A week later the United States carried out another attack against “senior al-Qaeda operatives” in Yemen.³

Reports are that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Norway is now in conference to determine whether to raise the maximum number of wars allowed to ten. Given the committee's ignoble history, I imagine that Obama is taking part in the discussion. As is Henry Kissinger.

The targets of these attacks in Yemen reportedly include fighters coming from Afghanistan and Iraq, confirmation of the warnings long given – even by the CIA and the Pentagon – that those US interventions were creating new anti-American terrorists. (That's anti-American foreign policy, not necessarily anything else American.) How long before the United States will be waging war in some other god-forsaken land against anti-American terrorists whose numbers include fighters from Yemen? Or Pakistan? Or Somalia? Or Palestine?

Our blessed country is currently involved in so many bloody imperial adventures around the world that one needs a scorecard to keep up. Rick Rozoff of StopNATO has provided this for us in some detail.⁴

For this entire century, almost all these anti-American terrorists have been typically referred to as “al-Qaeda”, as if you have to be a member of something called al-Qaeda to resent bombs falling on your house or wedding party; as if there's a precise and meaningful distinction between people retaliating against American terrorism while being a member of al-Qaeda and people retaliating against American terrorism while NOT being a member of al-Qaeda. However, there is not necessarily even such an animal as a “member of al-Qaeda”, albeit there now exists “al-Qaeda in Iraq” and “al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”. Anti-American terrorists do know how to choose a name that attracts attention in the world media, that appears formidable, that scares Americans. Governments have learned to label their

insurgents “al-Qaeda” to start the military aid flowing from Washington, just like they yelled “communist” during the Cold War. And from the perspective of those conducting the War on Terror, the bigger and more threatening the enemy, the better – more funding, greater prestige, enhanced career advancement. Just like with the creation of something called The International Communist Conspiracy.

It’s not just the American bombings, invasions and occupations that spur the terrorists on, but the American torture. Here’s Bowe Robert Bergdahl, US soldier captured in Afghanistan, speaking on a video made by his Taliban captors: He said he had been well-treated, contrasting his fate to that of prisoners held in US military prisons, such as the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. “I bear witness I was continuously treated as a human being, with dignity, and I had nobody deprive me of my clothes and take pictures of me naked. I had no dogs barking at me or biting me as my country has done to their Muslim prisoners in the jails that I have mentioned.”⁵

Of course the Taliban provided the script, but what was the script based on? What inspired them to use such words and images, to make such references?

Cuba. Again. Still. Forever.

More than 50 years now it is. The propaganda and hypocrisy of the American mainstream media seems endless and unwavering. They can not accept the fact that Cuban leaders are humane or rational. Here’s the *Washington Post* of December 13 writing about an American arrested in Cuba:

“The Cuban government has arrested an American citizen working on contract for the U.S. Agency for International Development who was distributing cellphones and laptop computers to Cuban activists. ... Under Cuban law ... a Cuban citizen or a foreign visitor can be arrested for nearly anything under the claim of ‘dangerousness’.”

That sounds just awful, doesn’t it? Imag-

ine being subject to arrest for whatever someone may choose to label “dangerousness”. But the exact same thing has happened repeatedly in the United States since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. We don’t use the word “dangerousness”. We speak of “national security”. Or, more recently, “terrorism”. Or “providing material support to terrorism”.

The arrested American works for Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), a US government contractor that provides services to the State Department, the Pentagon and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2008, DAI was funded by the US Congress to “promote transition to democracy” in Cuba. Yes, Oh Happy Day!, we’re bringing democracy to Cuba just as we’re bringing it to Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2002, DAI was contracted by USAID to work in Venezuela and proceeded to fund the same groups that a few months earlier had worked to stage a coup – temporarily successful – against President Hugo Chávez. DAI performed other subversive work in Venezuela and has also been active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other hotspots. “Subversive” is what Washington would label an organization like DAI if they behaved in the same way in the United States in behalf of a foreign government.⁶

The American mainstream media never makes its readers aware of the following (so I do so repeatedly): The United States is to the Cuban government as al-Qaeda is to the government in Washington, only much more powerful and much closer. Since the Cuban revolution, the United States and anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the US have inflicted upon Cuba greater damage and greater loss of life than what happened in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Cuban dissidents typically have had very close, indeed intimate, political and financial connections to American government agents. Would the US government ignore a group of Americans receiving funds or communication equipment from al-Qaeda and/or engaging in repeated

“I bear witness I was continuously treated as a human being, with dignity, and I had nobody deprive me of my clothes and take pictures of me naked. I had no dogs barking at me or biting me as my country has done to their Muslim prisoners in the jails that I have mentioned”

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

I was invited to attend a book fair in Cuba, where one of my books, newly translated into Spanish, was being presented. However, the government of the United States would not give me permission to go. My application to travel to Cuba had also been rejected in 1998 by the Clinton administration

meetings with known leaders of that organization? In the past few years, the American government has arrested a great many people in the US and abroad solely on the basis of alleged ties to al-Qaeda, with a lot less evidence to go by than Cuba has had with its dissidents' ties to the United States, evidence usually gathered by Cuban double agents. Virtually all of Cuba's "political prisoners" are such dissidents.

The *Washington Post* story continued:

"The Cuban government granted ordinary citizens the right to buy cellphones just last year." Period.

What does one make of such a statement without further information? How could the Cuban government have been so insensitive to people's needs for so many years? Well, that must be just the way a "totalitarian" state behaves. But the fact is that because of the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, with a major loss to Cuba of its foreign trade, combined with the relentless US economic aggression, the Caribbean island was hit by a great energy shortage beginning in the 1990s, which caused repeated blackouts. Cuban authorities had no choice but to limit the sale of energy-hogging electrical devices such as cell phones; but once the country returned to energy sufficiency the restrictions were revoked.

"Cubans who want to log on [to the Internet] often have to give their names to the government."

What does that mean? Americans, thank God, can log onto the Internet without giving their names to the government. Their Internet Service Provider does it for them, furnishing their names to the government, along with their emails, when requested.

"Access to some Web sites is restricted."

Which ones? Why? More importantly, what information might a Cuban discover on the Internet that the government would not want him to know about? I can't imagine. Cubans are in constant touch with relatives in the US, by mail and in person. They get US television programs from Miami. International conferences on all man-

ner of political, economic and social subjects are held regularly in Cuba. What does the American media think is the great secret being kept from the Cuban people by the nasty commie government?

"Cuba has a nascent blogging community, led by the popular commentator Yoani Sánchez, who often writes about how she and her husband are followed and harassed by government agents because of her Web posts. Sánchez has repeatedly applied for permission to leave the country to accept journalism awards, so far unsuccessfully."

According to a well-documented account⁷, Sánchez's tale of government abuse appears rather exaggerated. Moreover, she moved to Switzerland in 2002, lived there for two years, and then voluntarily returned to Cuba. On the other hand, in January 2006 I was invited to attend a book fair in Cuba, where one of my books, newly translated into Spanish, was being presented. However, the government of the United States would not give me permission to go. My application to travel to Cuba had also been rejected in 1998 by the Clinton administration.

"Counterrevolutionary activities', which include mild protests and critical writings, carry the risk of censure or arrest. Anti-government graffiti and speech are considered serious crimes."

Raise your hand if you or someone you know of was ever arrested in the United States for taking part in a protest. And substitute "pro al-Qaeda" for "counterrevolutionary" and for "anti-government" and think of the thousands imprisoned the past eight years by the United States all over the world for ... for what? In most cases there's no clear answer. Or the answer is clear: (a) being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or (b) being turned in to collect a bounty offered by the United States, or (c) thought crimes. And whatever the reason for the imprisonment, they were likely tortured. Even the most fanatical anti-Castroites don't accuse Cuba of that. In the period of the Cuban revolution, since 1959, Cuba has

had one of the very best records on human rights in the hemisphere. See my essay: “The United States, Cuba and this thing called Democracy”.⁸

There’s no case of anyone arrested in Cuba that compares in injustice and cruelty to the arrest in 1998 by the United States government of those who came to be known as the “Cuban Five”, sentenced in Florida to exceedingly long prison terms for trying to stem terrorist acts against Cuba emanating from the US.⁹ It would be lovely if the Cuban government could trade their DAI prisoner for the five. Cuba, on several occasions, has proposed to Washington the exchange of a number of what the US regards as “political prisoners” in Cuba for the five Cubans held in the United States. So far the United States has not agreed to do so. **CT**

William Blum is the author of *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*; *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*; *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*; and *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*.

Notes

1. Michael Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The*

Johnson White House Tapes 1963-1964 (New York, 1997), p.306. All other sources for this section on Gordon can be found in: Washington Post, December 22, 2009, obituary; The Guardian (London), August 31, 2007; William Blum, “Killing Hope”, chapter 27

2. ABC News, December 17, 2009; Washington Post, December 19, 2009
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There's something about Helen ...

89-year-old Helen Thomas shames her media colleagues, but still can't get a straight answer, writes **Ray McGovern**

Thomas posed an adult query that spotlighted the futility of government plans to counter terrorism with more high-tech gizmos and more intrusions on the liberties and privacy of the traveling public

Thank God for Helen Thomas, the only person to show any courage at the White House press briefing after President Barack Obama gave a flaccid account of the intelligence screw-up that almost downed an airliner on Christmas Day.

After Obama briefly addressed L'Affaire Abdulmutallab and wrote "must do better" on the report cards of the national security schoolboys responsible for the near catastrophe, the President turned the stage over to counter-terrorism guru John Brennan and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.

It took 89-year old veteran correspondent Helen Thomas to break through the vapid remarks about channeling "intelligence streams," fixing "no-fly" lists, deploying "behavior detection officers," and buying more body-imaging scanners.

Thomas recognized the John & Janet filibuster for what it was, as her catatonic press colleagues took their customary dictation and asked their predictable questions. Instead, Thomas posed an adult query that spotlighted the futility of government plans to counter terrorism with more high-tech gizmos and more intrusions on the liberties and privacy of the traveling public.

She asked why Abdulmutallab did what he did.

Thomas: "Why do they want to do us

harm? And what is the motivation? We never hear what you find out on why."

Brennan: "Al Qaeda is an organization that is dedicated to murder and wanton slaughter of innocents... They attract individuals like Mr. Abdulmutallab and use them for these types of attacks. He was motivated by a sense of religious sort of drive. Unfortunately, al Qaeda has perverted Islam, and has corrupted the concept of Islam, so that he's (sic) able to attract these individuals. But al Qaeda has the agenda of destruction and death."

Thomas: "And you're saying it's because of religion?"

Brennan: "I'm saying it's because of an al Qaeda organization that used the banner of religion in a very perverse and corrupt way."

Thomas: "Why?"

Brennan: "I think this is a – long issue, but al Qaeda is just determined to carry out attacks here against the homeland."

Thomas: "But you haven't explained why."

Neither did President Obama, nor anyone else in the U.S. political/media hierarchy. All the American public gets is the boilerplate about how evil al Qaeda continues to pervert a religion and entice and exploit impressionable young men.

There is almost no discussion about why so many people in the Muslim world object

to U.S. policies so strongly that they are inclined to resist violently and even resort to suicide attacks.

I had been hoping Obama would say something intelligent about what drove Abdulmutallab to do what he did, but the President limited himself to a few vacuous comments before sending in the clowns. This is what he said before he walked away from the podium:

“It is clear that al Qaeda increasingly seeks to recruit individuals without known terrorist affiliations ... to do their bidding. ... And that’s why we must communicate clearly to Muslims around the world that al Qaeda offers nothing except a bankrupt vision of misery and death ... while the United States stands with those who seek justice and progress. ... That’s the vision that is far more powerful than the hatred of these violent extremists.”

But why it is so hard for Muslims to “get” that message? Why can’t they end their preoccupation with dodging U.S. missiles in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Gaza long enough to reflect on how we are only trying to save them from terrorists while simultaneously demonstrating our commitment to “justice and progress”?

Does a smart fellow like Obama expect us to believe that all we need to do is “communicate clearly to Muslims” that it is al Qaeda, not the U.S. and its allies, that brings “misery and death”? Does any informed person not know that the unprovoked U.S.-led invasion of Iraq killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and displaced 4.5 million from their homes? How is that for “misery and death”?

Rather than a failure to communicate, U.S. officials are trying to rewrite recent history, which seems to be much easier to accomplish with the Washington press corps and large segments of the American population than with the Muslim world.

But why isn’t there a frank discussion by America’s leaders and media about the real motivation of Muslim anger toward the

United States? Why was Helen Thomas the only journalist to raise the touchy but central question of motive?

Peeking behind the screen

We witnessed a similar phenomenon when the 9/11 Commission Report tiptoed into a cautious discussion of possible motives behind the 9/11 attacks. To their credit, the drafters of that report apparently went as far as their masters would allow, in gingerly introducing a major elephant into the room:

“America’s policy choices have consequences. Right or wrong, it is simply a fact that American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American actions in Iraq are dominant staples of popular commentary across the Arab and Muslim world.” (p. 376)

When asked later about the flabby way that last sentence ended, former Congressman Lee Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the 9/11 Commission, explained that there had been a Donnybrook over whether that paragraph could be included at all.

The drafters also squeezed in the reason given by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as to why he “masterminded” the attacks on 9/11:

“By his own account, KSM’s animus toward the United States stemmed ... from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel.”

Would you believe that former Vice President Dick Cheney also has pointed to U.S. support for Israel as one of the “true sources of resentment”? This unique piece of honesty crept into his speech to the American Enterprise Institute on May 21, 2009.

Sure, he also trotted out the bromide that the terrorists hate “all the things that make us a force for good in the world.” But the Israel factor did slip into the speech, perhaps an inadvertent acknowledgement of the Israeli albatross adorning the neck of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Rather than a failure to communicate, U.S. officials are trying to rewrite recent history, which seems to be much easier to accomplish with the Washington press corps and large segments of the American population than with the Muslim world

ASKING QUESTIONS

Salon.com's Glen Greenwald, for example, has complained loudly about "how our blind, endless enabling of Israeli actions fuels terrorism directed at the U.S.," and how it is taboo to point this out

Very few pundits and academicians are willing to allude to this reality, presumably out of fear for their future career prospects.

Former senior CIA officer Paul Pillar, now a professor at Georgetown University, is one of the few willing to refer, in his typically understated way, to "all the other things ... including policies and practices that affect the likelihood that people ... will be radicalized, and will try to act out the anger against us." One has to fill in the blanks regarding what those "other things" are.

But no worries. Secretary Napolitano has a fix for this unmentionable conundrum. It's called "counter-radicalization," which she describes thusly:

"How do we identify someone before they become radicalized to the point where they're ready to blow themselves up with others on a plane? And how do we communicate better American values and so forth ... around the globe?"

Better communication. That's the ticket.

Hypocrisy and Double Talk

But Napolitano doesn't acknowledge the underlying problem, which is that many Muslims have watched Washington's behavior closely for many years and view pious U.S. declarations about peace, justice, democracy and human rights as infuriating examples of hypocrisy and double talk.

So, Washington's sanitized discussion about motives for terrorism seems more intended for the U.S. domestic audience than the Muslim world.

After all, people in the Middle East already know how Palestinians have been mistreated for decades; how Washington has propped up Arab dictatorships; how Muslims have been locked away at Guantanamo without charges; how the U.S. military has killed civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere; how U.S. mercenaries have escaped punishment for slaughtering innocents.

The purpose of U.S. "public diplomacy" appears more designed to shield Ameri-

cans from this unpleasant reality, offering instead feel-good palliatives about the beneficence of U.S. actions.

Most American journalists and politicians go along with the charade out of fear that otherwise they would be accused of lacking patriotism or sympathizing with "the enemy."

Commentators who are neither naïve nor afraid are simply shut out of the Fawning Corporate Media (FCM). Salon.com's Glen Greenwald, for example, has complained loudly about "how our blind, endless enabling of Israeli actions fuels terrorism directed at the U.S.," and how it is taboo to point this out.

Greenwald recently called attention to a little-noticed Associated Press report on the possible motives of the 23-year-old Nigerian Abdulmutallab. The report quoted his Yemeni friends to the effect that he was "not overtly extremist." But they noted that he was open about his sympathies toward the Palestinians and his anger over Israel's actions in Gaza.

Former CIA specialist on al Qaeda, Michael Scheuer, has been still more outspoken on what he sees as Israel's tying down the American Gulliver in the Middle East. Speaking Monday on C-SPAN, he complained bitterly that any debate on the issue of American support for Israel and its effects is normally squelched.

Scheuer added that the Israel Lobby had just succeeded in getting him removed from his job at the Jamestown Foundation think tank for saying that Obama was "doing what I call the Tel Aviv Two-Step."

More to the point, Scheuer asserted:

"For anyone to say that our support for Israel doesn't hurt us in the Muslim world ... is to just defy reality."

Beyond loss of work, those who speak out can expect ugly accusations. The Israeli media network Arutz Sheva, which is considered the voice of the settler movement, weighed in strongly, branding Scheuer's C-SPAN remarks "blatantly anti-Semitic."

As for media squelching, I continue to be

amazed at how otherwise informed folks express total surprise when I refer them to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's statement about his motivation for attacking the United States, as cited on page 147 of the 9/11 Commission Report. Here is the full sentence (shortened above):

"By his own account, KSM's animus toward the United States stemmed not from his experience there as a student, but rather from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel."

One can understand how even those following such things closely can get confused. On Aug. 30, 2009, five years after the 9/11 Commission Report was released, readers of the neoconservative *Washington Post* were given a diametrically different view, based on what the Post called "an intelligence summary:"

"KSM's limited and negative experience in the United States – which included a brief jail-stay because of unpaid bills – almost certainly helped propel him on his path to becoming a terrorist ... He stated that his contact with Americans, while minimal, confirmed his view that the United States was a debauched and racist country."

Apparently, the *Post* found this revisionist version politically more convenient, in that it obscured Mohammed's other explanation implicating "U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel." It's much more comforting to view KSM as a disgruntled visitor who nursed his personal grievances into justification for mass murder.

An unusually candid view of the dangers accruing from the U.S. identification with Israel's policies appeared five years ago in an unclassified study published by the Pentagon-appointed U.S. Defense Science Board on Sept. 23, 2004. Contradicting President George W. Bush, the board stated:

"Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and

the longstanding, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf States.

"Thus, when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy."

Abdulmutallab's attack

Getting back to Abdulmutallab and his motive in trying to blow up the airliner, how was this individual without prior terrorist affiliations suddenly transformed into an international terrorist ready to die while killing innocents?

If, as John Brennan seems to suggest, al Qaeda terrorists are hard-wired at birth for the "wanton slaughter of innocents," how are they also able to jump-start a privileged 23-year old Nigerian, inculcate in him the acquired characteristics of a terrorist, and persuade him to do the bidding of al Qaeda/Persian Gulf?

As indicated above, the young Nigerian seems to have had particular trouble with Israel's wanton slaughter of more than a thousand civilians in Gaza a year ago, a brutal campaign that was defended in Washington as justifiable self-defense.

Moreover, it appears that Abdulmutallab is not the only anti-American "terrorist" so motivated. When the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al Qaeda announced that they were uniting into "al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula," their combined rhetoric railed against the Israeli attack on Gaza.

And on Dec. 30, Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi, a 32-year-old Palestinian-born Jordanian physician, killed seven American CIA operatives and one Jordanian intelligence officer near Khost, Afghanistan, when he detonated a suicide bomb.

Though most U.S. media stories treated al-Balawi as a fanatical double agent driven by irrational hatreds, other motivations could be gleaned by carefully reading articles about his personal history.

Al-Balawi's mother told Agence France-

The young Nigerian seems to have had particular trouble with Israel's wanton slaughter of more than a thousand civilians in Gaza a year ago, a brutal campaign that was defended in Washington as justifiable self-defense

ASKING QUESTIONS

Does Helen Thomas deserve an adult answer to her question about motive? Has President Obama been able to assimilate all this?

Ray McGovern works with *Tell the Word*, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. During his career as a CIA analyst, he prepared and briefed the President's Daily Brief and chaired National Intelligence Estimates. He is a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). This article appeared first at Consortiumnews.com

Presse that her son had never been an “extremist.” Al-Balawi’s widow, Defne Bayrak, made a similar statement to *Newsweek*. In a *New York Times* article, al-Balawi’s brother was quoted as describing him as a “very good brother” and a “brilliant doctor.”

Stared to change

So what led al-Balawi to take his own life in order to kill U.S. and Jordanian intelligence operatives?

Al-Balawi’s widow said her husband “started to change” after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. His brother said al-Balawi “changed” during last year’s three-week-long Israeli offensive in Gaza, which killed about 1,300 Palestinians. When al-Balawi volunteered with a medical organization to treat injured Palestinians in Gaza, he was arrested by Jordanian authorities, his brother said.

It was after that arrest that the Jordanian intelligence service apparently coerced or “recruited” al-Balawi to become a spy who would penetrate al Qaeda’s hierarchy and provide actionable intelligence to the CIA.

“If you catch a cat and put it in a corner, she will jump on you,” the brother said in explaining why al-Balawi would turn to suicide attack.

“My husband was anti-American; so am I,” his widow told *Newsweek*. Her two little girls would grow up fatherless, but she had no regrets.

Answering Helen

Are we starting to get the picture of what the United States is up against in the Muslim world?

Does Helen Thomas deserve an adult answer to her question about motive? Has President Obama been able to assimilate all this?

Or is the U.S. political/media establishment incapable of confronting this reality and/or taking meaningful action to alleviate the underlying causes of the violence?

Is the reported reaction of a CIA official

to al-Balawi’s attack the appropriate one: “Last week’s attack will be avenged. Some very bad people will eventually have a very bad day.”

Revenge has not always turned out very well in the past.

Does anyone remember the brutal killing of four Blackwater contractors on March 31, 2004, when they took a bad turn and ended up in the wrong neighborhood of the Iraqi city of Fallujah – and how U.S. forces virtually leveled that large city in retribution after George W. Bush won his second term the following November?

If you read only the Fawning Corporate Media, you would blissfully think that the killing of the four Blackwater operatives was the work of fanatical animals who got – along with their neighbors – the reprisal they deserved. You wouldn’t know that the killings represented the second turn in that specific cycle of violence.

On March 22, 2004, Israeli forces assassinated the then-spiritual leader of Hamas in Gaza, Sheikh Yassin – a withering old man, blind and confined to a wheelchair.

That murder, plus sloppy navigation by the Blackwater men, set the stage for the next set of brutalities. The Blackwater operatives were killed by a group that described itself as the “Sheikh Yassin Revenge Brigade.”

Pamphlets and posters were all over the scene of the attack; one of the trucks that pulled around body parts of the mercenaries had a large poster photo of Yassin in its window, as did store fronts all over Fallujah.

We can wish Janet Napolitano luck with her “counter-radicalization” project and President Obama with his effort to “communicate clearly to Muslims,” but there will be no diminution in the endless cycles of violence unless legitimate grievances are addressed on all sides.

It would certainly also help if the American people were finally let in on the root causes for what otherwise gets portrayed as unprovoked savagery by Muslims. **CT**

Brutus: The man who would reclaim sport

Dave Zirin pays tribute to Dennis Brutus, the ‘Dark Genius’ who changed international sports forever

It was 1976, and the Summer Olympics in Montreal had improbably become ground zero in the struggle against apartheid. Several dozen African nations threatened to boycott if the International Olympic Committee dared allow South Africa to be a part of the games.

Montreal’s athletic jamboree was in jeopardy and the cause of all the tumult, according to *Sports Illustrated*, was a diminutive South African poet the magazine called “the Dark Genius of Dissent.” His name was Dennis Brutus. Brutus organized entire blocks of the world around a simple question: how can the Olympics say they stand for “brotherhood” and fair play if apartheid nations could join the festivities? It worked.

The “Dark Genius” shamed the shameless and changed international sports forever. Over the course of decades, as a dissident, refugee, and political prisoner, Brutus advanced this simple athletic argument. The organizations he founded, the South African Sports Association (SASA) in 1958 and its successor, the South African Nonracial Olympic Committee, (SANROC) used it to hammer critical nails in apartheid’s coffin.

For Brutus, this work in the sports world was merely an extension of a lifetime organizing for racial and economic justice. His death on December 26th after a long bout

with cancer has created an incalculable void. Not merely because he was beloved as the “singing voice of the South African Liberation Movement”; not merely because Brutus held a reservoir of political lessons; but because he remained a tireless agitator for justice.

Days before the recent international climate talks in Copenhagen, the ailing Brutus called the proceedings a sham, saying, “We are in serious difficulty all over the planet. We are going to say to the world: There’s too much of profit, too much of greed, too much of suffering by the poor. ... The people of the planet must be in action.”

Ideals of sport

He also never stopped holding up the dreamy ideals of sport against reality’s harsh light. Up until the final days of his life, while the leaders of South Africa celebrated the coming arrival of the 2010 World Cup, Brutus was in the streets, protesting the demolition of low income housing to make way for soccer’s international party. In December 2007, he publicly rejected induction in the South African Sports Hall of Fame, saying to 1,000 onlookers,

“Being inducted to a sports hall of fame is an honor under most circumstances. In my case the honor is for helping rid South African sport of racism, making it open to all. So I cannot be party to an event where

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TRIBUTE

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unapologetic racists are also honored, or to join a hall of fame alongside those who flourished under racist sport. Their inclusion is a deception because of their unfair advantage, as so many talented black athletes were excluded from sport opportunities. Moreover, this hall ignores the fact that some sportspersons and administrators defended, supported and legitimized apartheid.

“There are indeed some famous South Africans who still belong in a sports hall of infamy. They still think they are sports heroes, without understanding and making amends for the context in which they became so heroic, namely a crime against humanity. So, case closed. It is incompatible to have those who championed racist sport alongside its genuine victims. It’s time—indeed long past time—for sports truth, apologies and reconciliation.”

Blunt and provocative

I had the privilege to interview Brutus extensively three years ago about why he came to see sports as an arena to fight for justice.

His answer was, I have come to learn, typical Dennis Brutus: refusing to be anything less than blunt and provocative. I asked him whether he agreed with me that sports could still be a lever to change the world. Instead of cheerleading the notion, he said to me,

“My own sense is that sports has less capacity now to change society than it had before. For instance, the degree that sports has become commercialized. The degree that your loyalty is no longer to a club like it used to be because guys are bought and sold like so many slaves. . . . The other thing that really scares me is the way that sport is used to divert people’s attention. Critical political issues in their own lives. Their

living conditions. The Romans used to say this is the way to run an empire. Give them bread give them circuses. Now they don’t even give you bread and the circuses are lousy. . . .”

But amidst his critiques, Brutus was never a pessimist, only a “critical optimist.” How else to explain that in his next breath, he also said to me,

“We must however realize that the power and reach of sports is undeniable . . . It’s kind of a megaphone. People will hear [political athletes] because their voices are amplified. Not always in a very informed way. Of course when there are exceptions, it can produce magic: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for instance or Muhammad Ali. So it does help and they do have that megaphone: but all-important is content. All-important is politics. That is decisive.”

There are ways to honor Dennis Brutus and his memory. Read aloud his poetry at the first opportunity. Keep his words alive to “produce magic” for a new generation. Keep fighting for a global justice. And keep fighting to reclaim sports.

As people are criminalized in Vancouver to make way for the 2010 Olympics, as the poor are dispossessed in the name of the 2010 World Cup, we should proudly claim Dennis’s well-worn place at the march, never allowing those in power the comfort of indifference. As Dennis said to me when I asked him how he could stay so active into his 80s, “This is no time for laurels. This is no time for rest.” **CT**

Dave Zirin is the sports correspondent for the Nation magazine. Reach him at edgeofsports@gmail.com

To purchase Brutus’s collection, Poetry and Protest, go to www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Poetry-and-Protest-A-Dennis-Brutus-Reader

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An exhibition of spent tear gas grenades and projectiles in the village of Bil'in for which Abu Rahmah was indicted. *Picture: Oren Ziv / ActiveStills.org*

**“What’s next?
Charging
protesters
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Abdallah Abu Rahmah, a school teacher and coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall, was indicted in an Israeli military court on an arms possession charge for collecting used tear gas canisters shot at demonstrators in Bil'in by the army and showcasing them in his home.

On receiving the indictment Adv. Gaby Lasky, Abu Rahmah's lawyer said that “the army shoots at unarmed demonstrators, and when they try to show the world the violence used against them by collecting presenting the remnants – they are persecuted and prosecuted. What's next? Charging protesters money for the bullets shot at them?”

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