

WHEN THE SHARKS SMELL BLOOD | JONATHAN COOK
THEN THEY CAME FOR THE GLOBALISTS | CJ HOPKINS
MAKING ATROCITIES GREAT AGAIN | REBECCA GORDON

ISSUE 157

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APRIL 2018

BORDER CROSSINGS

- With the Undocumented:
a photo essay by John Moore
- One man against the wall
by Chellis Glendinning

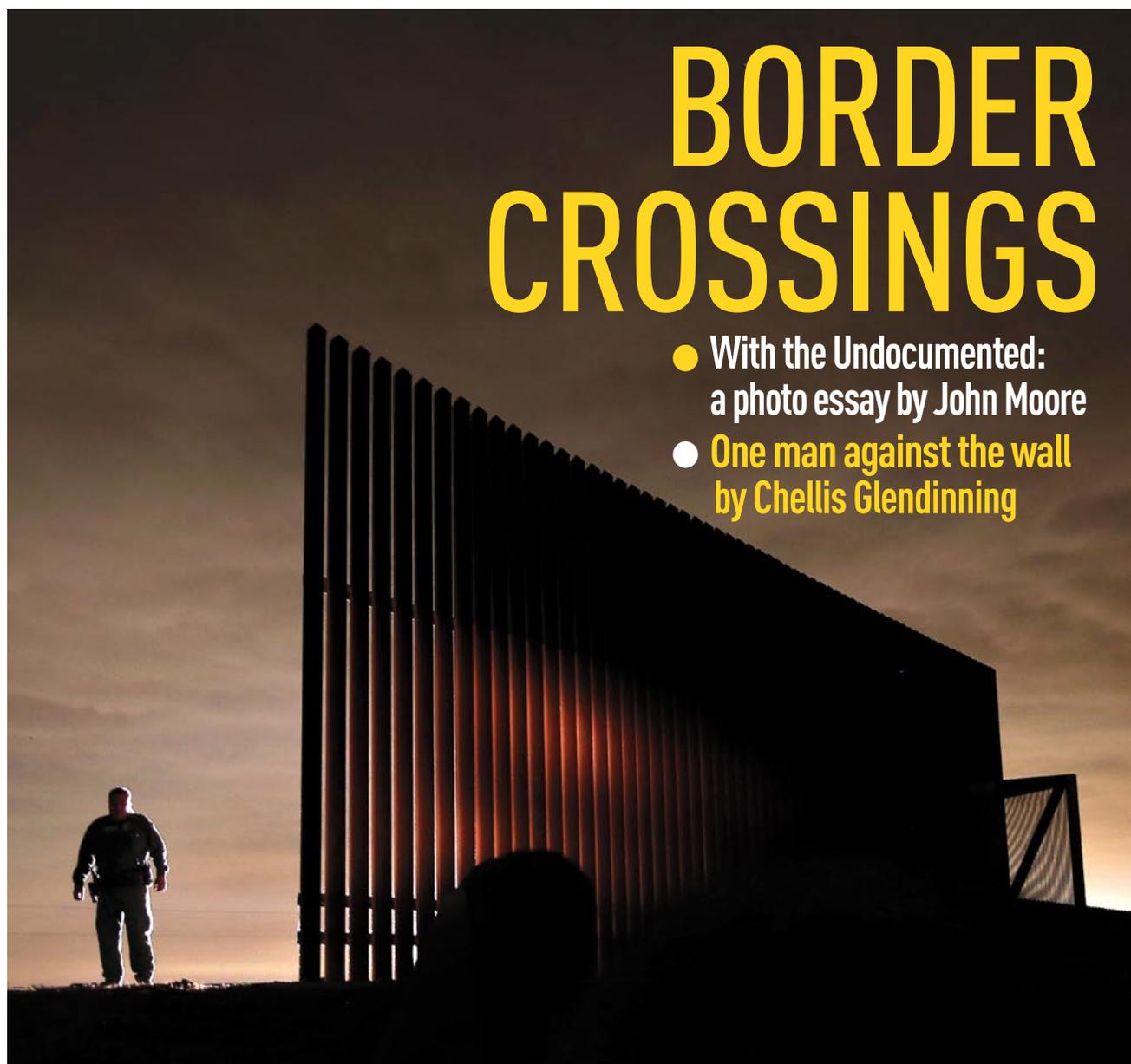


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The sharks scent blood

How Jeremy Corbyn caved in to pressure from the Labour Party's Blairite faction and Israel's media cheerleaders

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After a short reprieve following Jeremy Corbyn's unexpected success in Britain's general election last year, when he only narrowly lost the popular vote, most of the Labour parliamentary party are back, determined to bring him down. And once again, they are being joined in full battle cry by the corporate media.

At the beginning of March, Corbyn was a Russian spy. Just weeks later, we're in more familiar territory, even if it has a new twist: Corbyn is not only a friend to antisemites, it seems, but now he has been outed as a closet one himself.

In short, the Blairites in the parliamentary party are stepping up their game. Corbyn's social justice agenda, his repudiation of neoconservative wars of aggression masquerading as "humanitarianism" – lining the coffers of the west's military-industrial elites – is a genuine threat to those who run our societies from the shadows.

The knife of choice for the Labour backstabbers this time is a wall mural removed from East London in 2012. At that time, before he became Labour leader, Corbyn expressed support on



Facebook for the artist, Kalen Ockerman, known as Mear One. Corbyn observed that a famous anti-capitalist mural by the left-wing Mexican artist Diego Rivera was similarly removed from Manhattan's Rockefeller Center in 1934.

Interestingly, the issue of Corbyn's support for the mural – or at least the artist – originally flared in late 2015, when the Jewish Chronicle unearthed his Facebook post. Two things were noticeably different about the coverage then.

First, on that occasion, no one apart from the Jewish Chronicle appeared to show much interest in the issue. Its "scoop" was not followed up



GETTING THE FACTS WRONG: Jeremy Corbyn was slammed by Jewish institutions, mainstream newspapers and the BBC for supporting this mural (above) in London's East End by graffiti artist Kalen Ockerman, aka Mear One, which they claimed depicted Jewish bankers playing Monopoly on the backs of the poor. However, they didn't examine the mural, being more concerned, it seems, about the nose shapes of the bankers. Embarrassingly for them, Ockerman later identified the men he depicted in the mural as "turn of the century Robber Barons Rothschild, Rockefeller, Morgan, Carnegie, Warburg, as well Aleister Crowley who was a kind of philosophical guru to the ruling elite of that time and a well-known Satanist." Only two of them were Jewish! – TS

by the rest of the media. What is now supposedly a major scandal, one that raises questions about Corbyn's fitness to be Labour leader, was a non-issue two years ago, when it first became known.

Second, the Jewish Chronicle, usually so ready to get exercised at the smallest possible sign of antisemitism, wasn't entirely convinced back in 2015 that the mural was antisemitic. In fact, it suggested only that the mural might have

JONATHAN COOK

“antisemitic undertones” – and attributed even that claim to Corbyn’s critics.

And rather than claiming, as the entire corporate media is now, that the mural depicted a cabal of Jewish bankers, the Chronicle then described the scene as “a group of businessmen and bankers sitting around a Monopoly-style board and counting money.” By contrast, the Guardian abandoned normal reporting conventions on March 24 to state in its news – rather than comment – pages unequivocally that the mural was “obviously antisemitic.”

Not that anyone is listening now, but the artist himself, Kalen Ockerman, has said that the group in his mural comprised historical figures closely associated with banking. His mural, he says, was about “class and privilege,” and the figures depicted included both “Jewish and .white Anglos.” The fact that he included famous bankers such as the Rothschilds (Jewish) and the Rockefellers (not Jewish) does not, on the face of it, seem to confirm antisemitism. They are simply the most prominent of the banking dynasties most people, myself included, could name. These families are about as closely identified with capitalism as it is possible to be.

There is an argument to be had about the responsibilities of artists – even street artists – to be careful in their visual representations. But Ockerman’s message was not a subtle or nuanced one. He was depicting class war, the war the capitalist class wages every day on the weak and poor. If Ockerman’s message is inflammatory, it is much less so than the reality of how our societies have been built on the backs and the suffering of the majority.

Corbyn has bowed to his critics – a mix of the Blairites within his party and Israel’s cheerleaders – and apologised for offering support to Ockerman, just as he has caved in to pressure each time the antisemitism card has been played against him.

This may look like wise, or safe, politics to his advisers. But these critics have only two possible outcomes that will satisfy them. Either Corbyn is harried from the party leadership, or he is intim-

idated into diluting his platform into irrelevance – he becomes just another compromised politician catering to the interests of the one percent.

The sharks circling around him will not ignore the scent of his bloodied wounds; rather, it will send them into a feeding frenzy. As hard as it is to do when the elites so clearly want him destroyed, Corbyn must find his backbone and start to stand his ground.

UPDATE: This piece in the liberal Israeli newspaper Haaretz by their senior columnist Anshel Pfeffer sums up a lot of the sophistry (intentional or otherwise) underscoring the conflation of leftwing critiques of neoliberalism and globalism with rightwing ultra-nationalism and antisemitism.

Pfeffer writes: “The conspiracy theories of globalist bankers utilising mainstream media and corrupt neoliberal politicians to serve their selfish sinister purposes, rather than those of ordinary people, are identical whether from left or right.

“And on either side, most of the theorists will never admit to being anti-Semitic. They are just ‘anti-racist’ or ‘anti-imperialist’ if on the left, or “pro-Israel” on the right. And most of them really believe they have nothing against Jews, even while parroting themes straight out of the Protocols [of the Elders of Zion].”

Notice the problem here. If you are a radical leftist who believes, as generations of leftists before you have done, that military, political, media, and financial elites operate in the shadows to promote their interests, to wage class war, then not only are you a conspiracy theorist, according to Pfeffer, but you are by definition antisemitic as well. If you believe that an Establishment or a Deep State exists to advance its interests against the great majority, you must hate Jews.

The logic of Corbyn’s critics has rarely been articulated so forthrightly and so preposterously as it is here by Pfeffer. But make no mistake, this is the logic of his critics. **CT**

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Jonathan Cook is a Nazareth-based journalist and winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His web site is www.jonathan-cook.net

Then they came for the globalists

I'm now a Nazi thoughtcriminal, according to the corporate media and the Anti Defamation League

Thank God for the corporate media. If it wasn't for them, and the ADL, I'd have probably never discovered that I'm a Nazi. Apparently, I've been one for quite some time ... which is weird, as I had no idea. Here I was, naively believing that I'd been writing about global capitalism and the realignment of political power and ideology in the post-Cold War world, when all along I had really just been persecuting the Jews. I didn't think I was persecuting the Jews. But such is the insidious nature of thought-crime. When you're a Nazi thought criminal (as I apparently am), it doesn't matter what you think you're thinking. What matters is what the global capitalist ruling classes tell you you're thinking, which it turns out is often a lot more complicated and horrible than what you thought you were thinking.

For example, I've been thinking and writing about globalism, which most dictionaries define as "a national policy of treating the whole world as a proper sphere for political influence," or "the development of socioeconomic networks that transcend national boundaries," or something like that ... which was more or less my understanding of the term. Little did I know that these fake "definitions" had been infiltrated into these dictionaries by discord-sowing Strasserist agents to dupe political satirists like myself into unknowingly spreading antisemitism as part of Putin's Master Plan to destroy the United States of America and establish worldwide Nazi domination.

Fortunately, the lexicography experts in the corporate media and the Anti-Defamation League cleared that up for me earlier this month. According to these experts, words like "globalist" and "globalism" don't really mean anything. They are simply Nazi code words for "the Jews." There is actually no such thing as "globalism," or "global capitalism," or "transnational capitalism," or "supranational quasi-governmental entities" such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank ... or, OK, sure, there are such entities, but there is no legitimate reason to discuss them, or write about them, or even casually mention them, and anyone who does is definitely a Nazi.

Now, imagine my horror when I took that in, especially given my repeated references to "the corporatocracy," "global capitalism," and "the global capitalist ruling classes" in the essays I've been publishing recently. I didn't want to accept it at first, but the more "authoritative sources" I consulted, the more glaringly obvious my thoughtcrimes became.

These authoritative sources were reacting to Trump referring to Gary Cohn as "a globalist" in his rambling remarks in the Oval Office, which went a little something like this: "He may be a globalist, but I still like him. He is seriously a globalist. There's no question ... in his own way. But you know what, he's also a nationalist. He

loves our country and ... where is Gary?" While the experts are still scouring the video for Nazi gestures and facial expressions, there can be no doubt that Trump said the word "globalist." The corporate media and the ADL could not allow this transgression to stand.

Peter Beinart, writing in the Atlantic magazine, explained that "globalist" is "an epithet ... a modern-day vessel for a slur" against the Jews, and he linked to a video of Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the ADL, who verified that "the term 'globalist' was developed and originated in extremist circles populated by white supremacists" (by which I can only assume he meant the Anti-globalisation Movement, which apparently is just a big Nazi front). Eli Rosenberg, in the Washington Post, although allowing that "globalist" can sometimes mean "globalist," emphasised that, "to some observers of extremism," it also "speaks to something darker." Bret Stephens, in the New York Times, couldn't quite decide whether using the word makes you an official goose-stepping Nazi or just a garden variety antisemite. CNN's Don Lemon, delving into "the ugly history" of the word, explained that "it is shorthand for a worldview based on racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism" ... the worldview of "far right conspiracy theorists obsessed with prominent Jews like George Soros." And these are just a few of the many examples.

After processing all these "authoritative" statements by these "respected experts" and "credible news sources," I felt like I'd been walking around with a swastika branded into my forehead. I was overcome by a sudden need to signal my anti-antisemitism to my friends, family, and the world at large. After destroying my old Pink Floyd CDs and apologising to Jerry Seinfeld on Twitter, I immediately ran and confessed to my wife, who just happens to be "a globalist," and begged her to call her family members who control the media, the banks, and Hollywood and ask them to forgive me my thoughtcrimes. Then I drafted an email to the SPLC asking whether they could possibly squeeze me into their interactive Hate Map somewhere, or at least let some

neo-McCarthyite hack publish a ridiculous, paranoid smear piece about my Nazi vocabulary on their website.

Seriously, though, all satire aside, this stigmatisation of terms such as "globalist," "globalism," and "global capitalism" is a key component of The War on Dissent that the global capitalist ruling classes have been waging against a broad assortment of insurgent elements for the last 18 months. It isn't just a question of delegitimising dissidents by smearing them as antisemites, Russian agents, and conspiracy theorists. The goal is also to conceal the essential nature of the conflict itself. The essential nature of the conflict is neoliberalism versus neo-nationalism. This is what we are experiencing currently, not a Russian assault on Western democracy, nor even a resumption of the Cold War, but, rather, the global capitalist ruling classes putting down a neo-nationalist insurgency ... the insurgency that led to the Brexit referendum and the presidency of Donald Trump.

I felt like I'd been walking around with a swastika branded into my forehead

Now, here's where things get a little tricky, particularly for those of us on the Left (whatever that label even means anymore). The neo-nationalists can come right out and call the conflict what it is. It is in their interest to call it what it is. They may not be opposing capitalism, but they are certainly opposing global capitalism. In doing so, they are attracting people who are not so thrilled about being governed by unaccountable global corporations and supranational non-governmental bodies, people who are still emotionally attached to such outdated concepts as national sovereignty, national culture, and crazy stuff like that. Some of these folks are actual neo-Nazis, but most of them are just regular people who know when they are being pissed on by global capitalism and told it's raining. The point is, the neo-nationalists can describe their opponents as exactly what they are, global capitalists, or just plain old glo-

balists. Neoliberals do not have this luxury.

See, the problem for the capitalist ruling classes is that global neoliberalism (ie, globalism) is a really tough sell to regular folks. They can't just come out and explain to people that national sovereignty is essentially dead, and that political power now resides among a network of global corporations (which couldn't care less about their "nationality") exploiting a globalised labour market (which is why their "good jobs" are not coming back) and a globalised financial market (which is why almost everything is being privatised and their families are being debtenslaved). Nor can they admit that the "War on Terror" and the European refugee crisis it has caused, and the chaos and slaughter in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Syria, et cetera, is the predictable result of global capitalism aggressively restructuring the Greater Middle East, which it started doing more or less immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union (ie, as soon as the final impediment to its pursuit of global hegemony was removed). This kind of thing doesn't go over very well, not with most regular working class people.

So what the global capitalist ruling classes have to do is ... well, they have to lie. They have to disseminate a different narrative, one that has nothing to do with the hegemony of global capitalism, the dissolution of national sovereignty, and the privatisation of virtually everything. Because people aren't total morons, this narrative needs to bear some resemblance to the actual conflict taking place. So, all right, a little rebranding is in order. Global neoliberalism becomes "Western democracy," neo-nationalism becomes "Nazism," and Vladimir Putin becomes Adolf Hitler.

Presto! Now things are nice and simple! History, geopolitics, and socioeconomics vanish into the ether! Capitalism schmapitalism! This is no time for critical thinking, not with Putin-Nazis coming out of the woodwork! No, this is a time to rally behind the freedom fighters at the FBI, the CIA, the corporate media, and the rest of the military industrial complex, and to mercilessly

hunt down Russian infiltrators, Putin sympathizers, crypto-Assadists, neo-Strasserian, alt-right entryists, and other sowers of division and discord! We need to get these folks delegitimised, stigmatised as racists and anti-Semites, or terrorists, or some other type of "extremist," before they can "influence" anyone else with their Facebook ads and subversive essays.

Go back and read through some of my essays and make note of all the coded Nazi messages

You will know them by the words they use, and by the words they do not use. Anybody using words like "globalist," "global capitalism," or "neoliberal," or suggesting that anyone voted for Trump or Brexit for any reason other than racism, you can pretty much rest assured that they're Nazis. Also, anyone writing about "banks" or the "deep state." Absolutely Nazis. Oh yeah, and the "corporate media," naturally. Only Putin-Nazis talk like that. Oh, and definitely anyone who hasn't spent the last two years attacking Trump (as if there has been anything else to focus on), or has implied that "the Russians" aren't out to destroy us, or that the historical moment we are living through might be just a bit more complex than that ... well, you know what they're really saying. They're saying, "we need to exterminate the Jews."

Look, I could go on and on with this, but I don't think I really need to. Remember, I'm a Nazi thoughtcriminal now. So just go back and read through some of my essays and make note of all the coded Nazi messages, or check with the Anti-Defamation League, or the SPLC, or the corporate media, or ... well, just ask the good folks at Google.

CT

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JOHN MOORE

Photographs: John Moore, Getty Images



Undocumented immigrants comfort each other after being detained by Border Patrol agents in Weslaco, Texas.

On the border

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A new book, **Undocumented**, tracks the daunting and dangerous journeys of migrants fleeing from Mexico and Central America to the United States

COVER STORY

John Moore, a special correspondent with Getty Images, has spent much of the past decade focusing on the problems facing undocumented immigrants on their arduous treks from Mexico and Central America to the United States. Now his gripping photographs have been published in a new book, **Undocumented: Immigration And The Militarization Of The United States – Mexico Border**, a large-format photo-narrative, which highlights the risky travels of many brave and often-desperate refugees.

Moore's access to immigrants at all points of their journey, along with ICE agents, Border Patrol agents, the immigration service and dozens of NGOs, has resulted in a **stunning** set of photographs and mini-essays that demolish the

ill-chosen words of Donald Trump, who declared war on illegal immigration and Mexican 'rapists' as he descended an escalator at Trump Tower, when he announced his candidacy for president.

The world was surprised when Trump won the election, "But for many of the 11-million undocumented immigrants living in the US, the results were more terrifying than surprising," writes Moore, adding, "Many undocumented immigrants have been in the United States for decades and have children who are American citizens. Most speak two languages. Most



The body of a man killed in a suspected drug-related execution lies along the path where he was shot in Acapulco, Mexico – formerly a top international tourist destination.

Photo: John Moore, Getty Images

work full-time, most pay state and local taxes. Most are law-abiding, and most contribute to society in equal measure to those who were born here. Most draw far fewer government benefits than their American counterparts.

“As recently as a couple years ago, many Americans had come to believe we’d moved beyond the crass jargon and open racism of the past, the spectre of deportation forces and the demonisation of this vulnerable population is familiar to undocumented immigrant communities. Even a routine

traffic stop by a local policeman could change their lives forever. The moral arc of history does not consistently move in one direction.”

In the face of such official hostility to their plight when they arrive in the US, often to perform tasks that no American will undertake, it’s excusable to ask, Why do they do it? Yes, the main reason for the exodus is a desire to escape from poverty, and to fulfill the universal desire to create a bet-



12 A man in Tijuana, Mexico, looks through the border fence onto the beach in San Diego, California

ter life for yourself and for your children; but it's not just poverty that has forced people to flee their homes – increased violence plays a major part. Moore informs us, “In Honduras, San Pedro Sula has been called ‘the murder capital of the world,’ Rival gangs control, at least on the street level, the majority of the country.” He adds, ironically, “Two of the more lethal gangs – Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 – began in the immigrant communities of Los Angeles, and were launched locally only when members were deported back to Central America. Both demand loyalty from local teens. If young people refuse to join, they often must migrate, or die.”

The trip north is fraught with danger. Some refugees travel on freight trains, known as La Bestia (the Beast), travelling for weeks on top of the trains. Moore joined some of them for part of their journey to safety, “La Bestia slows as it comes out of a turn then crosses a two-lane road. My driver brings me

to this particular place because he thinks I'll have a better chance here of not falling under the churning wheels when I try to climb on the roof of a moving train to join 500 or so immigrants. People on top make space for me.

“Hundreds of thousands of them have risked their lives on train tops. If they are lucky, they reach the US-Mexico border unscathed. Many fall asleep and roll off the side, losing a hand or arm or leg. Overhanging branches knock some people off.

“When I climb down at the next stop, I am parched, exhausted, uneasy on my feet. I had ridden The Beast for only three hours. The migrants ride for weeks on their journey *al norte*.”

Moore's photographs show us the explicit hostility of the terrain over which other fleeing migrants must travel. “The border winds along the Rio Grande in Texas, rises up and over mountains, crosses deserts, and stretches into the Pacific approximately 2,000 miles from where it started. The Rio Grande forms more than half of the border's total length. Along the most southern stretch of river,



A boy from Honduras watches a movie at a detention facility in McAllen, Texas. Customs and Border Protection opened the holding centre to temporarily house children, after tens of thousands of families and unaccompanied minors from Central America surged into the United States, seeking political asylum

the Rio Grande Valley, is where most undocumented immigrants cross over. Unforgiving terrain and unpredictable weather account for a good share of the danger they face when attempting the journey toward a better life.”

Near where the fence reaches its western end between San Diego and Tijuana, Moore tells us that during in the 1990s, this was the busiest sector for illegal immigration of any place along the border. “Now, the illicit ‘traffic’ there is negligible, thanks to a double fence, banks of surveillance cameras mounted on towers, and border agents on horse-

back and ATVs. The smugglers simply relocated their routes to Arizona, then Texas.”

In recent years the border has been heavily militarised, the Border Patrol swelled by former servicemen returning from action in various American wars. “Though the Border Patrol is the most visible, it’s just one of a number of federal agencies under the umbrella of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).” says Moore. “Another is made up of ‘air interdiction agents’ from the US Air and Marine



Mexican migrant workers harvest organic parsley in Wellington, Colorado. Many farmers nationwide say they have found it nearly impossible to hire American citizens for seasonal, labor-intensive farm work

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Operations (AMO) – known as ‘Omaha’ – who pilot everything from modernised Vietnam-era Huey helicopters to Predator drones. They employ high-powered cameras to guide on-the-ground Border Patrol agents pursuing undocumented immigrants and drug smugglers.”

Methods of tracking down immigrants range from the traditional – checking wind and humidity to determine the freshness of tracks – to high-tech reliance on Aerostat balloons repurposed from military use in Afghanistan and Iraq. They fly above the border, beaming images from infrared cameras to agents’ vehicle LCD screens. Miniature cameras hidden in trees capture photos of immigrants, revealing their locations on the smartphones of nearby agents.

Even after the migrants manage to slip through the border, they live in fear of being caught, detained and sent home. Moore tells of meeting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at Starbucks at 5:00 a.m. one day. “They describe their strategy over coffee – stake out the target at his home and then snag him on his way to his car. Out in the open, agents don’t need



Elvira Lopez lost a leg after falling from the roof of a moving train, which she was riding through Mexico.

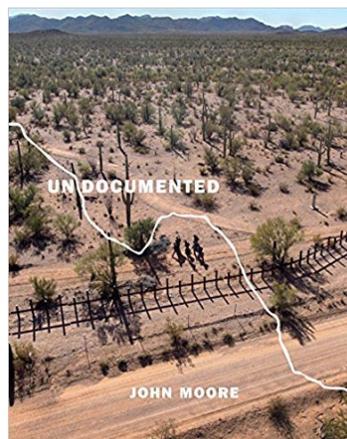


A US Border Patrol agent stands near a portion of the US-Mexico border fence near La Joya, Texas during a night patrol in the Rio Grande Valley.

a warrant.

“It’s going down this way more and more nationwide. In New York, ICE agents arrested a 19-year-old high school student – a citizen of Ecuador – a couple of hours before his prom. ‘He’s not a criminal,’ his cousin pleaded with police. ‘He’s just a kid.’ In the past, ICE wouldn’t bother with students like him. The Trump administration, however, has more than doubled the arrests of ‘noncriminal aliens’ from the final year of the Obama administration. President Trump has called for an additional 10,000 new agents.”

Moore ends his epic work with a message for his fellow countrymen, “Americans who strive for ‘liberty and justice for all’ should choose their leaders with care. Our nation built on immigrants depends on it.” I think few readers of this brilliant, eye-opening volume will disagree. – **Tony Sutton**



UNDOCUMENTED
Immigration
And
The Militarization
Of The United
States – Mexico
Border

John Moore

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John Moore has worked in more than 70 countries over 25 years. His work has won many awards, including a 2005 Pulitzer as member of the AP photo team that covered the war in Iraq.

CHELLIS GLENDINNING

How to cross the border

An excerpt from the soon-to-be-published book, *The History Makers: Meetings with Remarkable Bohemians, Rebels, and Deep Heads*

“I came to the US because in my ejido in Chihuahua, there isn’t enough money to buy toilet paper.” – Raúl Solís Salazar, answering Diné/Navajo ethnobotanist Donna House’s question, “Why did you risk everything to come to the US?”

COVER
STORY

Raúl has forged the border between Mexico and the US so many times that he has the passage down to a craft. “They chase us down in the desert,” he told me. “They put up 25-foot walls, they add airplanes that fly without pilots, they make fences that sting like bees – but we always find a way to get through.” He and his band of *indocumentados* in our village were always regaling me with their experiences, ideas, and opinions. They had pioneered the journey north in tight groups and, upon arrival, called their cousins back at the *ejido* so they too could launch using the same, now-proven routes.

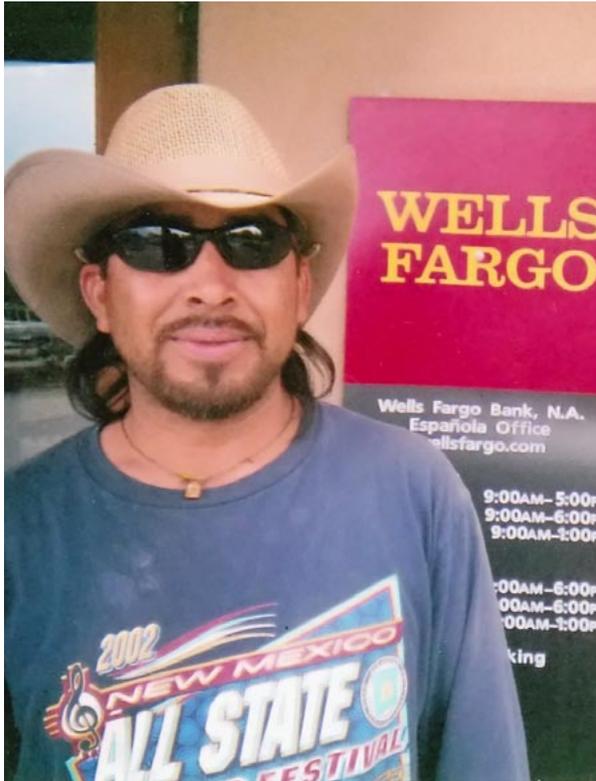
Raúl first arrived in Chimayó, New Mexico, in 2002, and in the eight years I was around him, I learned that his breaking point came like clockwork at a year-and-a-half. After that, he would feel like bursting if he could not hug his wife Gabriela, his sons Raulito and Bryan, and his parents. And so he would head south for a few months – only to be challenged once again to retake the walls, hide from the drones, and slither under the electric-shock fences.

His choice story about the journey centred

on the 25-foot concrete wall that separated the US from Mexico. Dauntless as always, one man hopped onto the shoulders of another, a third onto his back, a fourth onto his, etc – until the last man reached the summit of the wall. Then, to bring up those at the lower levels, they repeated the action in reverse: instead of scaling the body of a *compañero*, he who had reached the upper rim pulled the highest man up using a “rope” made of a sweatshirt, then with two sweatshirts tied together the next-to-highest – until finally, using every shirt they had, the man at the bottom. Another time, one dark night under a crescent moon, he jumped a freight train travelling from Tucson, Arizona, into New Mexico, riding the whole way clinging to iron girders underneath a car, enduring the thunder of the engine and screeching of wheels, with grease splattering his body until he turned black.

Raúl is an intellect with a philosophical bent. Springing from the near absolute power his government has wielded during the whole of his 30 years, plus the poverty he knows by heart, his insight is Buddhist, though he has never heard of Buddha: he believes that suffering reigns in this life and we have to make the best of it by transcending the pain and living a life of meaning. His meaning, as he explained to me, is to fulfil his role as a man; his greatest desire is that his sons grow up to be *trabajadores* like

CHELLIS GLENDINNING



Left: Raul proudly, but fearful of admitting his undocumented presence in the US, opens a bank account. Above: Marker on the bridge at Paso/Juarez where the US turns into Mexico. This is the bridge where the migra dumped Raul and Jorge when they were deported.

Photos: Chellis Glendinning (left), Andy Staver, www.ourdownsizedlife.com (above).

him. Once, as he was packing a van he had bought to resell in Chihuahua, we decided that, to stay connected no matter which side of the border each of us was on, we would look to the full moon – and feel the presence of the other in its silver reflection.

The work that Raúl and his *compañero* Jorge found was indeed a job, as stipulated by immigration requirements for working legally, that not one citizen of the United States wanted to do: they worked at SM's septic-tank service, sometimes upwards of 70 hours a week. On Sunday they would trundle to the laundromat in Española and sit on plastic chairs while the machines clunked and spun. Then to the Shop 'n Save to buy enough tortillas, tomatoes, hamburger meat, and chiles to last the week. And finally back to the trailer to watch *telenovelas*.

The high point of their week also took place on Sunday: they used my telephone to call home. I papered an entire desk with their used *tarjetas pre-pagadas* boasting depictions of Mexican women in off-the-shoulder blouses, San Juan Diego at his magical moment, and

Superman looking like a Mexican wrestler in purple tights. Once Jorge was talking loudly on the phone in the office, as was his wont, and I overheard his description of El Día de los Muertos we had attended the night before at the Museo Cultural de Santa Fe. Let's get one thing straight: el Museo is not in any way a fancy museum boasting managed temperature, camera surveillance, and sealed cases; it's a down-home warehouse that lies on the razor edge of paying the rent and is run by northern New Mexico Latinos with a beautiful vision. Nonetheless, from my office telephone came Jorge's booming voice: "You're not going to believe this," he squealed with pride. "I went to a... a MUSEUM!"

While Jorge was dialing up Sinaloa, Raúl and I sat in the living room browsing a book of Agustín Casasola's photos of the Mexican Revolution. Here were his *paisanos*, even his ancestors – and yet these images of federal troops in pointy felt sombreros, women with *bandoleras* strung

across their breasts, and Zapatista soldiers entrenched in corn fields were new to him. Irony of ironies, they were well known to me. Yes, many experiences I regarded as normal, even ho-hum, were startlingly novel to Raúl, and so I became witness to a plethora of his “firsts.” Like the first time he drove on a freeway. His first taste of tofu. His first glimpse of a computer screen. His first trip to Wal-Mart... Jazz, however, did not present a bona fide first. Upon popping a Miles Davis CD into the stereo, I asked Raúl and Jorge if they had ever heard such sounds. I was looking forward to regaling them with the origins and history of a truly “American” music. Raúl listened for a spell, looked to Jorge in a moment of mutual recognition, and then responded, “Oh yes, yes. Of course. We know this music! It’s the music from the limousine between Phoenix and Albuquerque.”

*Gabriela hears about the rapes.
They take a bus home, and
spend the money on a doctor*

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Raúl plots breathlessly. “I’m gonna get a really big truck with double tires and a major CD player.” “I’ll haul fish from Sinaloa to restaurants in Chihuahua.” “I’m ready to bring Gabriela and the *niños* over and we can live together in a little adobe with a corn field and a rose bush and the boys can go to Chimayó Elementary and learn English and become proud *trabajadores* like me.” On his paltry salary and given the fact that he sends 90 percent of it in a southward direction, I can’t see the truck happening soon. Or the fish business. But I can see a family reunion. Others have pulled it off, and given the general lack of toilet paper on the *ejido*, it’s a viable answer to the dead-of-the-night misery Raúl feels in the trailer with the other guys and the *telenovelas* reminding them of home. I can also see the potential tragedy. Bristling with Nike knock-offs and American Idol – with the suffering of their father in full view – the new generation grows up to leave the older in the dust. The thought of Raúl hurting because his sons mock the meaning of their father’s life

claws at my chest like an eagle’s talon.

I send out a plea to friends and friends-of-friends via the Internet. It’s 2003 and one never knows what will fly anymore, but the prospect of helping one family appeals: the bucks roll in.

And so Gabriela and the boys take a bus to Nogales. They ferret out a *coyote*. They set off across the blistering sands. Raúlito has taken on the job of being son-husband-father. He puts on a brave face – but Little Bryan is four and has diarrhoea. They sweat. They trudge. The *migra*/border patrol appears from behind a saguaro like a mirage and marches them back to the border. They sweat and trudge again. The *migra* catches them again. Bryan’s pants are soiled with crap, and he’s bawling like a lost cat. There’s no place for them to stay in Nogales except under a bush. Gabriela hears about the rapes. They give up, take a bus home, and spend the money on a doctor.

To divert his attention from the disappointment, I take Raúl to his second museum: the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe. The exhibition consists of artsy photos of Mexican buses decorated with tricolour banners, plastic statuettes of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, and gold tassels reminiscent of shrines, and on the way home I foolishly ask if he’s ever been to a museum in his homeland. He puffs up and proclaims, “Yes, of course.” I ask what they were exhibiting. The silence that ensues goes on a tad too long. No, way too long.

Then, like a kernel of corn popping, he blurts out his answer: “Photos of Mexican buses!”

After Raúl honoured me by asking me to be *madrina*/godmother to his sons, he came to visit regularly. It was during these quiet times together that I learned about his early life. He grew up on the *ejido* San Lorenzo Viejo near Ahome, Sinaloa; it had been established after the revolution as a way to “give back” land to the people. One downside of such redistribution was that formerly indigenous peoples were randomly stirred in with others and eventually lost knowledge of their cultural roots. When we went to the Museo Cultural, Raúl and Jorge spent an inordinate amount of time in front of a

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map showing the pre-revolution outlay of Mexico's native cultures, explaining to me that they truly did not know who they were. "Maybe this group, maybe that one" was about as clear as they could get.

His parents are Alvino Solís Villegas and Guadalupe Salazar; his father, he proudly related, is ten years older than his mother. At his dirt-floored school he learned both modern skills like reading and writing, and ancient skills like planting seeds with a stick. He danced the traditional steps through the streets of his pueblo and, upon seeing a young woman ten years younger at a cantina, he knew immediately that she was the one he would marry.

His first job, at age 12, was selling oranges from the tailgate of a pickup truck. This was a worthy exchange for having to give up school, he explained, as he got to ride in the back of the truck, eat as much citrus as he could devour, and get to know all the pueblos around Sinaloa. Next he assembled seat belts in a *maquila* at the border and weeded industrial watermelon patches – and, indeed, married the woman he had seen in the cantina.

Now he puts in 60 or 70 hours a week scouring porta-potties. And now, due to the devaluation of the peso and the North American Trade Agreement that has supplanted Mexico's communal corn fields to make way for Fritos' hegemony, he is part of history: one of somewhere between 12- and 20-million undocumented immigrant workers in the US in the early 2000s. As such, he wears his thinning ponytail under a series of baseball hats festooned with words he can't read. NYPD. MOUNTAIN DEW. GET A GRIP. Soon after I meet him, he announces in perfect Castilian that he will never, ever deign to speak English.

Except for one word he has learned on the job: *whatever*.

Perhaps it is this word that best sums up Raúl's philosophy. After all, he has forged hundreds of miles in thin *huaraches* through 100-degree saguaro desert, bedded down with cockroaches and faeces, been deported, trudged hundreds more miles in thinner *huaraches*, been kidnapped by pirates, held for ransom on

one-hard-boiled-egg-a-day, and pressed into slavery to pay back the *coyote*.

On one unbearably hot August afternoon in Chimayó, I figure it's good for such a hero to go over to the waterfall in a bathing suit. You can wade in, stand inches from the river crashing down, inhale a great big breath for courage, and spring through to the other side. There lies a pocket of air just big enough for one person – and once in its sanctuary you can cop a feel of God's glory.

But on this day the river is but a trickle.

Raúl gets right to work gathering pebbles, twigs, soil, and leaves

Raúl and I plop into a shallow pool and, border policy never far from mind, set out to build a symbolic bridge. A miniature rendition of the Santa Fe Bridge linking Juarez to El Paso, it will be. We each know the exact place in the middle where the brass cap marks the boundary – Raúl from a recent enforced journey to the other side of that cap (read: deportation). I stayed in a \$14-a-night motel in El Paso – the kind where the cashier sits on the other side of iron bars – and walked across so I could see what was so important to Raúl's life.

He will build the Mexican side; I, the US. The distance between us is a foot-and-a-half. Raúl gets right to work gathering pebbles, twigs, soil, and leaves. I put a branch in place, but I can see right off that I don't know what I'm doing. He lays the tiny rocks as a foundation, covers this with leaves and dirt, and extends sticks toward the US side. I try to imitate.

"Raúl." The laziness of the river tilts me toward the deeper side of things. "What's it like being here?" It's not as if I haven't been party to the buying of cars without licence plates, the *telenovelas* at the end of the day, the September *gritos de libertad*, and New Year's midnight handshakes.

But I mean something else.

He's placing twigs between the long sticks like latias between vigas. "I miss my children and wife and my parents and brothers and sisters and cousins," he muses. "I miss the *quinceñeras* and the dances at the *ejido*. Over there I know exactly what to do, when to do it, and how." He drips wet sand and pebbles over the sticks to make pavement. "Pero"

"Yeah? What?" I ask.

"Pero... I'm a different person here. I go shopping for myself. At Club Lumina I can dance with anyone. I do what I want, when I want, how I want."

"Freedom?"

"Sí, sí... freedom."

It's an odd toss-up. The bonds of family and culture on the side of tradition. The solitary rootless person on the side of global capitalism. I want to protest, to insist that tradition and culture are superior, but I myself am a raging sample of what he has now tasted. Until I was named *madrina* to his children and given entrance into the formal world of Mexican social relations, Raúl and his *compañeros* didn't know what to do with me. I, a woman, owned a car. I showed up when I felt like it. I paid for myself. I could drive to El Paso and stay in a motel just to see what it was like.

"How is it for you to have me here?" he asks.

"I admire your courage."

There it is for all to see: I'm packing my books into boxes. Selling futons and bookcases

Once, after his cousin finished a day laying adobes at the upscale Las Campanas condo-golf-club and returned to regale us with tales of pet dogs boasting their very own indoor bathrooms and horses whose hooves are toasted by sub-floor radiant heat, I asked Raúl how he deals with the discrimination and inequality. "I know why I'm here," he stated with pride. "I know what I must do. Thanks be to God, I know who I am."

By now, the Mexican side of our bridge reaches halfway across. The US construct is a tad rickety, but I pat a last finger of sand on to solid-

ify where the two sides meet in the middle. And together we cop a feel of one-and-a-half feet of God's glory.

In 2009 the time arrives for me to tell Raúl that I myself will soon be an immigrant: I am moving to Bolivia. ¡Ay, *mi compadre!* Poor soul, he harbours the constant possibility of upheaval. A policeman's glance in the direction of a non-existent licence plate. An immigration raid. An accident. He's not expecting this upheaval. But there it is for all to see: I'm packing my books into boxes. Selling futons and bookcases. Clearly, something is going on.

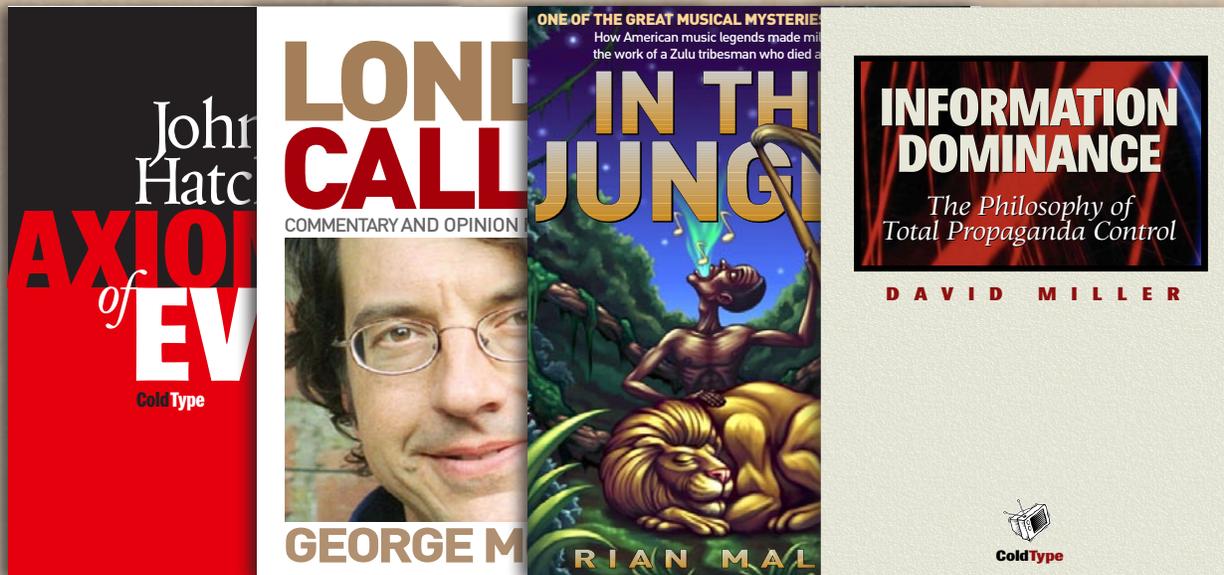
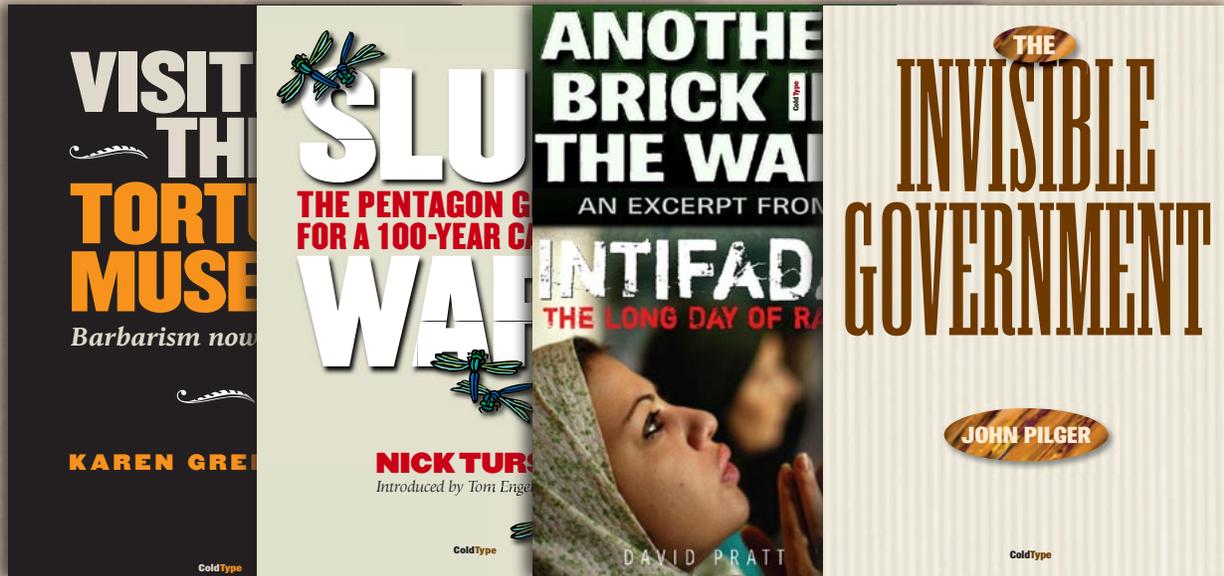
Tears pool, then spill over like the Chimayó waterfall on a big-river day... but NO! Raúl has a better plan. I can move to his house on the *ejido* in Chihuahua! Live with Gabriela and Raúlito and Bryan in two-room splendour with a boom box that holds 52 CDs at once! He would build me my own room! Not with a dirt floor, but a concrete floor! And, Dios Mio, I'm a woman of a grandmotherly age: I won't have to work!

In the face of such generosity my head begins to whirl like a drunken dervish on a *migra* drone flight over the *frontera*. I can't imagine that anyone I know in the US would ever offer the same. No, in this North American country, a single woman is on her own. But to Raúl, I'm family. I gasp for breath. What can I say? I thank him. "Wow... This is unbelievable... We don't know what will happen... Maybe... Can we wait and see?... I'm aiming for Bolivia, but who knows?"

Raúl's teeth glisten like the bubbles on the surface of a freshly poured Corona. "Sí, sí, Che," he chirps. "We will wait and see." And then, brandishing the kingpin of his grasp of the English language, he says it: "*Whaat-éfff-er!*" **CT**

Chellis Glendinning is a psychotherapist and author of seven books. This essay is a chapter in her new book, The History Makers: Meetings with Remarkable Bohemians, Rebels, and Deep Heads, which will be published by New Village Press later this year. She lives in an antique house in Chuquisaca, Bolivia.

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No spirit of liberty in the UK media

A close look at the Salisbury spy poisoning case and hysterical media abuse of Jeremy Corbyn highlights the increasing need to reject Establishment propaganda

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Fifteen years ago, the US-led “Shock and Awe” offensive began against Iraq, supposedly to disarm the country of its “weapons of mass destruction.” The illegal invasion and subsequent brutal occupation led to the loss of around one-million lives, created millions of refugees, destroyed the infrastructure of a country already ravaged by more than a decade of cruel UN sanctions, and contributed significantly to the rise of Islamic State. All of this might never have happened were it not for an intense campaign of propaganda and deception in which the so-called “mainstream” media, including “impartial” BBC News, were enthusiastic participants.

In the Guardian, Martin Woollacott had declared of Saddam’s supposed WMD: “Among those knowledgeable about Iraq there are few, if any, who believe he is not hiding such weapons. It is a given.”

This conformity throughout the corporate media was remarkable. Ardent armchair war supporter David Aaronovitch, also writing in the Guardian, confidently asserted: “If nothing is eventually found, I - as a supporter of the war - will never believe another thing that I am told by our government, or that of the US ever again.”

As the Downing Street Memo showed, intelligence and facts were “fixed around” the pre-existing policy of invasion. The Chilcot Report, finally released in 2016, was damning of the way Tony Blair’s government took the UK into war. Analysis of the report published last year by

Sheffield University’s Piers Robinson, emphasised the fundamental deception at the heart of the “war on terror:” “9/11 was exploited in order to pursue a regime-change policy against countries unconnected with Al Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.”

Iraq was not a one-off. An onslaught of media propaganda facilitated the 2011 devastation of Libya, the deaths of up to 25,000 Libyans, including the brutal murder of Gaddafi, and a refugee crisis that has seen thousands drown trying to make the perilous sea crossing to Europe. The rationale for “intervention” was the alleged threat of a massacre by Gaddafi’s forces in Benghazi.

The Guardian’s Jonathan Freedland had declared: “If those nations with the power to stop these pre-announced killings had stood aside, they would have been morally culpable. Benghazi was set to become another Srebrenica – and those that did nothing would share the same shame.”

After “something” had been done, the BBC’s Nick Robinson observed that Downing Street: “will see this, I’m sure, as a triumphant end. Libya was David Cameron’s first war. Col. Gaddafi his first foe. Today, his first real taste of military victory.” (BBC, News at Six, October 20, 2011)

In September 2016, a report into the Libyan war was published by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. In contrast to the near-total uniformity in media coverage at the time, the parliamentary report concluded



PROPAGANDA? Screenshot from BBC Newsnight shows Jeremy Corbyn "depicted in a huge studio backdrop using an image that seemed to be deliberately manipulated to make him look embedded in the Kremlin."

that: "the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence."

As with Iraq, virtually an entire country's infrastructure had been destroyed by the West's intervention: "The result was political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons across the region and the growth of ISIL [Islamic State] in North Africa."

Cynical geopolitics and media disinformation campaigns have also characterised the ongoing war in Syria, with confident and immediate declarations of Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons. Rational challenges to this establishment consensus, and reasonable questions raised, have elicited howls of outrage from establishment politicians and commentators. Dissent simply will not be tolerated.

The parallels with the confident and immediate declarations of Russian responsibility for the nerve agent Novichok poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury on March 4 are disturbing.

Prime Minister Theresa May's response was to declare it "highly likely" that Russia was responsible for the Salisbury attack. Russia's ambassador to the UK was summoned to the Foreign Office on March 13 "to provide an explanation." May said that if there was no "credible response" by the end of that day, the UK would conclude that there had been an "unlawful use of force" by Russia.

The following day, the very first line read out by presenter Sophie Raworth on BBC News at Ten was a propaganda bullet point: "Britain expels 23 Russian diplomats after Moscow fails to explain the chemical attack in Salisbury."

The loaded phrase, "after Moscow fails to explain," was the UK government-approved framing: the alleged perpetrator of the crime was required to "explain" its actions. The conformity to this state script was widespread across the "free

press”.

A Telegraph editorial demanded total consensus for the government’s agenda: “Theresa May needs the whole country’s support to see Britain through this crisis with Russia.”

A Sunday Times editorial stated: “Mrs May must show Russia that she is an Iron Lady too.”

A Guardian editorial declared that the Prime Minister had made: “a compelling case for Kremlin culpability in the Salisbury incident and is right that such a reckless, hostile act by another state requires a robust response.”

In the Commons, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had very reasonably challenged the government by asking for evidence for its claims, and by insisting that international law and conventions be upheld. The Guardian, however, found Corbyn’s response “dispiriting:” “He sounded too keen to find another explanation for the use of the nerve agent novichok in the attack.”

And: “his reluctance to share Mrs May’s basic analysis of the Salisbury incident made him look eager to exonerate a hostile power.” This was the editorial response by supposedly one of the world’s leading liberal newspapers.

A Telegraph leading article hinted at an underlying truth: that the incident was being exploited for the benefit of “defence” and intelligence services: “To protect itself, this country has to give its intelligence services the tools they need and invest properly in its defence forces. This week’s spring statement must guarantee better funding.”

Mainstream media coverage has been instrumental in presenting a misleading image of May as the “strong, stable” leader she has long tried to claim for herself. John Pienaar, deputy political editor for BBC News, noted: “Among senior ministers and officials, there’s quiet satisfaction that the Russia crisis seems to be going according to plan. Maybe even better.”

All the better if you have a compliant corporate media on board.

The headline to a “politics sketch” by the Guardian’s John Crace, whom we are supposed to find amusing, was comical for the wrong rea-

sons: “Theresa May transforms into cold war colossus by not being Jeremy Corbyn.” Under the cover of “comedy,” Crace slipped in this smear: “Jeremy had never met a Russian he didn’t like or trust – especially one that had been head of the KGB.”

The portrayal of Corbyn as some kind of Putin stooge was continued on BBC Newsnight on March 15. Reporter David Grossman posed the leading question, “Does Labour have a Russia problem?” The Labour leader was then depicted in a huge studio backdrop using an image that seemed to be deliberately manipulated to make him look embedded in the Kremlin. Even Corbyn’s cap appeared to have been altered to look like a Russian fur hat.

A post on the Medialens Facebook page noting this BBC propaganda went viral, with around 650,000 hits at the time of writing (most of our posts achieve hits in the low thousands). This was a strong indicator of public awareness and outrage at the BBC’s biased portrayal of Corbyn; and a sign of the power of social media in challenging MSM distortions.

The following evening on Newsnight, Guardian commentator Owen Jones rightly criticised the programme’s Corbyn imagery. But when Newsnight later tweeted a clip of Jones’s appearance, they omitted the section where he took them to task.

Responding to the tsunami of public challenges, acting Newsnight editor Jess Brammar defended the use of biased imagery, commenting via Twitter: “By all means criticise Newsnight. That’s healthy, and we will always welcome people like @OwenJones84 coming on the show to criticise us from our own studio. But no one photoshopped a hat.” She added: “the Russia background was a rehash of one Newsnight used a few weeks ago, for a story about Gavin Williamson, the Defence Secretary.” This explanation got short shrift across social media. The manipulation of Corbyn’s image, including its placement close to the iconic St Basil’s Church in the Moscow skyline, the red tinting and the altered appearance of his “Lenin-style” cap, obviously served a clear propaganda purpose.

As the remarkable WW2 veteran and social

justice campaigner Harry Leslie Smith said on Twitter: “I think you will find most see that the particular photo used of Corbyn dead in the middle of the backdrop with a super enhanced cap to make it look more soviet and the shot of Gavin Williamson in a suit, not in frame, imply two different things.”

Clearly, one figure (Williamson) was depicted as a sober, responsible and senior government politician; and the other (Corbyn) as an untrustworthy figure with dubious ideological links to an Official Enemy. No doubt deluged with public complaints, the BBC subjected itself to scrutiny and swiftly adjudged that it had done nothing wrong. Former BBC Chairman Lord Grade once described his experience of complaining to the BBC as “grisly” due to a system he said was “absolutely hopeless.” If that is what he thought, then what hope for the rest of us?

But, embarrassingly for the BBC, evidence has emerged that the corporation does knowingly manipulate images to portray Corbyn in a negative light. Barrister Jo Maugham QC revealed: “Just remembered I have a written message from a senior BBC bod explaining (unambiguously) that the BBC does code negative messages about Corbyn into its imagery.” [Our emphasis]

He followed up with: “The message was communicated to me in confidence so I will give *no* further details. But I would swear a witness statement that this tweet is true.”

BBC News coverage basically echoed and amplified UK state propaganda over the Salisbury attack on the Skripals, dangerously ramping up tension with Russia. On BBC News at Ten on March 12, BBC security correspondent Gordon Corera said of the Novichok nerve agents: “The crucial thing is that these agents were only developed by Russia.”

The careful wording, in line with the government script, indicated there was no unequivocal proof of Russian involvement. The flood of propaganda continued for days, with contributions by several senior BBC News journalists, including diplomatic correspondent James Landale, Moscow correspondent Sarah Rainsford and home

affairs correspondent Daniel Sandford.

Meanwhile, strong scepticism about the established MSM consensus appeared across social media. An important briefing document, titled *Doubts About Novichoks*, published by an academic group working on media and propaganda, noted that there was no solid evidence that the compounds used to poison the Skripals were: “military grade nerve agents or that a Russian ‘Novichok’ programme ever existed.”

The document also observed that “the purported ‘Novichoks’ is within the capability of a modern chemistry laboratory,” such as nearby Porton Down, less than ten miles from Salisbury. In 2015, the Independent reported that Porton Down had run secretive chemical and biological weapons experiments on hundreds of thousands of unwitting civilians during the Cold War, including on the London Tube.

Craig Murray, a former UK ambassador, said that he had: “received confirmation from a well placed FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] source that Porton Down scientists are not able to identify the nerve agent as being of Russian manufacture, and have been resentful of the pressure being placed on them to do so. Porton Down would only sign up to the formulation ‘of a type developed by Russia’ after a rather difficult meeting where this was agreed as a compromise formulation.”

This echoes the manipulation and distortion of intelligence about Iraq’s alleged WMD for the political objective of launching an invasion.

Investigative journalist Nafeez Ahmed observed that Russia has been: “certified by the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] as having destroyed its chemical weapons programme, including its nerve agent capabilities. The OPCW found no evidence to indicate that Russia retains an active [Novichok] capability. The same is not the case for the US, Britain and Israel.”

Ahmed concluded sensibly: “It may turn out that Russia did indeed carry out the Novichok attack. But at this time, the British state has no real basis to presume this. Which implies that the state has already decided that it wants to manufacture a path to heightened hostilities

with Russia, regardless of the evidence.”

If BBC News and the rest of the MSM were actual news organisations based on proper journalistic principles, they would extensively report and investigate serious concerns about the official narrative on the Salisbury nerve agent attack. When we challenged BBC News journalists Gordon Corera, Sarah Rainsford, James Landale and Laura Kuenssberg to do so we were met with the usual wall of silence.

Hyping Russia as an Official Enemy is a natural consequence of the corporate nature of the media. Big profits are there to be made. It is an age-old strategy to boost fear in bogeymen abroad, all in the interests of a huge military-industrial complex with strong ties to state-corporate media.

A piece by Kenny Coyle in the Morning Star correctly observed that: “The media has not considered how Russophobia is benefitting big business.” Coyle addressed the extensive business and military links of former British army officer, Colonel (rtd) Hamish de Bretton-Gordon: “Quoted daily by multiple media outlets on the Skripal case, de Bretton-Gordon has become a very public expert, relied upon for unbiased comment and analysis by the British and foreign media on chemical weapon threats from Salisbury to Syria.”

For some time, he has been: “urging greater government expenditure on chemical protection counter-measures and equipment. He has used his columns in the Guardian, Daily Telegraph, as well as TV appearances to repeat this message.” Coyle added: “While his Guardian online biography selectively mentions his military record and work on Syria, it overlooks his day job — de Bretton-Gordon is managing director CBRN [Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear] of Avon Protection Systems, based in Melksham, Wiltshire.”

Last month, reported Coyle, Avon Rubber, Avon Protection’s parent company, announced a five-year £16-million contract to supply the Ministry of Defence with equipment.

Journalist John Pilger summed it all up succinctly when he said that the: “Skripal case is a carefully-constructed drama as part of the prop-

aganda campaign that has been building now for several years in order to justify the actions of Nato, Britain, the United States towards Russia.” He continued: “Russia is ringed by missiles, has Nato right up on its western border. This is unprecedented since the Second World War. Most people in Britain, most people in the United States, don’t understand these dangers; the dangers of this propaganda.”

As Pilger pointed out: “Why on earth would Russia, on the eve [of] an election, and on the eve of staging the world football cup, want to destroy its international name with such a crime?” He added: “But there’s plenty of motive on the other side. ... This is part of a carefully constructed drama in which the media plays a role, the government plays a role, both sides of the House of Commons play a role, unfortunately.”

Craig Murray described how he has been hounded and subjected to abuse for raising rational questions about government claims: “In 13 years of running my blog I have never been exposed to such a tirade of abuse as I have for refusing to accept without evidence that Russia is the only possible culprit for the Salisbury attack. The abuse has mostly been on twitter, and much of the most venomous stuff has come from corporate and state media ‘journalists’. I suppose I am a standing rebuke to them for merely being stenographers to power and never doing any actual research, but that hardly explains the visceral levels of hatred exhibited.”

Owen Jones made a crucial point about the treatment meted out to those who challenge official propaganda: “It’s the same [thing], every time. Iraq, Helmand Province, Libya. Anything other than total subordination to the government line invites accusations of being a stooge for Saddam/Taliban/Gaddafi, of treachery, of cowardice. All dissent has to be bullied out of existence.” As he noted in a short, powerful clip on Sky News: “Why are the politicians and pundits who brought us Iraq and Libya still treated as statesmen and sensible hard-headed pundits?” By contrast: “Those who were (tragically) vindicated are traitors and cowards.”

Kerry-Anne Mendoza, editor of The Canary, rightly emphasised the point: “The same people who spent the last three years bemoaning the ‘post-truth era’ are now denouncing as heretics anyone who wants facts re: the Skripal poisoning. And they see nothing contradictory in that at all. Welcome to modern McCarthyism. The witch hunt is on.”

Veteran journalist Peter Hitchens warned: “In the past few days I have begun to sense a dangerous and dark new intolerance in the air, which I have never experienced before. ... The treatment of Jeremy Corbyn, both by politicians and many in the media, for doing what he is paid for and leading the Opposition, seems to me to be downright shocking.” He continued: “There’s no real spirit of liberty left in this country. Yes, I am scared, and I never have been before. And so should you be.”

George Galloway observed of the distasteful media treatment of Corbyn: “The grisly collection of #Russian exiles, opposition exiles, absconded thieves and oligarchs donated £3-million to the Tories and zero to #Corbyn. That “the story” is instead Corbyn expressing the same view as France & Germany shows the absolute corruption of the British media.”

In an excellent Morning Star piece titled, Desperate Establishment Resorts To Fear-mongering, Callum Alexander Scott recalled that a 2016 study by media scholars at the London School of Economics found that: “the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the UK.” Scott points out that, on the eve of last year’s general election, the Daily Mail ran a front-page headline calling Corbyn and his col-



TABLOID EXCESSES: Front pages from the Sun and Daily Mail portray Corbyn as a dupe of the Kremlin.

leagues APOLOGISTS FOR TERROR, while the Sun ran a headline that read JEZZA'S JIHADI COMRADES. More recently, the Daily Mail screamed, CORBYN “THE COLLABORATOR and CORBYN, THE KREMLIN STOOGES. Meanwhile, the Sun shrieked, CORBYN AND THE COMMIE SPY.

Dan Hodges, also in the Mail, confidently declared that “Corbyn is most certainly an agent of Russia.” Readers may recall that a comment piece in 2016 by Hodges bore the notorious headline, Labour MUST kill Vampire Jezza.

In its own subtly insidious way, the BBC is also playing a powerful role in ramping up the ‘patriotic’ fervour. For example, Sarah Smith, presenter of the BBC Sunday Politics show, “impartially: asserted: “At times like this you might expect the leader of the opposition to back up the Prime Minister.” Is that so? Who is this “you?” And might we not instead, as Peter Hitchens noted, expect Corbyn to continue

“doing what he is paid for” by “leading the Opposition?”

The BBC’s primary role as a bulwark of the establishment is shockingly obvious at times like these. Perhaps never before has dissent been so marginalised, so demonised. However, the more that BBC News and the “free press” act so obviously like state mouthpieces, the more people will recognise and reject their propaganda. Elite power, especially the state, fears any threat to the status quo. And a well-informed, well-motivated public is the greatest threat of all. **CT**

David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of Medialens, the UK media watchdog. Their web site is www.medialens.org where this article was first published.

Freedom for the speech we hate

Silencing unpopular viewpoints with which the majority might disagree only empowers the controllers of the Deep State

Tolerance cuts both ways. This isn't an easy pill to swallow, I know, but that's the way free speech works, especially when it comes to tolerating speech that we hate.

The most controversial issues of our day – gay rights, abortion, race, religion, sexuality, political correctness, police brutality, et al. – have become battlegrounds for those who claim to believe in freedom of speech but only when it favours the views and positions they support.

“Free speech for me but not for thee” is how my good friend and free speech purist Nat Hentoff used to sum up this double standard. This haphazard approach to the First Amendment has so muddied the waters that even First Amendment scholars are finding it hard to navigate at times.

It's really not that hard. The First Amendment affirms the right of the people to speak freely, worship freely, peaceably assemble, petition the government for a redress of grievances, and have a free press.

Nowhere in the First Amendment does it permit the government to limit speech in order to avoid causing offense, hurting someone's feelings, safeguarding government secrets, protecting government officials, insulating judges from undue influence, discouraging bullying, penalizing hateful ideas and actions, eliminating terrorism, combatting prejudice and intolerance, and the like.

Unfortunately, in the war being waged between free speech purists who believe that free speech is an inalienable right and those who be-

lieve that free speech is a mere privilege to be granted only under certain conditions, the censors are winning.

We have entered into an egotistical, insulated, narcissistic era in which free speech has become regulated speech: to be celebrated when it reflects the values of the majority and tolerated otherwise, unless it moves so far beyond our political, religious and socio-economic comfort zones as to be rendered dangerous and unacceptable.

Indeed, President Trump – who has been accused of using his very public platform to belittle and mock his critics and enemies while attempting to muzzle those who might speak out against him – may be the perfect poster child for this age of intolerance.

Even so, Trump is not to blame for America's growing intolerance for free speech. The country started down that sorry road long ago. Protest laws, free speech zones, bubble zones, trespass zones, anti-bullying legislation, zero tolerance policies, hate crime laws and a host of other legalistic maladies dreamed up by politicians and prosecutors (and championed by those who want to suppress speech with which they might disagree) have conspired to corrode our core freedoms, purportedly for our own good.

On paper – at least according to the US Constitution – we are technically free to speak. In reality, however, we are only as free to speak as

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a government official – or corporate entities such as Facebook, Google or YouTube – may allow.

Free speech is no longer free. What we have instead is regulated, controlled speech, and that's a whole other ballgame. Just as surveillance has been shown to “stifle and smother dissent, keeping a populace cowed by fear,” government censorship gives rise to self-censorship, breeds compliance, makes independent thought all but impossible, and ultimately foments a seething discontent that has no outlet but violence.

The First Amendment is a steam valve. It allows people to speak their minds, air their grievances and contribute to a larger dialogue that hopefully results in a more just world.

When there is no steam valve – when there is no one to hear what the people have to say – frustration builds, anger grows and people become more volatile and desperate to force a conversation. By bottling up dissent, we have created a pressure cooker of stifled misery and discontent that is now bubbling over and fomenting even more hate, distrust and paranoia among portions of the populace.

Silencing unpopular viewpoints with which the majority might disagree – whether it's by shouting them down, censoring them, muzzling them, or criminalising them – only empowers the controllers of the Deep State. Even when the motives behind this rigidly calibrated reorientation of societal language appear well-intentioned – discouraging racism, condemning violence, denouncing discrimination and hatred – inevitably, the end result is the same: intolerance, indoctrination and infantilism.

The police state could not ask for a better citizenry than one that carries out its own censorship, spying and policing. This is how you turn a nation of free people into extensions of the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent police state, and in the process turn a citizenry against each other.

So where do we go from here? If Americans don't learn how to get along – at the very least, agreeing to disagree and respecting each other's right to subscribe to beliefs and opinions that may be offensive, hateful, intolerant or merely

different – then we're going to soon find that we have no rights whatsoever (to speak, assemble, agree, disagree, protest, opt in, opt out, or forge our own paths as individuals).

The government will lock down the nation at the slightest provocation. Indeed, the government has been anticipating and preparing for civil unrest for years now, as evidenced by the build-up of guns and tanks and militarised police and military training drills and threat assessments and extremism reports and surveillance systems and private prisons and Pentagon training videos predicting the need to impose martial law by 2030.

Trust me: when the police state cracks down, it will not discriminate.

We'll all be muzzled together.

We'll all be jailed together.

We'll all be viewed as a collective enemy to be catalogued, conquered and caged.

Indeed, a recent survey concluded that a large bipartisan majority of the American public already recognizes the dangers posed by a government that is not only tracking its citizens but is also being controlled by a “Deep State” of unelected government officials. Thus, the last thing we need to do is play into the government's hands by turning on one another, turning in one another, and giving the government's standing army an excuse to take over.

So let's start with a little more patience, a lot more tolerance and a civics lesson on the First Amendment. What this means is opening the door to more speech not less, even if that speech is offensive to some. It's time to start thinking for ourselves again. It's time to start talking to each other, listening more and shouting less.

Most of all, as I make clear in my book, *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, it's time to make the government hear us – see us – and heed us.

This is the ultimate power of free speech. **CT**

*John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* (SelectBooks, 2015) is available online at www.amazon.com*

DELL FRANKLIN

Visiting time

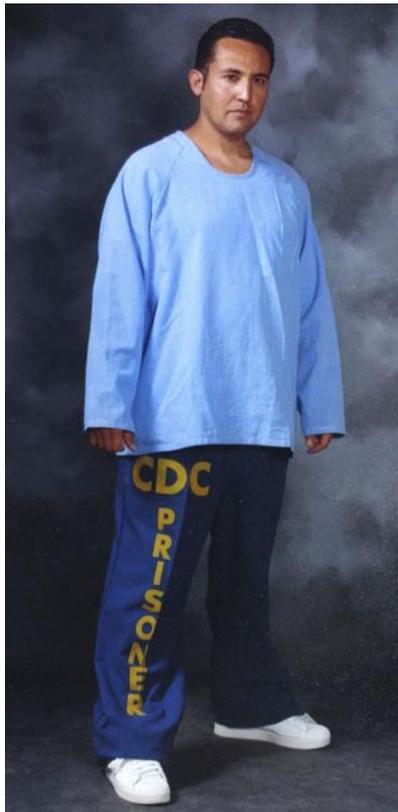
Tales from a California prison waiting room

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Dell Franklin, a regular contributor to ColdType, sent us this article – a rewrite of a piece he wrote for the San Luis Obispo county alternative weekly New Times in 2005 – after reading Chris Hedge’s cover story about life in US prisons in the last issue of ColdType. David Valdez, the subject of Franklin’s story, has recently been released after serving almost 25 years in California prisons, and is now living in a halfway house. He is writing a memoir of his years behind bars.

I always get this tremulous moiling in my gut when I’m standing in line waiting to enter the prison at San Luis Obispo in California. It’s always a slow process, but I’m well versed and prepared for it, with a plastic bag of dollar bills for the automats, so I can share some sandwiches, soft drinks and chips with David Valdez, a Mexican American citizen serving 25-to-life on a kidnapping/attempted murder charge.

David wrote to me after reading one of my ar-



David Valdez while a prisoner at San Luis Obispo, CMC (California Men’s Colony). He was later transferred to the maximum security prison at Soledad.

a great release to unleash your problems to a stranger you know you’ll never see again.

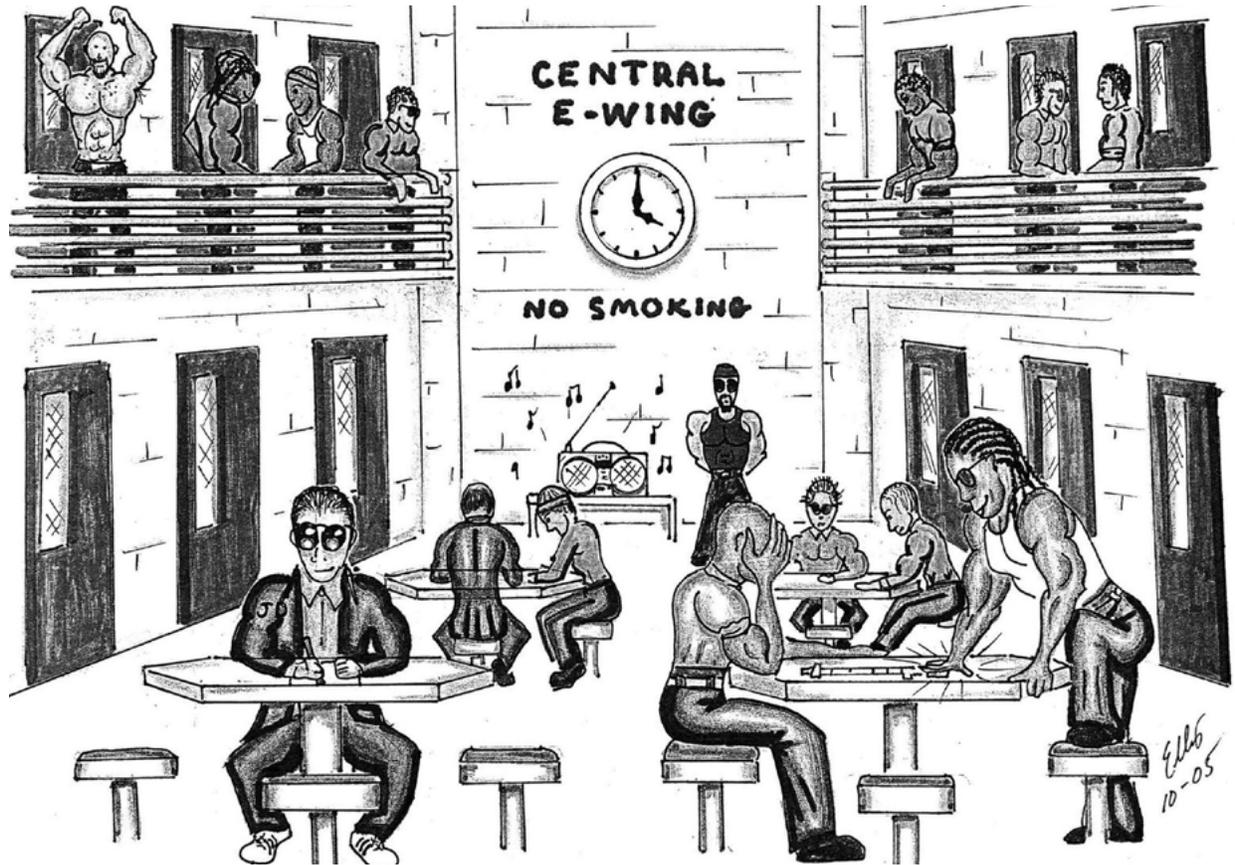
The line begins to move, but we keep talking.

ticles in New Times, the county’s alternative paper, in which I wrote about the resilience of black women riding buses over 200 miles all night to visit their men at this prison these very same women riding in my cab to the prison after I’d picked them up at the Greyhound bus station.

As I wait in line, I talk to a young black man the size of pro football lineman who’s standing behind me. He’s here to see his younger brother. He tells me he’s the only black teacher at a Catholic high school down in LA, he’s engaged to a white woman, and, yes, he played high school and college football, but is no longer interested in the sport. He’s also very angry because he got pulled over on the drive up and received a ticket for going eight miles over the speed limit.

Seldom has anybody divulged so much personal information to me in so short a time, but I know that sometimes it’s

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WAITING: Gene Ellis's art from the original version of this story published in 2005.

I tell him I'm visiting David for the fifth or sixth time, that he is just a friend and an interesting and engaging person. The big man, Roger, smiles and praises me for visiting a prisoner who needs to make human contact.

We are just about to enter, when he says, "My brother is in here because he just can't stop fucking up. He just can't stop fucking with authority. He's not really a hard-core criminal, just a fuck-up. He won't listen to me, but he's my little brother, and I love him."

We enter. At a desk I show my papers, then undergo searches, taking my shoes off and checking in my keys. A door squeezes open and I walk into the big, drab waiting room, which is packed on this Saturday afternoon, and sit at a table to wait for David. All around me are families, many of them playing board games or cards, or sharing food.

Roger comes in; then a tall, slender black man

with a wild thatch of hair enters from a door and they hug and sit down. Roger spots me and waves. I wave back. Guards stand nearby, in corners or against walls, watching. There is the babble of voices. David enters wearing his blues, smiling. I stand when he comes over, we shake hands, and he thanks me for coming, telling me how much my visits mean to him, as it's hard for his mother and brother to come up all the time from LA.

David tells me about the books I sent him – Steinbeck, Hemingway, Charles Willeford, Elmore Leonard – that will help him to become a writer. Already, this highly intelligent, articulate 30-year-old, not a tattooed gang-banger, but an ardent and creative conversationalist, who networks daily to make friends from the outside to improve his quality of life inside the prison, has

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has published a coverpiece for *New Times* about life in prison.

I fetch some soft drinks and sandwiches, which David relishes after the poor prison food and nasty water, and we talk about the lawyer his family is paying to try to get him out of this shit-hole, which he says really does smell like a shit-hole. We talk about his case, and I tell him stories about the characters, and especially the women, at the rowdy bar where I now work, and as always, he tells me about some of the characters with whom he lives.

From the beginning, David employed his social skills to find a way to walk a treacherous tightrope and get along with the dangerous gang of Mexican inmates, who do not try to coerce him, but actually respect him for his education – a couple years of college before imprisonment – and went out of their way to show him the ropes when he first arrived. He has a magical way of getting along with anybody.

He points to a wizened, pale, stooped man sitting with an old woman who is holding back tears. “He’s got liver cancer and probably won’t last another week,” David explains.

“She flew in from back east. He’s been here 30-some years. This is probably the last time she’ll see him. I know him pretty well. I don’t see how he could’ve murdered anybody, but you never know.” He winked at me. “We’re all innocent, you know, but I actually am, and a lot of these guys know it.”

I spot Roger waving to me. He stands and comes over. I introduce him to David. They shake hands. He says that the place is packed, and could he and his brother join us at a table. David is fine with it; we’ve been visiting over an hour already. His brother shuffles over with the rhythm of a boulevardier. Reggie. Unlike Roger, who is calm, Reggie is animated and jittery – he can’t sit still. Earlier, when I pointed him out to David, he said he did not know him, as he mostly keeps to himself or converses with old white guys or fellow Latinos.

Right off, Reggie takes the stage, almost like an entertainer, and he talks rapid-fire, and

warns me, an older white man, “Don’t fuck up, man, or you end up in this mothafucka, no rights, they put yo ass in here for nothin’ if you black, mothafuckin’ prison industry. These mothafuckin’ guards, they fuckin’ worthless, can’t get no job outside, they sign up for this booshit cuz they ain’t worth shit, they got a mothafuckin’ union protect their asses, the nigger guards ain’t no better’n the white mothafuckas, prison industry, man, what it is, lock up the niggers, get our black asses off the street fo’ mothafuckin’ dope, fo’ mothafuckin’ weed, fo’ one mothafuckin’ joint! It like when we fightin’ them folks in Veet Nam, get the niggers off the streets, get they asses shot off in the jungle, they ain’t worth shit, lives don’t mean shit, same thing here, doin’ time, lives ain’t worth shit to nobody, we ain’t nothin’ to nobody, ain’t mothafuckin’ humans ...”

“When the cops see my big black ass in a fancy car, they pull me over, and they hassle me”

David is smiling at me. Reggie is oblivious to us as he continues, his brother seeming to go into a trance of his own, as if he’s heard this spiel a hundred times and is tuning it out. He glances at me and shakes his head. I didn’t ask what Reggie was in for but he hinted it was for drugs and fighting with police. This is his second tour. He’s got five years. David and I lean back in our chairs, listening, as David is as good a listener as a talker.

When Reggie finally halts and sips his soft drink, Roger says, “Yeh, you have to watch your step in white land. I drive to work in a Mustang rag-top. I teach in a very affluent area, almost all white, except for a lot of Iranians, and when the cops see my big black ass in a fancy car, they pull me over, and they hassle me. And when I explain I am a civics teacher at a private Catholic school, they don’t believe me, even if I’m wearing a shirt and tie. I don’t ask them why they pulled me over. It’s not wise to do that. They will fuck with you. I stay quiet and calm, but I’m boiling inside, I want to grab these peckerwoods by their necks and squeeze the life out of them. After all

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that has gone down in this country, civil rights, lynchings, it's still the same, the white man has the upper hand, he can fuck with you, and, like Reggie says, even the token black cop fucks with me. They cannot believe I am educated and articulate."

"Fuckin' A," chimes in Reggie. "They lookin' fo' yo' black ass, you in white land, or the ghetto, ain't no mothafuckin' way out."

Roger continues. "I'm engaged to a white girl, a Catholic. Her parents, they like me, but they don't approve. They want it ended. They're fearful. They're fearful we'll end up social outcasts. They're fearful I'll lose it and beat somebody up and end up here, with Reggie, but man, I'm in control. I work hard at it. Same thing at the school. I'm the only black teacher. They're either scared of me or fucking with me. I feel like I'm always in the crosshairs, man, because the principal, he's always on my ass, it's like they're just waiting for me to fuck up so they can get rid of me. I'm a good teacher, I prepare, I get along with the kids, the kids love me ... it's never the kids, it's the politicians. ..."

Reggie guffaws, sneering. "Yeh, THEY the mothafuckas fuck you over. The black politicians, they got they noses up whitey's ass, shee-it, my brother, you got yo big black ass in a mothafuckin' sling, they comin' after yo' ass. even if you a law abidin' white-actin' nigger, them politicians ain't gonna stop fuckin' with yo' ass until YOU the mothafucka makin' the rules, and that ain't gonna happen, brother..."

Roger and Reggie go back and forth, and Roger tries to calm him down, explaining that "negative energy" is not going to get him anywhere, but Reggie doesn't hear him. I peer up at the clock and discover I've been here almost three hours.

It's closing in on four o'clock, when visiting hours end. I have not had time to tell David funny new bar stories. I am drained, as always, and start to feel the oppressive, suffocating claustrophobia I always experience after several hours in this environment. I cannot conceive of living here.

I yawn massively. David recognises my waning interest in being here, and I am suddenly restless, edgy, anxious to get out as he stands up. People begin to leave after we are warned we only have 15 more minutes. David and I hug after he thanks me for the visit and the food. Reggie and Roger hug. Then Roger and I walk out of the waiting room together and through the sunlit area back into the office where our keys are returned and then we are out the door into the parking lot on this sunny afternoon. We shake hands. I tell Roger I've enjoyed talking to him and wish him luck with what's going on in his life. He says he hopes we can meet again here, and continue talking. We part and head for our cars.

I am, as usual, bludgeoned with guilt at leaving David behind, an essentially forgotten shard of humanity, rotting away his vital, prime years in a nothing existence where he can only dream of and fantasize over the women who visit him and masturbate when his cellmate leaves their room. I am going straight to the bar in the small beach town where I live, as usual.

POSTSCRIPT: *David was later transferred hundreds of miles north to the tougher maximum security prison at Soledad a year later. We both believe the cause was his powerfully true depiction of prison life in New Times and Rogue Voice. I stopped visiting him, but we continued writing, and he began publishing a monthly column – Life In The Cage – about prison life until the publication closed three years later. He had several girl friends and eventually married one when he got out 15 years later, now in his 40s.*

David's hair is now gray, but his positive attitude and energy, which preserved him during prison life, already has him optimistic and preparing for future employment and writing a memoir. He is in a halfway house many miles from here. Knowing him has been a sort of treasure and I am a different person because of it, hopefully a better one. I never saw Roger again. But I'll see David soon. **CT**

Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the now-defunct Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at www.dellfranklin.com

TREVOR GRUNDY

An officer, but hardly a gentle man

Tipped to become a British army general, Peter Mackay became a farmer before being jailed by Rhodesia's white government, and unsung hero of one of Africa's most important wars of liberation

Students at Stirling University have a new hero: Peter Mackay, a man who lived the life of a John Buchan adventurer. A one-time captain in the Brigade of Guards, he fought white rule in Central and Southern Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, when he died five years ago, an almost unknown octogenarian in Zimbabwe, that country's military and political leaders barely acknowledged his existence, although the self-effacing Scotsman had saved dozens, perhaps hundreds, of them from Ian Smith's prisons and gallows.

Many books have been written about the long war from 1966 to 1979 that finally ended 90 years of white rule in Southern Rhodesia in 1980, but Peter Mackay's name is mentioned in only four of them. Two are by critics: Richard Hughes's book, *Capricorn*, David Stirling's *Second African Campaign*, which presented Mackay as a maverick figure in the European-run "liberal" attempt to end racism in the British colony; and Ken Flower's memoir of Rhodesian intelligence, *Serving Secretly, Rhodesia into Zimbabwe 1964-1981*, in which Mackay appears, absurdly, as a KGB agent and a man condemned by most Rhodesian whites as a supporter of Africans (the racist slang being "kaffir-lover"). The other two books Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness: A life in Zimbabwe* (Zebra Press, 2007); and Terence Ranger's *Are We Not Also Men – the Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe 1920-1964*, see him as a hero of the revolution struggle. Otherwise, notes Ranger in the foreword to Mackay's

work, *We Have Tomorrow – Stirrings in Africa, 1959-1967*, "He has gone unnoticed in the whole vast literature of African nationalism in Central Africa and the liberation war in Zimbabwe."

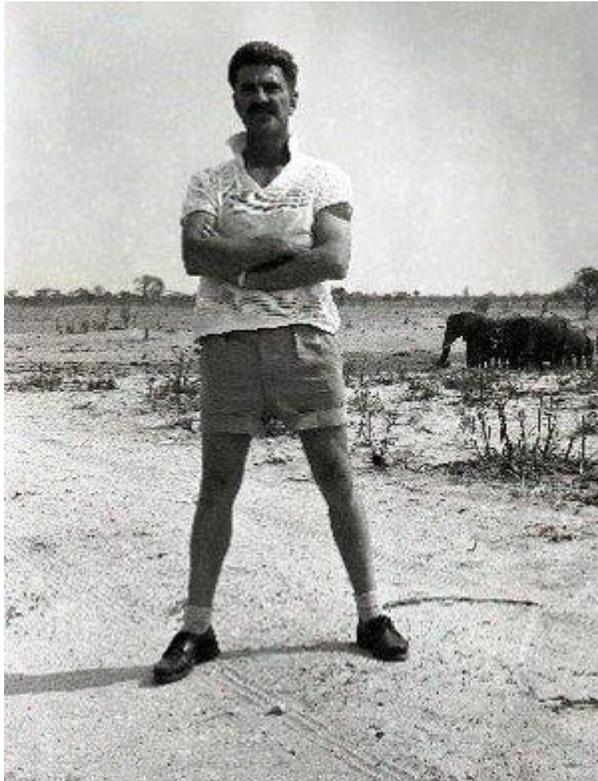
Very few people knew that during years of sometimes feverish activity on behalf of the African nationalists fighting Rhodesia's relatively well-equipped army, Peter Mackay was keeping a diary of events which young African historians will find so useful.

The entire collection – the Peter Mackay Archive – has been shipped to Stirling University in Scotland, where students have taken Mackay to their collective heart, decorated walls at the campus with pages from his book, illustrated the heroic journeys he made between Rhodesia, Botswana, the Caprivi Strip, Zambia, up into Tanzania and then to the Soviet Union countries, China and North Korea – a political/military/liberation highway known to Mackay's growing number of supporters and admirers as Freedom Road.

"Mackay played a crucial role in the liberation of Zimbabwe but his stories have not yet been fully told," said Karl Magee, the university's chief archivist. "We want to make his personal and political papers and photography accessible to scholars and students in Africa and open up one of the most important collections of its kind, to the rest of the world."

Mackay's ties to Stirling were strong: his family, with its distinctly imperial connections, lived

TREVOR GRUNDY



Peter Mackay strikes a military pose along Freedom Road. Photo: Peter Mackay Archive, Stirling University

at nearby Doune: his father was a major in the Gurkhas and one of his uncles became a colonel in the regiment. The young Mackay became head boy at Stowe public school and then the youngest captain in the Guards. His family and his peer group at Sandhurst Military College saw him as a future general, but instead of pursuing a military career, he left the army and became a tobacco farmer in Southern Rhodesia, where he used his military expertise to help black nationalists who opposed, first, the Central African Federation that linked Northern and Southern Rhodesia with Nyasaland between 1953 and 1963, and then Ian Smith's Rhodesian government from 1964 to 1978.

The turning point in Mackay's extraordinary life occurred when he met Colonel David Stirling, founder of the SAS. He stopped farming and devoted himself to the multicultural, liberal Capricorn Society, organising its most successful

venture, the Salima Convention, on the shores of Lake Malawi in June, 1956.

Mackay was jailed for refusing to serve in the Rhodesian army; then, after his release from prison, he moved to Kenneth Kaunda's Zambia, where he worked with refugees in Lusaka, becoming a strong supporter of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), the tiny liberation movement led by James Chikerema and George Nyandoro after their break with both the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1971.

*"I never did like politics.
Nearly every political
prediction I made was wrong"*

It is not known how many young blacks Mackay shepherded out of Southern Rhodesia into guerrilla training camps in other parts of Central, Eastern and Northern Africa and beyond. Some say hundreds – others insist it was much more – maybe thousands. In one of his rare discussions with a journalist he said: "My politics were the politics of race; majority rule, not the politics of party. I never did like politics. Nearly every political prediction I made was wrong."

Ironically, after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, Mackay watched the men he'd help to power become as greedy and corrupt as the worst of the men they'd removed from power.

Mackay later moved to Omay in the Zambezi Valley, one of the most malaria-infested parts of Zimbabwe, where he set up a health clinic and school and an agricultural settlement for the 15,000 Batonka tribespeople in the impoverished region.

"In many ways," said Lawrence Vambi, author of *An Ill-fated People – Zimbabwe Before and After Rhodes*, "Peter was a kind of saint. But a non-religious saint, if there can be such a person." **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist who worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1999.

Why Europe's centre keeps losing elections

Voters can't tell the difference between the centre left and the centre right, but they don't want either

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More than a quarter of a century ago, much of the European centre-left made a course change, edging away from its working class base, accommodating itself to the globalisation of capital, and handing over the post World War II social contract to private industry. Whether it was the “New Labour” of Tony Blair in Britain or Gerhard Schroder’s “Agenda 2010” in Germany, social democracy came to terms with its traditional foe, capitalism.

Today, that compact is shattered, the once powerful centre-left a shadow of its former self, and the European Union – the largest trading bloc on the planet – is in profound trouble.

In election after election over the past year, social democratic parties went down to defeat, although centre-right parties also lost voters. Last year’s election in the Netherlands saw the Labour Party decimated, though its conservative coalition partner also took a hit. In France, both the Socialist Party and the traditional conservative parties didn’t even make the run-offs. September’s elections in Germany saw the Social Democrats (GPD) take a pounding, along with their conservative alliance partners, the Christian Democratic Union and Christian

Social Union. And Italy’s centre-left Democratic Party was decisively voted out of power.

It would be easy to see this as a shift to the right. The neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany (AfG) has 92 seats in the Bundestag. The Dutch anti-Muslim Party for Freedom picked up five seats. The extreme right National Front made the runoffs in France. The racist, anti-immigrant Northern League took 17.5 percent of the Italian vote and is in the running to form a government.



But the fall of the centre-left has more to do with the 1990s course change than with any rightward shift by the continent. As the centre-left accommodated itself to capital, it eroded its trade union base. In the case of New Labour,

Blair explicitly distanced the Party from the unions that had been its backbone since it was founded in 1906.

In Germany, the Social Democrats began rolling back the safety net, cutting taxes for corporations and the wealthy, and undermining labour codes that had guaranteed workers steady jobs at decent wages.

The European Union – originally touted as a way to end the years of conflict that had em-

broiled the continent in two world wars – became a vehicle for enforcing economic discipline on its 27 members. Rigid fiscal rules favoured countries such as Germany, Britain, Austria and the Netherlands, while straitjacketing countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, particularly in times of economic crisis.

Centre-left parties all over Europe bailed out banks and financial speculators, while inflicting ruinous austerity measures on their own populations to pay for it. It became difficult for most people to distinguish between the policies of the centre-right and the centre-left.

Both backed austerity as a strategy for the debt crisis. Both weakened trade unions through “reforms” that gave employers greater power. Short-term contracts – so-called “mini jobs” – with lower wages and benefits replaced long-term job security, a strategy that fell especially hard on young people.

Centre-left parties bailed out banks, while inflicting ruinous austerity measures to pay for it

The recent Italian elections are a case in point. While the centre-left Democratic Party (DP) bailed out several regional banks, its labour minister recommended that young Italians emigrate to find jobs. It was the Five Star Movement that called for a guaranteed income for poor Italians and sharply criticised the economics of austerity.

In contrast, the DP called for “fiscal responsibility” and support for the EU, hardly a programme that addressed inequality, economic malaise, and youth unemployment. Euro-skeptic parties took 55 percent of the vote, while the Democrats tumbled from 41 percent four years ago to 19 percent.

In the German elections, the SPD did raise the issue of economic justice, but since the party had been part of the governing coalition, voters plainly did not believe it. The party’s leader Martin Schulz called for a “united states of Europe,” not exactly a barn-burner phrase when the EU is increasingly unpopular.

Breaking a pre-election promise to go into opposition, the SPD has re-joined Merkel’s “Grand Coalition.” While the SPD landed some important cabinet posts, history suggests the party will pay for that decision. It also allows the neo-Nazi AfD to be the official opposition in the Bundestag, handing it a bully pulpit.

The unwillingness of Europe’s social democrats to break from the policies of accommodation has opened an economic flank for the right to attack, and the centre-left’s unwillingness to come to grips with immigration makes them vulnerable to racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Both the Italian and German centre-left avoided the issue during their elections, ceding the issue to the right.

Europe does have an immigration problem, but it is not the right’s spectre of “job-stealing, Muslim rapists” overrunning the continent. EU members – most of all Italy – have a shrinking and increasingly aged population. If the continent does not turn those demographics around – and rein in “mini jobs” that discourage young workers from having children – it is in serious long-term trouble. There simply will not be enough workers to support the current level of pensions and health care.

In any case, many of the “immigrants” are EU members – Poles, Bulgarians, Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese and Romanians – looking for work in England and Germany because their own austerity-burdened economies can’t offer them a decent living.

The centre-left did not buy into the right’s racism, but neither did it make the point that immigrants are in the long-term interests of Europe. Nor did it do much to challenge the foreign policy of the EU and NATO that actively aids or abets wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and Syria, wars that fuel millions of those immigrants.

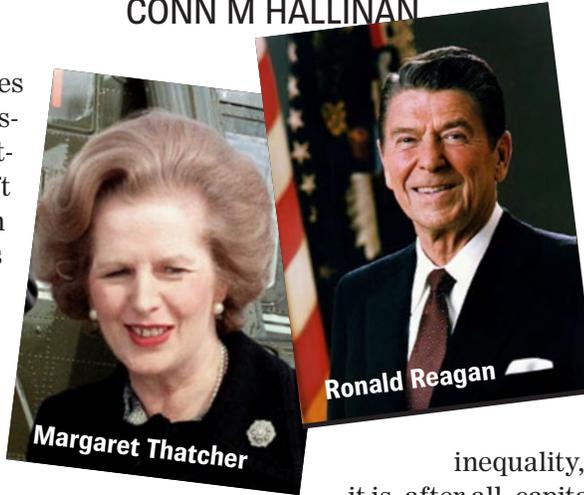
One of the most telling critiques that Five Star aimed at the DP was that the party supported the overthrow of the Libyan government and the consequent collapse of Libya as a functioning nation. Most of the immigrants headed for Italy come from, or through, Libya.

When centre-left parties embraced socially progressive policies, voters supported them. In Portugal two left parties formed a coalition with the Social Democrats to get the economy back on track, lower the jobless rate, and roll back many of the austerity measures enforced on the country by the EU. In recent local elections, voters gave them a ringing endorsement.

Jeremy Corbyn took the British Labour Party to the left with a programme to re-nationalise railroads, water, energy and the postal service, and Labour is now running neck and neck with the Conservatives. Polls also indicate that voters like Labour's programme of green energy, improving health care, and funding education and public works.

The examples of Portugal and Britain argue that voters are not turning away from left policies, but from the direction that the centre left has taken over the past quarter century.

The formulas of the right – xenophobia and nationalism – will do little to alleviate the growing economic inequality in Europe, nor will they address some very real existential problems such as climate change. The real threat to the Dutch doesn't come from Muslims, but the melting of the Greenland ice cap and the West Antarctic ice sheet, which, sometime in the next few decades, will send the North Sea over the Netherlands' dikes.



When Europe emerged from the last world war, the left played an essential role in establishing a social contract that guaranteed decent housing, health care and employment for the continent's people. There was still

inequality, exploitation, and greed – it is, after all, capitalism – but there was also a compact that did its best to keep the playing field level. In the words of Mette Frederiksen, a leading Danish social democrat, “to save capitalism from itself.”

The Thatcher government in Britain and the Reagan government in Washington broke that compact. Taxes were shifted from corporations and the wealthy to the working class and poor. Public services were privatised, education defunded, and the safety net shredded.

If the centre-left is to make a comeback, it will have to re-discover its roots and lure voters away from xenophobia and narrow nationalism with a program that improves peoples' lives and begins the difficult task of facing up to what capitalism has wrought on the planet.

CT

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Conn Hallinan is a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus. He has a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley and oversaw the journalism programme at the University of California at Santa Cruz for 23 years. He is a winner of a Project Censored Real News Award, and lives in Berkeley, California. He blogs at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com

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Does the news have a future?

By Philip Kraske

Does the news have a future? I wish that it did,
I like mine well-written and of horse feathers
rid,
All propped on stout pylons of facts, figs and
stats,
And with but a page about hits and at-bats,
And if they throw in a Pentagon scandal,
I'm glad to their toes a scribe's holding candle.

But lately I'm feeling this pull on my leg:
I see but crusades with hard news gone a-beg.
Here's Mueller to remind us that Trump's not
legit,
This drama "Collusion" where clues hardly fit,
There's Stormy whose lawsuit's in its inception,
'Course for those eyebrows I'll make an excep-
tion.

Another crusade knocks on poor Vlady Putin,
Who might get some Likes if his name was
Wayne Newton,
His Russia's improved since the Boris Y. time,
When neocons enabled the wealthy's repine,
But Wash-town loathes Vlady 'cause he's not
their man,
They want Russia put down, knocked hard on
its can.

Yes, the news now is Crusade True Confessions,
In which China crushes all free expressions,
Iran gets whacked for repressing females,
India for rape and Assad for assails,
Famine in NK, Maduro's poor graces:
Are things always lousy in all of these places?

I doubt that they are but the media say yes,
Hence in our own country the crises are less.
Foreclosures are nil and good jobs abound,
Our wars are progressing with nobody downed,
The race problem's solved, women brag of their lot,
It's folks paid by Putin who come stir our pot.

Gee-whiz, then go tell him I'd like to cash in,
Maybe not for the dough of one who's all in,
Like millionaires handsome who broadcast Fox
News:

I'm fine with six figures if I can spout views,
For if news has come down to crusade-du-jours,
It only depends on who foots the sinecures. **CT**

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Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His four novels, centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009. His website is www.philipkraske.com

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT
www.coldtype.net/joe.html

Making atrocities great again

Trump's recycling programme: War crimes and war criminals, old and (potentially) new

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A barely noticed anniversary slid by on March 20th. It's been 15 years since the United States committed the greatest war crime of the 21st-century: the unprovoked, aggressive invasion of Iraq. The New York Times, which didn't exactly cover itself in glory in the run-up to that invasion, recently ran an op-ed by an Iraqi novelist living in the United States entitled *Fifteen Years Ago, America Destroyed My Country*, but that was about it. The Washington Post, another publication that (despite the recent portrayal of its Vietnam-era heroism in the movie *The Post*) repeatedly editorialised in favour of the invasion, marked the anniversary with a story about the war's "murky" body count. Its piece concluded that at least 600,000 people died in the decade and a half of war, civil war, and chaos that followed – roughly the population of Washington, DC.

These days, there's a significant consensus here that the Iraq invasion was a "terrible mistake," a "tragic error," or even the "single worst foreign policy decision in American history." Fewer voices are saying what it really was: a war crime. In fact, that invasion fell into the very category that led the list of crimes at the Nuremberg tribunal, where high Nazi officials were tried for their actions during World War II. During the negotiations establishing that tribunal and its rules, it was (ironically, in view of later events) the United States that insisted on including the crime of "waging a war of aggression" and on placing it at the head of the list. The US position

was that all the rest of Germany's war crimes sprang from this first "crime against peace."

Similarly, the many war crimes of Dick Cheney and George W Bush – the extraordinary renditions; the acts of torture at Guantánamo, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, and CIA black sites all over the world; the nightmare of abuse at Abu Ghraib, a US military prison in Iraq; the siege and firebombing (with white phosphorus) of the Iraqi city of Fallujah; the massacre of civilians in Haditha, another Iraqi city – all of these arose from the Bush administration's determination to invade Iraq.

It was to secure "evidence" of a (nonexistent) connection between Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda attackers of 9/11 that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld upped the ante at Guantánamo in his infamous memo approving torture there. The search for proof of the same connection motivated the torture of Abu Zubaydah at a CIA black site in Thailand. If not for that long-planned invasion of Iraq, the "war on terror" might have ended years ago.

Fifteen years is an eternity in what Gore Vidal once called "the United States of Amnesia." So why resurrect the ancient history of George W Bush in the brave new age of Donald Trump? The answer is simple enough: because the Trump administration is already happily recycling some of those Bush-era war crimes along with some of the criminals who committed them. And its

REBECCA GORDON

top officials, military and civilian, are already threatening to generate new ones of their own.

Last July, the State Department closed the office that, since the Clinton administration, has assisted war crimes victims seeking justice in other countries. Apparently, the Trump administration sees no reason to do anything to limit the impunity of war criminals, whoever they might be.

Reporting on the closure, Newsweek quoted Major Todd Price, who worked at Guantánamo as a judge advocate general (JAG) defense attorney, this way: “It just makes official what has been US policy since 9/11, which is that there will be no notice taken of war crimes because so many of them were being committed by our own allies, our military and intelligence officers, and our elected officials. The war crime of conspiring and waging aggressive war still exists, as torture, denial of fair trial rights, and indefinite detention are war crimes. But how embarrassing and revealing of hypocrisy would it be to charge a foreign official with war crimes such as these?”

Guantánamo JAG attorneys like Price are among the real, if unsung, heroes of this sorry period. They continue to advocate for their indefinitely detained, still untried clients, most of whom will probably never leave that prison. Despite the executive order President Obama signed on his first day in office to close GITMO, it remains open to this day and Donald Trump has promised to “load it up with some bad dudes,” Geneva Conventions be damned.

Indeed, Secretary of Defense James (“Mad Dog”) Mattis has said that the president has the

right to lock up anyone identified as a “combatant” in our forever wars, well, forever. In 2016, he assured the Senate Armed Services Committee that any detainee who “has signed up with this enemy” – no matter where “the president, the commander-in-chief, sends us” to fight – should know that he will be a “prisoner until the war is over.” In other words, since the war on terror will never end, anyone the US captures in Afghanistan, Iraq, Niger, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, or elsewhere will face the possibility of spending the rest of his life in Guantánamo.

Speaking of Mattis and war crimes, there’s

already plenty of blood on his hands. He earned that “Mad Dog” sobriquet while commanding the US Marines who twice in 2004 laid siege to Fallujah. During those sieges, American forces sealed that Iraqi city off so no one could leave, attacked marked ambulances and aid workers, shot women, children, and an ambulance driver, killed almost 6,000 civilians outright, displaced 200,000 more, and destroyed 75 percent of the city with bombs and other munitions. The civilian toll was

vastly disproportionate to any possible military objective – itself the definition of a war crime.

One of the uglier aspects of that battle was the use of white phosphorus, an incendiary munition. Phosphorus ignites spontaneously when exposed to air. If bits of that substance attach to human beings, as long as there’s oxygen to combine with the phosphorus, skin and flesh burn away, sometimes right into the bone. Use of white phosphorus as an anti-personnel weapon

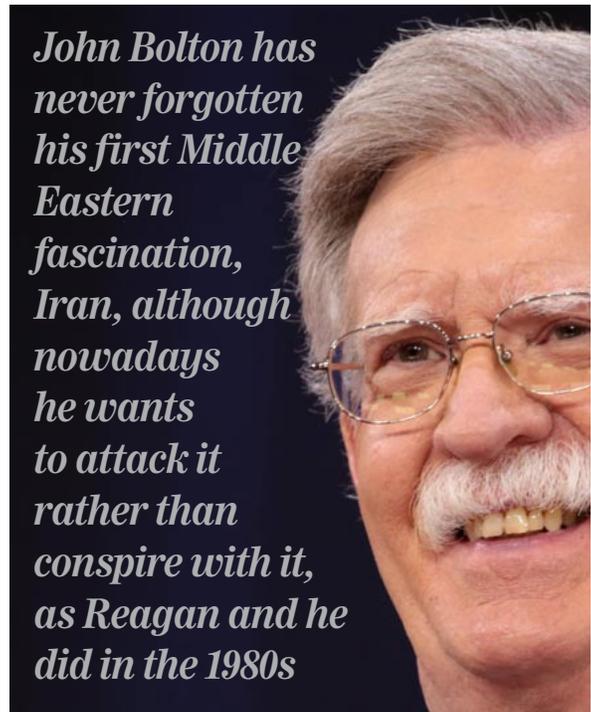


Photo: Gage Skidmore

John Bolton has never forgotten his first Middle Eastern fascination, Iran, although nowadays he wants to attack it rather than conspire with it, as Reagan and he did in the 1980s

is forbidden under the Chemical Weapons Convention, which the US has signed.

In Iraq, Mattis also saw to it that charges would be dropped against soldiers responsible for murdering civilians in the city of Haditha. In a well-documented 2005 massacre – a reprisal for a roadside bomb – American soldiers shot 24 unarmed men, women, and children at close range. As the convening authority for the subsequent judicial hearing, Mattis dismissed the murder charges against all the soldiers accused of that atrocity.

In many countries, covering up war crimes would merit prosecution; but not in the US

Mattis is hardly the only slightly used war criminal in the Trump administration. As most people know, the president has just nominated Deputy CIA Director Gina Haspel to head the Agency. There are times when women might want to celebrate the shattering of a glass ceiling, but this shouldn't be one of them. Haspel was responsible for running a CIA black site in Thailand, during a period in the Bush years when the Agency's torture programme was operating at full throttle. She was in charge, for instance, when the CIA tortured Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, who was waterboarded at least three times and, according to the executive summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee's Torture report, "interrogated using the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques." (The report provided no further details.)

Haspel was also part of the chain of command that ordered the destruction of videotapes of the torture of Abu Zubaydah (waterboarded a staggering 83 times). According to the PBS show Frontline, she drafted the cable that CIA counterterrorism chief José Rodríguez sent out to make sure those tapes disappeared. In many countries, covering up war crimes would itself merit prosecution; in Washington, it earns a promotion.

Many people remember that Trump campaigned on a promise to bring back waterboard-

ing "and a whole lot worse." On the campaign trail, he repeatedly insisted that torture "works" and that even "if it doesn't work, they [whoever "they" may be] deserve it anyway, for what they're doing." Trump repeated his confidence in the efficacy of torture a few days after his inauguration, saying that "people at the highest level of intelligence" had assured him it worked.

Trump's nominee to replace Rex Tillerson as secretary of state is former Tea Party congressman and CIA Director Mike Pompeo. Known for his antipathy to Muslims (and to Iran), he once endorsed calling his Indian-American electoral opponent a "turban topper."

Pompeo is as eager as Trump to restore torture's good name and legality, although his public pronouncements have sometimes been more circumspect than the president's. During his CIA confirmation hearings he assured the Senate Intelligence Committee of what most of its members wanted to hear: that he would "absolutely not" reinstitute waterboarding and other forms of torture, even if ordered to do so by the president. However, his written testimony was significantly more equivocal. As the British newspaper, the Independent reported, Pompeo wrote that he would back reviewing the ban on waterboarding if prohibiting the technique was shown to impede the "gathering of vital intelligence."

Pompeo added that he planned to reopen the question of whether interrogation techniques should be limited to those – none of them considered torture techniques – found in the Army Field Manual, something legally required ever since, in 2009, President Obama issued an executive order to that effect. ("If confirmed," wrote Pompeo, "I will consult with experts at the [Central Intelligence] Agency and at other organisations in the US government on whether the Army Field Manual uniform application is an impediment to gathering vital intelligence to protect the country.") Unlike many of Trump's appointees, Pompeo is a smart guy, which makes him all the more dangerous.

When President Trump lists his triumphs,

often the first one he mentions is the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch as a Supreme Court justice. Gorsuch, too, played a small but juicy role in the Bush torture drama, drafting the president's signing statement for the Detainee Treatment Act when he worked in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel back in 2005. That statement officially outlawed any torture of "war on terror" detainees, and yet left open the actual practice of torture because, as Gorsuch assured President Bush, none of the administration's self-proclaimed "enhanced interrogation techniques" (including waterboarding) amounted to torture in the first place.

Still, of all Trump's recycled appointments, the most dangerous of all took place only recently. The president fired his national security advisor, Lieutenant General HR McMaster, and replaced him with John Bolton of Iran-Contra and Iraq invasion fame.

Bolton didn't want to hear that Iraq had no active chemical weapons programme

Under George W. Bush, Bolton was a key proponent of that invasion, which he'd been advocating since at least 1998 when he signed an infamous letter to Bill Clinton from the Project for a New American Century recommending just such a course of action. In 2002, Bolton, while undersecretary of state for arms control, engineered the dismissal of José Bustani, the head of the UN's Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which was involved in overseeing Iraq's disarmament process. A former Bolton deputy told the New York Times that Bolton was dismayed because Bustani "was trying to send chemical-weapons inspectors to Baghdad in advance of the US-led invasion." Presumably Bolton didn't want the UN trumpeting the bad news that Iraq had no active chemical weapons programme at that moment.

Nor has Bolton ever forgotten his first Middle Eastern fascination, Iran, although nowadays he wants to attack it (along with North Korea) rather than conspire with it, as President

Reagan and he did in the 1980s. He's argued in several editorials and as a Fox News commentator – wrongly as it happens – that it would be completely legal for the United States to launch first strikes against both countries. Naturally, he opposes the six-nation pact with Iran to end its nuclear weapons programme. When that agreement was signed, the New York Times ran an op-ed by Bolton entitled "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran." It should (but doesn't) go without saying that any first strike against another country is again the very definition of the initial crime on that Nuremberg list.

We can't blame the Trump administration for the decision to support Saudi Arabia's grim war in Yemen, a catastrophe for the civilians of that poverty-stricken, now famine-plagued country. That choice was made under Barack Obama. But President Trump hasn't shown the slightest urge to end the American role in it either. Not after the Saudis threw him that fabulous party in Riyadh, projecting a five-story-high portrait of him on the exterior of the Ritz Carlton there. Not after his warm embrace of Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman during his recent visit to the United States. In fact, at their joint press conference, Trump actually criticised former president Obama for bothering the Saudis with complaints about human rights violations in Yemen and in Saudi Arabia itself.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to fund and support the Saudi military's three-year-old war crime in that country, providing weaponry (including cluster bombs), targeting intelligence, and mid-air refuelling for Saudi aircraft conducting missions there. The conflict, which the New York Times has called "the world's worst humanitarian crisis," has killed at least 10,000 people, although accurate numbers are almost impossible to come by. As of December 2017, the Yemen Data Project had catalogued 15,489 separate air attacks, of which almost a third involved no known military targets and another 4,800 hit targets that have yet to be identified. Hospitals and other health facilities have been targeted along with crowded markets. Gov-

ernment funding for public health and sanitation ended in 2016, leading to a cholera epidemic that the Guardian calls “the largest and fastest-spreading outbreak of the disease in modern history.”

Through the illegal blockading of Yemen’s ports, Saudi Arabia and its allies have exposed vast numbers of Yemenis to the risk of famine as well. Even before the latest blockade began in November 2017, that country faced the largest food emergency in the world. Now, it is in the early stages of a potentially devastating famine caused entirely by Saudi Arabia’s illegal war, aided and abetted by the United States. In addition, Trump has increased the number of drone assassinations in Yemen, with their ever-present risk of civilian deaths.

Drone operators will now be permitted to attack civilian homes and vehicles

Yemen is hardly the only site for actual and potential Trump administration war crimes. In response to requests from his military commanders, the president has, for instance, eased the targeting restrictions that had previously been in place for drone strikes, a decision he’s also failed to report to Congress, as required by law. According to Al-Jazeera, such drone strikes in countries ranging from Libya to Afghanistan will no longer require the presence of an “imminent threat,” which means “the US may now select targets outside of armed conflict,” with increased risk of hitting noncombatants. Also relaxed has been the standard previously in place “of requiring ‘near certainty’ that the target is present” before ordering a strike. Drone operators will now be permitted to attack civilian homes and vehicles, even if they can’t confirm that the human being they are searching for is there. Under Trump, the CIA, which President Obama had largely removed from the drone wars, is once again ordering such attacks along with the military. All of these changes make it more likely that Washington’s serial aerial assassinations will kill significant numbers of ci-

vilians in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other target countries.

Defense Secretary Mattis has also loosened the rules of engagement in Afghanistan by, for example, removing the “proximity requirement” for bombing raids. In other words, US forces are now free to drop bombs even when the target is nowhere near US or Afghan military forces. As Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee last October, “If they are in an assembly area, a training camp, we know they are an enemy and they are going to threaten the Afghan government or our people, [Gen. John Nicholson, commander of US Forces Afghanistan,] has the wherewithal to make that decision. Wherever we find them, anyone who is trying to throw the NATO plan off, trying to attack the Afghan government, then we can go after them.”

Under such widened rules for air strikes – permitting them anytime our forces notice a group of people “assembling” in an area – the chances of killing civilians go way up. And indeed, civilian casualties rose precipitously in Afghanistan last year.

And then there’s always the chance – the odds have distinctly risen since the appointments of two raging Iranophobes, Pompeo and Bolton, to key national security positions – that Trump will start his very own unprovoked war of aggression. “I’m good at war,” Trump told an Iowa rally in 2015. “I’ve had a lot of wars of my own. I’m really good at war. I love war in a certain way, but only when we win.” With Mike Pompeo whispering in one ear and John Bolton in the other, it’s frighteningly likely Trump will soon commit his very own war crime by starting an aggressive war against Iran. **CT**

*Rebecca Gordon teaches at the University of San Francisco. She is the author of *American Nuremberg: The U.S. Officials Who Should Stand Trial for Post-9/11 War Crimes*. Her previous books include *Mainstreaming Torture: Ethical Approaches in the Post-9/11 United States* and *Letters from Nicaragua*. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

ColdType Insights

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Always listening: Amazon's Echo speaker "listens in so that they can learn on our behalf."

An existential case for ditching Alexa

By allowing bits of plastic to take off the rough edges, we may be making our lives more artificial, says **Brendon Canavan**

Alexa's creepy laugh is far from the most worrying thing about her. This is despite the fact that Amazon's digital assistant – which allows users to access the internet and control personal organisation tools simply by speaking to the device – has been reported to spontaneously chuckle to herself. We shouldn't be too concerned about her

going rogue and turning on us either – a Terminator-style takeover by artificial intelligence doesn't seem imminent.

But Alexa does pose one immediate threat. Rather than worrying about AI becoming more human, we should fear ourselves becoming more artificial by outsourcing important actions and decisions to devices like her.

This idea hasn't been discussed much. Research suggests that the public's main concern about AI is instead it becoming super intelligent and developing a mind of its own. Various prominent science and technology experts, such as the late physicist Stephen Hawking and the entrepreneur Elon Musk, have warned of the potential risks of such a scenario.

Yet Amazon and Google's devices are popular, and were on many Christmas wish lists in 2017. Apple's ad for their new Homepod contender, directed by Spike Jonze, has been generating online chatter. AI is creeping ever further into our lives. Digital home assistants are just one part of this.

While the devices are intrusive – always listening in on our previously private spaces – many people find them worth it. They listen in so that they can learn on our behalf. They learn our routines and preferences and make recommendations for us.

As a result, these machines can simplify day-to-day tasks and make life that little bit more efficient. Expensive adverts illustrate how they can tell us the weather without looking out of the window and change the TV channel without reaching for the

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remote. They can also look up recipes, dim the lights, distract a bored child and so forth. Alexa and her ilk can even think for us. Whether you need knowledge, answers or memories – it can all be conjured up with a quick call and outsourced to the cloud.

But how are these devices affecting us? For starters, lots of physical and intellectual tasks are streamlined or done away with altogether. The idea is that this makes us more efficient.

And it seems to be working – AI can now monitor our workplace performance, our financial score and, just over the horizon, our social value – all in the name of improving productivity (one should ask, for whom?). It is also starting to look after our infants and elderly. It is selecting suitable romantic partners for us through apps. Perhaps the ideal partner might even be an artificial one.

But humans are not necessarily supposed to be efficient. We are messy, emotional, irrational creatures. Romantic interactions, for example, are often excruciating. But we push through in hope. Deciding what to do with the day is frequently impulsive, spur of the moment stuff. When throwing together whatever is left in the fridge, we sometimes come up with unexpectedly tasty new meals. Just being bored can similarly help us come up with cutting-edge ideas.

This may not be efficient, but it shows that there is value in mistakes and embarrassing

situations. The experiences that make up life are not always easy or enjoyable. They can be physically and mentally exhausting. But it is through these experiences that we connect with others and ourselves. So are we outsourcing the very things that ultimately make us human?

Existential philosophy gives a handle on this situation. Existentialism is a school of thought that considers what it means to be human, to be oneself and to be happy. Its central argument is that the absurdity and lack of meaning in life can make us unhappy.

However, we can create meaning by searching for our “authentic self”. Authenticity may be interpreted as an ideal state of fulfilment, in which people can pursue their own independent destiny and be true to themselves.

According to existentialism, the notion of responsibility is central to living genuinely. The existentialist author Jean-Paul Sartre believed that each of us is the lone author of our decisions. We are nothing more than what we make of ourselves – the totality of our actions.

It is tempting to give up the burden of responsibility. But in not taking responsibility for our actions we also give up our freedom. Our identity and independent destiny become subsumed to another. Not only do we give up responsibility for our actions, but we limit our experiences and relationships.

For existentialists, individual destiny is rooted in these. Experiences, such as travel, can shake us out of our routines and give us space for self-reflection. Meanwhile, it is through the eyes of others that we catch sight of ourselves. Our interactions with others ultimately help us to establish who we are.

Alexa lessens all of these. She takes responsibility for our decisions to some extent. She regulates our experiences. She manages our relationships. Just consider the fact that AI is already getting involved in hiring staff – this is a clear example of how we are outsourcing important human decisions.

Where we gain in efficiency, we lose in spontaneity, serendipity and connectedness. From an existentialist perspective, digital assistants are dehumanising. They imply derogation of responsibility, detachment from experiences and disconnect from ourselves.

By allowing circular bits of plastic to take off the rough edges, we seem to be unwittingly making our lives that much more artificial. An existentially authentic individual shows bravery in facing up to difficult choices. Unplugging Alexa and looking up at the sky to check the forecast might be a good first one to take. **CT**

Brendan Canavan is senior lecturer in marketing at England's University of Huddersfield. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Billionaires won't save us: Look at Elon Musk

"Playboy genius" squanders taxpayer money on pet projects like Mars trips and flamethrowers, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

Will Mars save humanity? Or will our saviour be billionaire Elon Musk?

Musk, the CEO of SpaceX and Tesla, humbly believes we don't have to choose. Mars will save us, he promises, and Musk himself will engineer this Mars miracle.

In 2019, Musk claims, SpaceX will start making short trips to Mars. By the early 2020s, his company will begin colonizing the Red Planet with a human population.

Why this feverish haste to set foot on interplanetary terra firma?

Musk sees a new "dark age" descending on our precious Earth. Another world war — or some environmental collapse — appears likely to threaten us with extinction, he fears.

Mars strikes Musk as our ideal refuge, the place where humankind will heroically regroup and eventually "bring human civilisation back" to our mother planet.

And we can even have some fun in the process. The Mars colony that Musk envisions will have everything from iron foundries to "pizza joints and nightclubs."

"Mars," he quips, "should re-



ELON MUSK: Seeking refuge on Mars. Photo: Brian Solis /Wikimedia

ally have great bars."

Reporters have become accustomed to this sort of visionary whimsy from Musk. The billionaire, *In These Times* says, has crafted his image as "a quirky and slightly off-kilter playboy genius inventor capable of conquering everything from outer space to the climate crisis with the sheer force of his imagination."

This carefully cultivated image has proven extraordinarily lucrative.

Investors now value Tesla, his 15-year-old car company, at around \$60 billion — not bad, note Wall Street watchdogs Pam and Russ Martens, for a

firm that "lost almost \$2 billion last year and has never delivered an annual profit to shareholders."

But Musk remains supremely confident that his enterprise on Mars will take root and prosper. He's betting a good chunk of his fortune on that.

Or rather, he's betting a good chunk of taxpayers' fortune.

Musk owes his billions, as commentator Kate Aronoff points out, to the billions in direct taxpayer subsidies his companies have received over the years — and the billions more in taxpayer-funded research into rocket technology and other high-tech fields of knowledge.

So Musk is essentially investing our billions in his own pet projects, everything from the Mars gambit to establishing a mass-market niche for high-tech flamethrowers.

None of this is going to rescue humanity anytime soon.

Indeed, if Musk really wanted to ensure humankind a sustainable future, he wouldn't be plotting escapes to Mars or marketing flamethrowers to the masses. He'd be challenging the global economic status quo that's left him phenomenally rich and our world phenomenally unequal.

This inequality may well pose the greatest threat to our well-being as a species. Stark economic divides invite armed confrontations.

Inequality and conflict, Nor-

wegian scholars observed last year in a major report for the United Nations and the World Bank, remain “inextricably linked.”

They found that “inequality influences the outbreak and dynamics of violent conflict,” going all the way back to the ancient Greeks.

In more recent years, researchers have made great strides in understanding the actual pathways in unequal societies that turn conflict violent.

But huge gaps in the research are still frustrating our understanding.

What we do know: Hawking high-tech flamethrowers is never going to save humanity. Neither will bar-hopping on Mars. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*, where an earlier version of this appeared. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, will be published this spring

and women. In this case, the lack of consent for an intimate moment is being trivialised because it was a male on the receiving end. It is also supposedly funny, just like so many popular culture references to men “wanting” to be raped by “hot” women. Neither is good for men, who often struggle to report abuse and assault for fear of stigma. Nor is it good for women to reinforce the notion that unwanted sexual behaviour is OK if they do it, or if the person is famous enough.

Still worse is the way the show is glorifying the moment. American Idol promoted it heavily before the show aired, despite Glaze saying he was a bit uncomfortable. Lionel Richie even egged her on as she did it.

I appreciate Glaze’s right to react as he wishes, and he has said he is simply happy for the experience of being on American Idol. Having been grabbed and kissed without my permission, I can say it made me feel dirty and disgusted, angry and sad. But the show, its fans, and the trolls on radio, TV and social media who think that makes it all OK are all simply wrong. It is very definitely not OK. To engage in or condone such a repulsive ratings ploy is no better than to say it was OK for Harvey Weinstein to kiss Cara Delevingne without her consent. **CT**

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Laura Finley teaches in the Barry University Department of Sociology & Criminology and is syndicated by PeaceVoice

Shame on you, Katie Perry

48 Planting a kiss on an American Idol contestant without his consent is not the right thing to do, writes **Laura Finley**

I am appalled that pop singer Katy Perry planted an unwanted kiss on an American Idol contestant during her judging duties for the show. Although the contestant, Benjamin Glaze, says he does not consider it to be sexual harassment, by definition it decidedly is. Glaze was even asked if he would have consented if Perry would have sought his permission for the kiss and he said no. Yet radio hosts are giggling about it like nonconsensual kissing is funny. In particular, they are having a good chuckle at Glaze’s comment that he “didn’t like it.” But “It’s Katy Perry!” I keep hearing, as though the fact that she’s a cute celebrity makes any

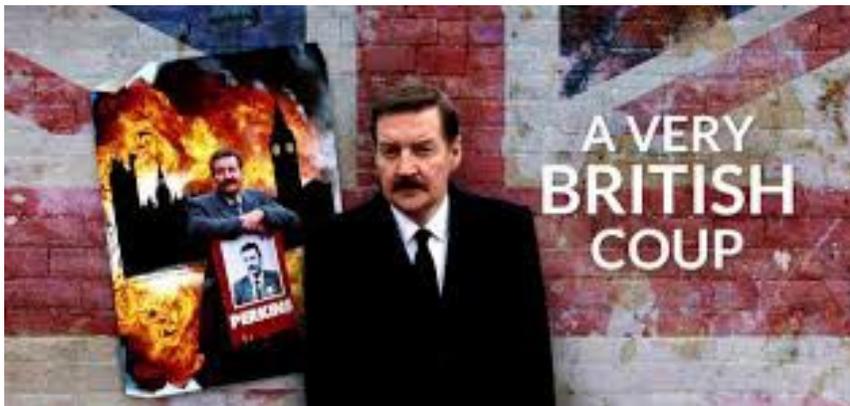


BAD EXAMPLE?: Katie Perry in concert in Paris.

Photo: ouinouin / Flickr

difference.

This all reeks of the double standard that harms both men



Promotional art for the Channel 4 TV adaptation of former MP Chris Mullen's book, *A Very British Coup*.

Life imitates art in Washington

Donald Trump seems to have become a pawn of the Russians in one of two famous political dramas, writes **Rick Salutin**

It's hard to tell if we're watching *The Manchurian Candidate* or *A Very British Coup*.

CNN is screening the former, based on a twice-made film about a US president planted by the enemy. The Russians, starting in Soviet times, stealthily recruited Trump, playing on his desperate ego and his yen to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. Then they "invaded" the US election to put him in power and are now running him.

This week's evidence is the phone call where he congratulated Putin on Russia's election, contrary to a memo ordering: **DO NOT CONGRATULATE**. CNN mavens like Jeffrey Toobin sputter on about it.

Fox News has adapted *A Very British Coup*, a 1982 novel about

a leftist prime minister undermined by the UK's "deep state," also made twice for TV. In the US version, Trump was fairly elected and is being undermined by the deep state, a security-media cabal that controls the US

Actually CNN seems to be screening it too. This week they interviewed a former CIA head who said the Russians may "have something" on Trump. It was like *A Very British Coup* for dummies. In the original, deep staters don't go on TV to give interviews.

Personally, I'm not distressed by the phone call. He's president, he has the right to ignore memos (in CAPS yet). He made nice, as reports said, with Putin. That's diplomacy: diplomacy is lying, everyone knows that.

He skipped berating Putin over election meddling and instead discussed the risks of a nuclear arms buildup (hardly mentioned in the news), which preoccupies Putin (wouldn't know that either). On this particular file, Trump is the adult. Does Putin "have something" on him? So what? In politics, motives don't matter. But I digress.

They're both engrossing plot lines, which is the problem. They reduce the electorate to an audience. The more gripping the plot, the less voters feel they have any agency. Everything depends on intrigue and chess moves among high-level players. Nothing gets determined democratically, politics abdicates.

The ultimate in this kind of demobilizing Grand Guignol was Watergate in 1973. It followed an election in which villain/monster Richard Nixon wiped out a perfectly decent left wing Democratic candidate, George McGovern, who got only 17 of 537 electoral votes. Nixon won the popular vote by 18 million. Yet in months he was gone, crushed by an insider cabal of congress, media and security agencies. "The people" were mere, though rapt, onlookers.

So is Watergate the Ur-plotline for Trump: the only way to take him down is by stealth, versus democratic politics? Not so fast. First, Trump isn't Nixon.

Nixon looked like a villain. He was personally repulsive. But he was also, says Noam Chomsky, the last liberal US president. He created the Environmental Protection Agency, backed consumer

safety, healthy workplaces, women's rights to sports funding, appointed supreme court judges who made abortion legal and ended "Red" China's ostracism by going there and meeting Mao. (Mao smiled when they met, infuriating western leftists, but Mao too knew what diplomacy is about: smiles and lies.)

Second, Trump isn't just beatable, he's already been beaten in the popular vote. US voters have changed. It took a reverse genius like Hillary Clinton to lose. Sanders would probably have beaten Trump, so would Biden, without even factoring out the Russians or Cambridge Analytica. And it wouldn't have engendered the bottomless rage of Republicans who've felt, ever since, cheated out of their righteous victory by Watergate. "This Isn't Watergate" could be the third Trump storyline and the best part is: it doesn't matter if he fires Mueller.

These narratives don't fade quietly, or ever. Last month UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

was charged in the British media with having been a Soviet agent in the 1980s or, at best, a dupe. Based, of course, on security sources.

Chris Mullin, who wrote *A Very British Coup*, and has had an entirely charming career on the left as a journalist, MP and even cabinet minister, surfaced to describe his own

capers among security agencies back then and defend Corbyn. It can be hard keeping the genres of politics and fiction distinct, when even the characters themselves won't stay in their proper lanes. **CT**

Rick Salutin is a Toronto-based activist and author. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star

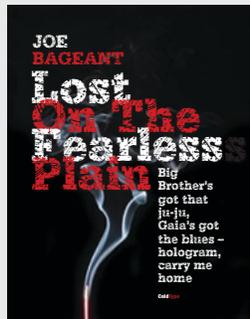
Oppose nukes? You must be a Kremlin tool!

Congressman claims antiwar groups may be Russian plants aiming to undermine US military, says **Whitney Webb**

In February, the Pentagon released a new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the first in eight years, calling for the modernization of the country's aging nuclear arsenal, a key part of President Donald Trump's plan to strengthen and expand the US military. The

2018 NPR calls for the government to spend an estimated \$1.2 trillion dollars on developing new nuclear weapons and missiles, and also rewrites the country's nuclear doctrine in such a way that allows nuclear weapons to be used in response to a non-nuclear attack, includ-

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ing a cyberattack.

Although Trump has met little resistance from either party in his push to modernize the country's nuclear weapons, there has been push-back from a handful of politicians as well as anti-war and nonproliferation advocates, resulting in the most public debate about the country's nuclear weapons and nuclear doctrine in several decades.

Despite the long history of the nonproliferation and anti-war movements in the United States, some politicians have recently asserted that those opposed to the expansion of the nuclear arsenal, as well as the new nuclear doctrine that allows nuclear strikes in response to non-nuclear attacks, are part of a Russian influence campaign aimed at weakening the United States.

Such statements were recently made by Representative Mac Thornberry (R-TX), who is the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and, in 2016, received more money from American weapons manufacturers than any US congressman. Earlier this month, Thornberry spoke at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where he stated:

“[While] there are well-meaning, very sincere opponents to all of the things we talked about today, [...] after what we've seen the past year or two, we better look under the hood and make sure that the Russians are not fuelling our controversies in the



TROUBLING PRECEDENT: Mac Thornberry's statements help build suspicion of American nuclear opponents.

way that we have seen them do in recent months.

“I suspect we're going to see much more sophisticated methods coming from Russia to try and influence the decisions that are required to implement this Nuclear Posture Review. So it's a big deal.”

This type of language has become increasingly common in Washington, especially in attempts to paint those who oppose current government policy as tools of the Russian government. Last month, National Director of Intelligence Daniel Coates stated: “the United States is under attack” because Russia “views the 2018 midterm US elections as a potential [emphasis added] target for Russian influence operations,” which would seek to “exacerbate social and political fissures in the United States.”

Like Thornberry, Coates sug-

gests that those who are against US government policy – thus creating “social and political fissures” — constitute evidence of a Russian influence operation, while offering no concrete facts to support his claims.

Indeed, when asked to provide specific evidence of Russia currently funding non-proliferation and anti-war groups in an effort to challenge the 2018 NPR, Thornberry was evasive, eventually just restating, “I think we need to be much more alert than we have been on how they [Russia] are trying to influence our defense decisions.”

While this type of association between those opposed to nuclear war and the Russian government has become normalized in the US political landscape, Thornberry's statements set a troubling precedent. Any American who opposes giving Donald Trump newer, stronger and farther-reaching nuclear weapons that can be used to respond to any attack – including a “cyberattack” — will now be the target of unsubstantiated suspicion of their motives, patriotism, and commitment to their country. **CT**

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Whitney Webb is a staff writer for MintPress News who has written for several news organizations in both English and Spanish; her stories have been featured on ZeroHedge, the Anti-Media, and 21st Century Wire among others. She lives in Southern Chile. – www.mintpressnews.com

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