

CounterPunch

LYNCHING IN AMERICA BY YVETTE CARNELL

TALKING CYBER WORLD WAR III BLUES BY PETER LEE

REINVENTING THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT BY PATRICK SMITH

NETANYAHU THE REJECTIONIST BY AJAMU BARAKA

THE COMFORTS OF VIETNAM BY MIKE WHITNEY



CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org
CounterPunch Magazine, Volume 22, (ISSN 1086-2323) is a journal of progressive politics, investigative reporting, civil liberties, art, and culture published by The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, Petrolia, California, 95558. Visit counterpunch.org to read dozens of new articles daily, purchase subscriptions, order books, plus access 18 years of archives.

Periodicals postage pending at Eureka, California.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
CounterPunch
P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)
www.counterpunch.org
All rights reserved.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jeffrey St. Clair

MANAGING EDITOR
Joshua Frank

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lee Ballinger, Melissa Beattie, Darwin Bond-Graham, Chloe Cockburn, Windy Cooler, Chris Floyd, Kevin Alexander Gray, Steve Horn, Lee Hall, Conn Hallinan, Barbara Rose Johnson, Binoy Kampmark, JoAnn Wypijewski, David Macaray, Chase Madar, Kim Nicolini, Brenda Norrell, Vijay Prashad, Louis Proyect, Martha Rosenberg, Christine Sheeler, Jan Tucker, Mike Whitney

POETRY EDITOR
Marc Beaudin

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Nathaniel St. Clair

BUSINESS MANAGER &
DESIGN PRODUCTION
Becky Grant

SUBSCRIPTIONS & ORDER FULFILLMENT
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN CONSULTATION
Tiffany Wardle

Contact Information

CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558
Toll Free 1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

EDITORIAL:
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
BUSINESS: becky@counterpunch.org
SUSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANDISE:
counterpunchdeva@gmail.com

Submissions

CounterPunch accepts a small number of submissions from accomplished authors and newer writers. Please send your pitch to counterpunch@counterpunch.org. Due to the large volume of submissions we receive we are able to respond to only those that interest us.

Advertising

Advertising space is available in CounterPunch Magazine. Media kit available upon request. All advertisements are subject to the publisher's approval of copy, text, display, and illustration. CounterPunch reserves the right to reject or cancel any advertisement at any time.
email becky@counterpunch.org

Address Change

Please notify us immediately of email and/or mailing address changes for uninterrupted delivery of issues.

BY MAIL:
CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

BY PHONE:
1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

BY EMAIL (preferred):
counterpunchdeva@gmail.com

Donations

CounterPunch's survival is dependent upon income from subscriptions, donations and book and merchandise sales. We are a non-profit, tax exempt organization under The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, DBA CounterPunch. Donations are welcome year round. Donate by mail, telephone or online: www.counterpunch.org.

Subscriptions

1- year print edition \$55
1- year digital edition (PDF) \$35
1- year print & digital edition \$65
1- year institutions/supporters \$100
1- year print for student/low income \$45
1-year digital for student/low income \$30

All subscription orders must be pre-paid—we do not invoice for orders. Renew by telephone, mail, or on our website. For mailed orders please include name, address and email address with payment, or call

1 (800) 840-3683 or 1 (707) 629-3683.

Add \$20.00 per year for subscriptions mailed to Canada and \$40 per year for all other countries outside the US.

Please do not send checks or money orders in currency other than U.S. dollars. We DO accept debit cards and credit cards from banks outside the US that have the Visa, Mastercard or other major card insignias.

MAKE CHECKS OR
MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO:
CounterPunch
Business Office
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

Send Letters to the Editor to:

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
or email :
counterpunch@counterpunch.org

Cover Image: The Lynching Tree by Nick Roney.

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 4

ARTICLES

The White Terrorists: Lynching in America
BY YVETTE CARNELL 9

The Cul-de-Sac of Israeli Politics
BY AJAMU BARAKA 13

Reinventing the Foreign Correspondent
BY PATRICK SMITH 16

**The Geopolitics of Hacking: Talking Cyber World
War III Blues**
BY PETER LEE 21

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Giving Voices to the Collective
BY LEE BALLINGER 26

COLUMNS

Roaming Charges 5

Israeli Gears

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR
CONGRESS as the real Israeli Defense
Force.

Diamonds and Rust 6
Living Well

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI
Self-discipline, habit and autonomy.

Empire Burlesque 7
The Age of Rapture

BY CHRIS FLOYD
Learning about the end times from
Michele Bachmann

Grasping at Straws 8

Getting Cured in Vietnam

BY MIKE WHITNEY
The cheap comforts of Vietnam.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Immutable Identity

Dear Counterpunch,

The day of the “Je Suis Charlie” march in Paris, a young schoolteacher in a Paris suburb patiently and clearly (according to the witnessing reporter) explained to her multi-ethnic class the difference between insulting a person’s race and insulting their religion. The former attacks their immutable identity, the latter the ideas they espouse. In France, she explained, Catholicism, Judaism or Islam can be attacked, ridiculed and insulted, but you are not permitted to attack someone for being born Breton, Sephardic or Berber. It’s a shame Diane Johnston and Dieudonné did not attend this class; send them both back to grade school, say I.

*Yours truly,
Joe Boyd
London*

Eloquent Piece

I’ve enjoyed Henry Giroux’s work for a long time, but his Counterpunch piece on Cornel West is just stupendous. I hope it’s widely read.

Joshua Sperber

NPR and Real Lost News

I think it ought to be covered that since Koch is a contributor to NPR, things are getting very one sided or maybe they long have been and I’m just noticing. There was a recent program on GMOs presenting them as sort of a world-saver. The other side wasn’t even touched upon that farmers are being sued for

using their patented seed that they didn’t plant, the list goes on and on about the abuses.... not covered.

It worries me that because it’s NPR--people may think they’re getting the truth when in fact they’re only getting one side, the corporate side or right (wrong) side.

60 minutes is pretty useless too, gone are the days of the big busts on film. All light and fluffy now.

John Ramos

Waiting for the General Strike

I was counting on people getting hungrier in this country, so the general strike could happen sooner. But the system and our overlords have adapted by rolling out cheap food via GMO tech. So now we have to wait until regular people refuse to eat non-nutritive cardboard products. This could take a while. We don’t know how to live. We accept far too many indignities.

Alan Thompson

Where Would We Be?

Dear Jeff and CounterPunch friends,
Thanks so much for editing and publishing Trayvons. I will do my best to circulate is here in the prison. I put a copy of Michelle Alexander’s “The New Jim Crow” in the library, as a donation, and it never went into circulation. I hope Trayvons will go further. Thanks also for reaching immeasurable people, educating us over the decades. “Where would we be without you?” is a

scary question!

*Love and peace,
Kathy Kelly
Lexington Federal Prison,
Kentucky*

Defending West

Thank you for Herny Giroux’s articulate and moving defense of Cornel West! Plenty of home runs! Deep insight into the crisis we are living through. Many of us love Cornel and you helped us understand why.

Irving Wesley Hall

Going, Going, Gone

Lake Powell is drying up, now at 45% capacity. It’s draining itself, making the ghost of Dave Brower happy. Lake Mead will drain too. And the ruins of Las Vegas will be buried in sand dunes. A testament to our excrescences for any people still left around. Or future alien visitors to a dead world.

Patrick Mazza

Oh, Baltimore

Poor blacks in Baltimore have taken the brunt of some terrible conditions and treatment by the authorities. But in general, the country has been on the wrong track for years. (Living in Baltimore sucks for working-class white people, too.) Living standards in the USA haven’t risen for two generations. It’s time to examine closely how things are being run, and for whom. The vast majority of us are getting the shaft. All of the benefits of economic growth now go to the top 1% of the population. College costs are out of

control. Student debt is crushing America’s youth. Tenured professorships are vanishing. Infrastructure is of poor quality. Pensions are disappearing. Illegal and colossally expensive wars are waged by the government for no reason. The medical system is relatively poor. The government spies on all of us. Millions of citizens are in prison. Our putative democracy is run by oligarchs. Jobs are lost with each successive “free” trade agreement. Globalization and technology erode the way of life of millions. What is going right in America? The blacks of Baltimore have taken to the streets, but the fact is that we all should be marching and expressing our discontent.

Christopher Schons

What is Obama Doing?

I find it amazing that an African-American President is asking these American people to address this issue. Where is his leadership? What is he doing?

My expectations for the U.S. Presidency has never been so low. He has been able to authorize the murder of thousands of people overseas. He heads a domestic dragnet spying effort. His administration has restricted freedom of press beyond anything seen since WWI. Yet he and his supporters claim there is nothing he can do. What if President Obama devoted as much time to the racial problems of the U.S. as to the TPP? How many male African-Americans have had their civil right restricted by local police? The President can (and should) have these police charged with civil rights violations.

Steve Lerman



ROAMING CHARGES

Israeli Gears

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

It started as a rather melancholy Friday afternoon in the West Bank. Nothing unusual. Just another funeral for a promising young man who died much too young. Under the implacable shadow of the Wall and in the rifle sights of Israeli soldiers, more than 200 mourners walked down the cobbled street toward the old cemetery in the village of Beit Ummar. Some shouted angrily at the soldiers, condemning Israel for yet another senseless death.

The funeral was for a college student, Jafaar Awad, who slipped into a coma and died only two months after being released from an Israeli prison, where his serious illness had festered untreated for months. Awad was only 22 when he died, as have so many other Palestinian prisoners, from medical neglect at the hands of Israeli jailers.

As his family huddled around his grave, the IDF launched a dozen tear gas canisters toward the mourners, scattering the stunned grouping. Then automatic weapons fire strafed the crowd, bullets hitting more than a dozen people, including Jafaar's cousin Ziad Awad. Ziad was struck in the back, the bullet piercing his spine. He was rushed to the Al Ahli Hospital in Hebron, where he died of his wounds. Ziad was only 28

A few hours after Ziad's murder at the hands of Israeli snipers, the IDF issued a terse statement saying that Israeli soldiers fired on the crowd of mourners after people were seen throwing stones.

I'm surprised the IDF even felt compelled to issue a justification for a kind of killing that has become routine: kids were throwing stones, skipping rocks, jumping rope, blowing bubbles, tossing dirt on an open grave. They had no option but to shoot.

The Palestinians have no redress for these daily acts of butchery: no court to go to judge the legitimacy of shootings, no venue to seek compensation for medical bills, pain and suffering or lost work days, no avenue to find a measure of justice for the slain. How much loss, misery and humiliation are one people expected to endure?

The Israeli state has never been more violent, the blood toll of Palestinian civilians never so high. In 2014, the Israeli military and security forces killed more than 2,300 Palestinians and wounded another 17,000. That's the worst carnage since 1967, when the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza intensified in the wake of the Six Day War. During the height of the last Israeli rampage in Gaza last summer, more than 500,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes. And, according to a recent UN Report titled *Fractured Lives*, more than 100,000 of them remain homeless. Detentions of Palestinians inside Israeli prisons are also on the rise. As of the end of February of this year, more than 6,600 Palestinians were being held in Israeli prisons and IDF detention centers, the most in five years. So the gears of the killing machine grind on with impunity, each slaughter only serving to embolden more killing.

Who will stop them? Certainly not the Israeli state's principle financial investor. For the most vigorous Israeli Defense Force, unblinking in its vigilance, unfaltering in its loyalty, is the U.S. Congress. There is a savage synchronicity to an alliance between one nation that drone strikes weddings and another that shoots up funerals.

Each year Congress drops a cool \$3 billion on Israel. Even in chambers ruled by fiscal tightwads the only real debate is whether this lavish dispen-

sation, which accounts for more than half of all U.S. military aid worldwide, is enough to satiate Israel's thirst for new weaponry. Even as Israel repeatedly sabotages U.S. policy across the region, Obama has described the U.S. aid package as "sacrosanct."

In this light, the annual subornment of Israel, which totals about a third of the nation's arms budget, by the U.S. begins to look less like a subsidy to a client state than protection money paid to a gangster organization.

It should come as no surprise that two of Benjamin Netanyahu's most fervid American disciples, Ted Cruz and Tom Cotton, both graduated from Harvard Law, where they incubated in the Zionist hothouse of Alan Dershowitz. Yet, Cruz and Cotton aren't outliers. Indeed, there is scarcely a micron of daylight between the positions of Ted Cruz and Elizabeth Warren, the Athena (to HRC's Medea, I suppose) of the progressives, when it comes to defending the scandalous behavior of Israel. Indeed Warren, like many other liberals, seems to work overtime to demonstrate her unrivaled fealty to the Jewish state.

The vaunted Israel Lobby scarcely even needs a lobbyist anymore. These days the new members of congress arrived pre-conditioned to demonstrate their devotion to the Israeli cause. They don't need to be bribed with PAC money, courted with hookers or blackmailed with indiscrete cellphone photos. When Israel assassinates an Iranian scientist, uses chemical weapons in Gaza, tortures prisoners, murders a young American peace activist, enfilades a burial party or is caught spying on the American president, the congress will leap in unison to its defense--no questions asked, no questions answered--and dispatch another check to Tel Aviv.

In the face of the world's longest running war crime, the American capital stands inert, an ethical void, its halls packed with the political equivalent of GMOs. Pass the Round-Up. **CP**



DIAMONDS AND RUST

Living Well

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

Gramsci was born a near-dwarf, a hunchback. He spent days hanging from his ankles, trying to straighten his spine. It did no good. Chick Webb, the great jazz drummer in 1930s Harlem, did the same. His twisted form was the result of a childhood accident, spinal tuberculosis and failure to thrive. Both men, in their early years, followed a routine of hanging upside down. Chick must have dreamed of beats, the pulsing of blood and the rhythm of his own heart.

Perhaps Gramsci concentrated on thought itself. It's said that the experience influenced his belief that discipline, habit, rote activities, are liberations for the mind. You hang, and you think. You brush your teeth, and you think. All of the small, diurnal activities of life, performed in exactly the same manner and sequence, are keys to autonomy. Defended by the now-mechanical habits of action, the mind alone is unconstrained by habits of thought.

This scrap of biography adds piquancy to Gramsci's notion that the least skilled, most unchanging assembly line work, once mastered, freed the worker for creative thought. If Gramsci had considered the noise, the dirt, the pain and relentless regimen of speed associated with the most numbing of those jobs, he doubtless felt he understood a thing or two about transcending adverse conditions. Gramsci may have been wrong about the liberatory nature of repetitive factory work, but he was right about self-discipline.

I had never heard Chick Webb's story until I saw the terrific documentary *The Savoy King*, and had never thought about the relationship between Gramsci's deformity and his ideas about the utility of habit to autonomy until I heard a sparky talk by Nadia Urbinati, a Columbia University professor of politi-

cal science, at an art happening in the Bronx a couple of years ago.

Everything we do, Urbinati had said, "the way we live, the way we think, the way we act, reveals whether we are subaltern—subjugated—or autonomous."

There are countless political applications of this concept, but I am thinking of it today, nearing the anniversary of my mother's death and in the shadow of much recent dying, on a more intimate level. And in this mode, it seems that the way we die, the way we approach death's imminence, also reveals something about subjugation versus autonomy.

My mother had her babies, three of us, and after that, except for one emergency trip to set a broken wrist, she didn't see a doctor for 50 years. No visits, no pills, none of the medical routine that structures so much of elderly life. When things went wrong, she said nothing of it until she didn't have to; her weight, her step, gave her away. Cancer, what else? She was 80 then and pondered doing nothing, but decided that, in her own way, she'd taken care of her body pretty well for all those years and maybe now she'd give radiation a shot.

The treatments occurred every day for weeks, and every day my mother planned her outfit, planned her waking and breakfast and brushing and readiness. You prepare, and you live. You dress—this red linen blouse, this red-and-black scarf—and you live. You are a lady, moving slowly like a lady, not like a sick person. Every fiber of your being is marshaled to defy, on the surface of things, the reality that, inside, is eating you alive.

The treatments didn't work for long, and when the doc said, "Sometimes doing nothing is the best approach"

my mother was relieved. It helped immensely that she was anticipating Heaven, with maybe a brief layover in Purgatory, but still there was a routine to follow, and in it a lot of time for thought, sitting in the same chair in the same spot at the same time each morning, looking out into the room she'd designed in her mind for so long, the one lit only by candles at night, before making it a reality.

My mother wouldn't have said she designed her children. She said she imagined the job of motherhood as akin to nourishing a baby bird and letting it fly away into the world. Before takeoff, though, there would be many habits to inculcate and lessons-by-example to pass along on how to live on tight money and live well. Mostly there would be *joie de vivre*, music and housework, games and the conviction that there was no authority that could not be challenged in some way, no power over us that could trump our own without an exceedingly good reason.

It was all her lived version of autonomy. She took almost nothing for pain. She had last words. Most people don't anymore. She was almost at her end but insisted on getting out of bed. She fell; then told my father, "Don't you do it" when he aimed to call 911.

She had a plan. A chair would be strategically placed. She would kneel and then boost herself from her elbows with an assist from my father. "Now help me," she said, fully concentrated, "but only when I tell you to." And that was it.

A few hundred yards off the side of a dirt road in Guilford, Vermont, is a graveyard, nineteenth century, easily overlooked. A simple slate there says, "MOTHER ∞ She taught me how to live, and how to die." A homely bookend to Gramsci, it reminds me of my mother. Come these anniversaries I like not to get too solemn anymore, though, preferring to recall most her laugh and rhythm and style, the beating drums of life. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

The Age of Rapture

BY CHRIS FLOYD

A clutch of headlines over a span of two days in April:

U.S. dispatches elite troops to Ukraine. US sends warships to Yemen to join naval blockade. BP taking more oil from Iraq in payments as government coffers dwindle. Saudi bombs boost al Qaeda. Sale of US arms fuels wars in Arab states. Michelle Bachmann says all signs point to the Rapture.

For the first time in my life, I agree with Michelle Bachmann. You remember Bachmann, don't you? She was once considered a serious candidate for the presidency. On the campaign trail, she would describe the road-to-Damascus moment that led her to become a Republican: reading Gore Vidal's "snotty novel," *Burr*. "If that's what Democrats believe," she said of Vidal's mordant look at the corruption and conniving of our Founding Dads, "then I must be a Republican." (Thank god she didn't read *Myra Breckinridge*, eh? Who knows *what* she would have become?)

Anyway, during those busy April days, Bachmann was interviewed on a Christian radio station and declared that the disastrous results of America's foreign policy were clear harbingers of the coming Rapture: that blessed time when the Lord, like a celestial Mr. Scott, will beam up the saved to the heavenly *Enterprise*—then destroy the earth and kill billions of people with ravaging fire and photon torpedoes.

(You can see why Bachmann and her literalist ilk don't worry too much about climate change; why bother to save a planet that's going up in smoke any day now? And why bother to tend the sick and feed the hungry and all that other jazzmo Jesus talked about, when most

of them are going to have their flesh fried and their souls shipped to hell? But oddly enough, the prospect of imminent departure doesn't seem to stop these pious paragons from padding their portfolios with long-term investments.)

Of course, the apocalyptic foreign policy Bachmann talked about was not Obama's insane dance along the nuclear tripwire in Ukraine. Nor his brutality in helping impose a naval blockade of Yemen—a nation that imports 90 percent of its food, mostly by sea. The fact that Yemenis were starving and dying and running for their lives under the bludgeoning of American bombs dropped by Saudi aggressors did not trouble Bachmann at all.

Nor was it the fact that the Saudi assault had been a tremendous boon to al Qaeda, who had been stymied by their enemies, the Houthis, but were now free to capture airports and take chunks of territory with the help of their frequent allies, the Americans. (See Syria, Libya.) Nor did she care about Obama's record-breaking arms sales to some of the most repressive regimes on earth. Her only quibble with any of this would be that it did not go far enough—that there weren't *more* troops in Ukraine, bellying up to the Russkis, that there weren't *more* bombs and starvation in Yemen, doing God's work in killing heathen Muslims, that there weren't *more* arms going to the Islamic extremists in Saudi Arabia so they too could kill more heathen Muslims.

This is not what set Bachmann off. On all these things there is remarkable comity and unity across the breadth and depth of the American political establishment, from the far right wing that Bachmann represents to the, er, *not-quite-as-far-right wing* that Obama

and Hillary Clinton and other system-supporting "progressives" represent. The only "debate" in our militaristic empire is how fast we kill, how many we kill, and with whom we kill at any given time.

No, the great sign of the impending end of the world that Bachmann saw was ... a prospective agreement to keep Iran from making nuclear weapons. (Which they have not done, are not doing, and have repeatedly declared they will never do—even though Israel has a vast arsenal of illegal, un-inspected nuclear weapons aimed at *them*.) The slightest chance of a temporary pause in Iran's eternal punishment for its demonic *lèse-majesté*—kicking America's imperial stooge out of their country 36 years ago—is, for Bachmann (and for many others in the political establishment) an abomination unto the Lord, for which He will soon implement the mother of all final solutions.

Now here we come to a splitting of theological hairs. I do agree with Bachmann that there is decidedly something mephitic and end-timesy in the air these days, a blind, reckless—even willful—rush toward catastrophes beyond imagining. And I agree that American policies—foreign *and* domestic—are, like the Gadarene swine, the main receptacles of the deathly spirit driving us toward the cliff.

However, I don't think the unfair and probably doomed agreement with Iran is a divine blazon of the end. Nor do I think that God's little sunbeams, like Michelle, will be plucked away to escape the consequences of our maniacal folly.

But in her own ignorant, horse's-ass way, I think Bachmann has, as through a glass darkly, touched on the pulse of our times. For this is indeed the Age of Rapture—a word taken from the Latin, meaning "seizure, rape, a snatching away." The sense of what is best in us—most human, most real and connected—is being brutally violated and snatched away. But there will be no transporter to save us; we are all, right now, in hell. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Getting Cured in Vietnam

BY MIKE WHITNEY

As much as I hate to admit it, I had to be forced to go to Vietnam. My son, Sam, who teaches second grade in Ho Chi Minh City, insisted that my wife, Joan and I make the trip because, as he put it, “You need to get out of your comfort zone.” And he was right too. We needed to c

huck the old routine and “expand the walls of the cage” as Chomsky would say. Vietnam was the perfect antidote; different culture, different food, different language, different everything. Just what the doctor ordered.

That’s not to say that Vietnam isn’t a crazy place. It is. Just flagging down a cab at the airport with the zillions of motorbikes buzzing by can be a stroke-inducing ordeal that would send even the most stouthearted traveler lunging for the valium.

But whatever Vietnam’s shortcomings may be, they are more than made up for by the beauty of the landscape, the vitality of the cities, and the gentle kindness of the people. This is why people keep coming back to Vietnam.

Of course it’s also very cheap. My wife and I stayed 10 days in a posh hotel in the coastal town of Hoi An for \$25 per night. The rooms were immaculate and tastefully decorated with glassed-in showers and a small deck with sweeping views of the river just 50 feet away.

There was a full breakfast every AM on the landscaped terrace by the river where you’d meet travelers from around the world while picking at fresh fruit and homemade breads or downing copious amounts of thick, black Vietnamese coffee.

There was also a stunning infinity pool with lounges placed in the shallow end so sunbathers could cool their feet in the water without having to put down their book and plunge in.

Repeat: \$25.

Some people don’t like Hoi An because they think it’s “too touristy”, but for those who haven’t spent a great deal of time outside the U.S., it’s a real oasis. There are plenty of daytrips to historic sites and temple ruins for the more ambitious travelers, or white sand beaches for those who would rather kick back and take it easy.

Joan and I spent most of our time riding bikes by the river or into town, drinking cappuccinos in open-air cafés, eating endless bowls of noodle soups, and doing whatever we could to avoid the 98 degree midday swelter.

If you’re from a cooler climate, like Seattle, Vietnam can be a harrowing adjustment. Even the slightest workout, like a 200-yard stroll by the river, can end in rivers of sweat followed by a drowsy sluggishness. There are times when the only good option is to go back to the hotel room, crank up the AC, and try to cool down. It’s a small price to pay for thrill of being in such a great country.

The heat does seem more oppressive in the cities though. Fortunately, there was a thin cloud cover the entire time we were in Hanoi or I don’t think we would have survived our daily five hour-long Bataan death marches following Sam through the heart of the city.

At 32, Sam is as fit as any Olympic champion and could probably tramp the entire 400 miles from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City without breaking a sweat.

Unfortunately, his parents are another breed altogether. While I wouldn’t call us “sedentary”, we’re certainly no match for our ironman son. In our four days in Hanoi, we must have logged 100 miles on foot. We saw the

grand sycamore-lined streets, the beautiful French architecture, the moving Ho Chi Minh museum and mausoleum, and countless pagodas, shrines, markets and warrens. It was an incredible, eye-opening experience that also included two vials of Ibuprofen and more than a few adult beverages. We take comfort where we find it.

The most interesting part of our trip had nothing to do with sightseeing, cappuccino, swimming pools or museums. It had to do with dentistry. On the flight from Hanoi to Danang, I asked Joan if she’d thought about having some work done while we were in the country. She said she’d looked into it but didn’t want to bring it up because she was worried that it would disrupt our travel plans.

After a quick tête-à-tête, we agreed that she should at least contact a reputable dentist and get an opinion about the extent of the work. Well, one thing led to another, and the next thing we know, Joan is getting three crowns, a bridge and two fillings for \$1,150.

Like many couples, this is work we’d put off so we could budget for it. The same work in the U.S. would have cost more than \$4,000, which is why “medical tourism” has become so popular.

So, for three days, Joan and I ferried back and forth to Danang from Hoi An. On the last day, we settled up with our VISA when Dr. Diem looked at me and said, “Something’s wrong with your eye. I’d like my ophthalmologist friend to look at it.” As it turns out, I had to have minor eye surgery, which the doctor performed in the hospital on the spot. Total cost: \$48 plus \$6.50 for eye-drops and codeine. Unbelievable.

Have I told you how much I love Vietnam? **CP**

The White Terrorists

Lynching in America

BY YVETTE CARNELL

The punchy demeanor and grandfatherly sturdiness of the man giving a high profile speech at a conservative dinner offered no clue as to his willingness to be used as a tool for racial annexation. “I do not believe, and I know this is a horrible thing to say, but I do not believe that the president loves America,” bellowed Rudy Giuliani—America’s Mayor—to an enthusiastic crowd.

Although Giuliani’s well-crafted otherization of President Obama was enough to motivate some political observers to reevaluate Giuliani’s ascension in American politics, history bears him out as a politician cast in a mold that is authentically American. Our politics has produced a class and culture of politicians who’ve mirrored the open revilement many whites in this country have historically harbored toward blacks.

A report issued by the Economic Justice Initiative (EJI) documents how race hatred in this country led to at least 4,000 blacks being lynched by white mobs. Among those lost to white terror squads was a Georgia soldier, lynched because he would not stop wearing his military uniform; a black boy, lynched for sassing white people; a black girl, lynched on suspicion that she’d poisoned a white baby. There were no trials, nor any presumption of innocence since the Constitution did not protect former slaves or their ancestors. It only protected people like Giuliani, who met the lopsided standard set by white supremacy.

Giuliani—as his biographer notes in a scathing editorial—dodged the draft, yet he was still considered patriotic enough to lead America’s iconic bustling metropolis. The cruel hand of fate would generously offer him the final push needed for transformation from mediocre politician to America’s Mayor.

Still, a black president ingratiates himself to the most regressive faction of the ultranationalist far right, as Obama has on multiple occasions, much to the disappointment of the left, and he’s still regarded as an outsider. The president’s Kenyan father, and the woman who bore a son for him, render Obama an uneasy fit into the slot of 44. The Constitution that once excluded Mr. Obama from having any agency in the political process now bestows upon him all the powers of the Oval Office. Old hatreds linger, though, and America’s relationship with the black community has been defined by both carrot and stick. On paper, rights existed for all American citizens, but for black Americans, rights only extended in so far as white men felt charitable enough to oblige federal dictates.

To be black and to love America seems a contradiction. To be black and to love America is to be out of your mind, con-

sidering what that love of country wrought the black patriotic Georgia soldier, and so many others like him.

Of all the gifts America has promised to endow its citizens, liberty is the most sacred, and the one this country has been most reluctant to afford blacks. In painstaking detail, the EJI report recounts the horrid circumstances that led to the slayings and the Great Migration of blacks, as they fled domestic terrorist attacks for safer communities. For those who still cower behind the defense that these white lynch mobs were the minority, the historical record is clear: Both silent whites and corrupt government officials were complicit in the slaughter. During the Red Summer of 1919—one of the most intense periods of lynching—the federal government was more concerned with the aftermath of World War I than providing protections for blacks. And far from providing protection, local police were often in cahoots with mobs, sometimes giving lynchers the keys to jail cells where blacks who had not been tried nor convicted were led off to their torture—that came first—then slow death.

The idea that America just bungled slavery’s aftermath at the onset, but eventually made good on its promises later is a dishonest lie that we should stop passing around. This report, and the bounty of evidence that supports it, shines a light on the intentional torture of blacks by their neighbors and fellow countrymen. Through research, these charred, mangled and hanged bodies have been resurrected in the collective mind. Any previously plotted retreat in the name of white exceptionalism must now be laid bare as just another propagandist lie. Most white Americans of this period, especially those having a duty to protect black Americans with the same zeal as white Americans, had nothing to be proud of.

Between 1877 and 1950, nearly 4,000 blacks were lynched. According to *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African-Americans Fought Back*, a spike in lynchings happened between 1818 and 1919. The EJI report focuses on the 12 states with the most lynchings: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The report casts these murders as “racial terror lynchings”, mainly because the lynchers sought to maintain white dominance—and black servitude—through the use of terror. In much the same way, the author of *1919* redefines race riots as anti-black violence, thereby neutralizing the false equivalency that blacks and white were fighting, when in reality white mobs were attacking minority black populations.

Another key finding of the EJI report centers on the previous under-reporting of lynchings by historians and the think tank’s discovery of “hundreds more lynchings” of blacks than previously identified. Although Americans fetishize the Civil War, founding fathers, and the Confederates—who went to war on behalf of racial subjugation—lynchings have been dismissed as mostly unimportant. There are monuments to racists all over this country, but for victims of racial terror-

ism, there are no markers for murder.

“In 1889, in Aberdeen, Mississippi, Keith Bowen allegedly tried to enter a room where three white women were sitting; though no further allegation was made against him, Mr. Bowen was lynched by the ‘entire (white) neighborhood’ for his ‘offense,’” reads the EJI report.

Mr. Bowen was not alone. Forgetting your place as a black among whites could get you killed. The brutality inflicted upon blacks was about maintaining a racial hierarchy with consequences so dire that blacks never dared to veer outside the bounds of meek servitude. They were deserving of nothing and owed nothing, in so far as whites were concerned. Any departure from racist norms was enough to ensure death at the end of a noose, leaving blacks to a meager existence where life depended upon one’s ability to balance on a tightrope.

Any misstep, no matter how innocent, would not be overlooked. A white boy would never be murdered for talking back to an adult, but a black child risked his life for the slightest utterance. Black lives only mattered in so far as they were counted among the ever-increasing profits of white men who grew rich on free labor. Once slavery was over, black lives were cheapened even further.

The ire of white racists was often raised at the spectre of interracial sex. A whopping 25 percent of lynchings were based on accusations of sexual assault, according to the report.

The white men who wielded control over both black men and white women, albeit to different degrees, deemed women too tempestuous to decide for themselves who they should bed, and black men too beastial. Thus consensual sex between a black man and white woman was a source of disgrace for her and a death sentence for him. “Frank Weems of Chattanooga who was not lynched in May only because the prominent citizens became his body guard until the doors of the penitentiary closed on him, had letters in his pocket from the white woman in the case, making the appointment with him,” wrote journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett in “Southern Horrors Lynch Law In All Its Phases.” Weems had no protection under federal or state law that any white man was bound to protect. Weems could only rely on the black community to protect him, a taking up of arms in the name of self-defense as a last resort.

Even more irksome was the duplicity with which white men feigned indignation at black men for having sex with white women, given their unpunished savage sexual assaults on black women and girls. “A large majority of the ‘superior’ white men prominent in the affair are the reputed fathers of mulatto children,” Wells-Barnett observed at the time.

Among the most glaring contradictions of white supremacists came the constant description of black men as apish rogues who lacked brains and overused their braun for everything but work. Upon close inspection of those who were lynched by white mobs, however, it becomes apparent that

the predator wasn’t a black beast but a green-eyed monster. White men who were jealous of black mobility used the belief in innate white superiority to smite their betters, not for misbehaving. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Although one white newspaper described “Negro scoundrels” as being at the core of growing outrage, and another blatantly stated that blacks had lost the “politeness” learned from whites during slavery, the truth was far more vile.

Ebenezer Fowler was the wealthiest black man in the Mississippi city where he lived before being shot to death by a group of white men who’d accused him of sending a note to a white woman.

The four Johnston brothers were the epitome of the black elite—one being a dentist and businessman, another a physician, and two others were car dealerships. They were murdered while squirrel hunting after a white mob worked themselves into feverish delirium when black sharecroppers tried to unionize. Being a respectable Negro could not save blacks when a mere accusation was enough to write your death warrant.

The idea that black men were hell bent on ravaging white women was mostly a cover for mob rule. The Southern way of life depended on white supremacy and the only way to ensure that the racial hierarchy remained intact was to make blacks quake in their boots at the idea of offending whites. Any move in the direction of economic fairness by blacks enraged white supremacists, many of whom thought it repulsive that any white person would be made to pay a black person for labor. This, they believed, the restriction against chattel slavery, was an encroachment that infringed upon white freedom. Black bondage was considered a requisite for white self-rule. If the federal government wouldn’t break the backs of blacks, then white mobs would take the task upon themselves. In the land of liberty, white hegemony settled on a strategy: nothing less than total annihilation of the black collective will to be free could ensure the continued flourishing of white oppression. Barbarism had become the norm and the abolition of chattel slavery couldn’t curb the roiling and oppressive force of white supremacy.

After World War I, some federal troops did the dirty work of lynch mobs, but in the main, the federal government took an approach of indifference as it pertained to the protection of blacks, but national leaders willingly inflamed white hangers on with fiery rhetoric. As the EJI report notes, President Andrew Johnson openly ridiculed blacks as having “less capacity for government than any other race of people,” and feared that they would “relapse into barbarism” if left to govern. For whites, this would mean “tyranny,” according to Johnson. This trepidation eerily mirrors a sign held by a Tea Party protester after President Obama’s election, which read, “Obama’s Plan White Slavery.”

Those four lynched black brothers, whom surely would’ve been heralded as credits to their race by the black elite,

weren't alone. Death came early for upwardly mobile blacks who evoked jealousy or recoiled against a system that enriched land-owning whites at the expense of blacks being kept perpetually, economically underfoot. "White mobs that collectively numbered several thousand first attacked black businesses, visible signs of black prosperity and success, then targeted individual blacks," wrote David F. Krugler, author of 1919.

Even though Woodrow Wilson had declared that lynchings should not be tolerated, leaders in other states, especially in the South, led what could only be called a shadow government that enforced this racial caste system as it pleased.

In 1891 an organizer for the Black Farmers' Alliance called on the organization's 20,000 members to boycott cotton picking until the pay was fair. That organizer disappeared.

The lawlessness of white mobs could've been rooted out were it not for the complicity of local courts and law enforcement. After the Confederate War, "social clubs" made up mostly of ex-white soldiers brutally enforced racial subordination. After World War I, "athletic clubs" of white

roving vigilante hordes deployed bombs and beatings to force blacks away from white neighborhoods. In at least two instances recounted in 1919, throngs of feral white supremacist mobs forcibly took black suspects from custody. In the main, law enforcement either looked the other way in the face of black lynchings or joined in with blood lusting crowds.

Equal protection under the law was nonexistent. Ida B. Wells-Barnett recalled how Pat Hanifan, a white man who'd raped a black girl, was sentenced to six months in jail for the offense and then went on to be rewarded with a job as a detective.

Again, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are promises enshrined by the founders but were summarily revoked from blacks once they threatened white wealth. The freedom of the press was also a right guaranteed by the founders, but

stripped from blacks, as black publishers quickly learned when their freedom to express themselves and tell their own stories came under assault. Still, black papers pushed forward in publishing stories of white officers ignoring the plight of blacks who were under assault by white mobs. Journalists like Wells-Barnett had their work cut out for them. The black press not only pushed back against stories that, as Wells-Barnett observed, caricatured blacks as "cutthroats, robbers and lustful wild beasts," but also highlighted inaccuracies in

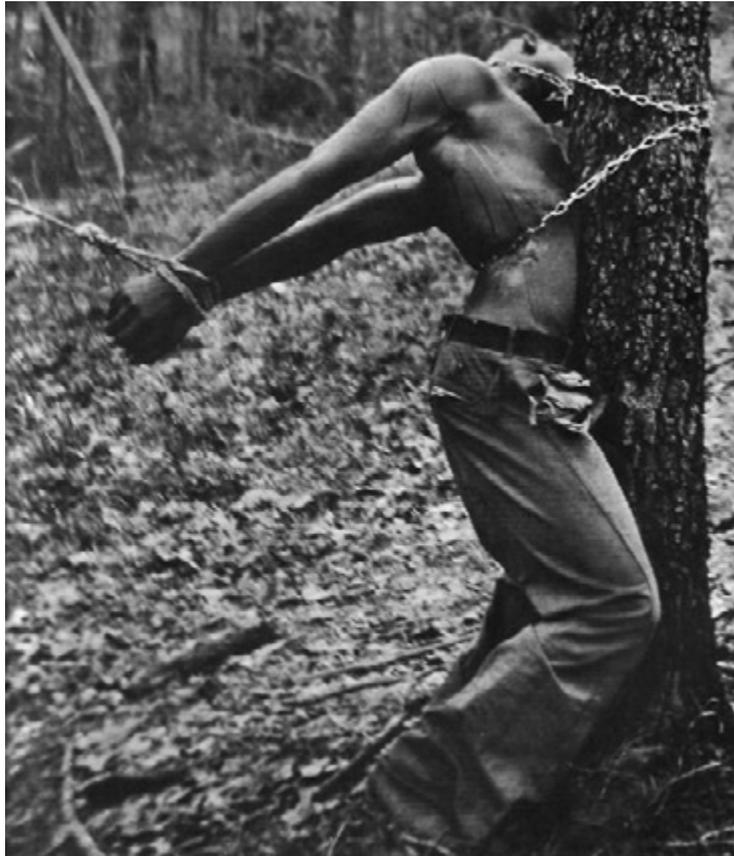
the white media and pushed for legislation to end lynchings.

Since white supremacy demanded that the white imagination run astray, white papers ramped up the outrageous notions that white women were being routinely attacked by black ruffians, even though the evidence didn't support any such thing. When white journalists denounced blacks as savages, the lyrical prose and dogged intellectualism of black writers neutered those charges. As surely as the investigatory arms of the *Dispatch* and *Gazette* deconstructed white narratives, black editorialists sparked the flame of armed self

defense. If blacks didn't

have the protection of law, then they had no choice but to defend themselves against lynchings, rape and a collection of other degradations. "For more than fifteen years, The *Gazette* has been warning our people of this and all other large cities of the country to get ready for [race riots]," wrote Henry Clay Smith. "Violence is the one remedy that will bring the white southern ruffians to their senses," he continued. This sentiment was echoed at the same time that black men were coming home after fighting for democracy in World War I.

To combat the iron fisted repressive forces of white supremacy, blacks, especially soldiers who'd recently returned from the war, resorted to armed self-defense. These black soldiers had little in common with regressive Negro preacher types who believed that the only way blacks could secure protection for themselves and their families was through



Black man lynched in Louisiana. Photo: Atlanta Black Star.

enduring subservience. These New Negroes, as they were called, had fought the Great War for democracy. They'd heard President Woodrow Wilson's lofty praise of self-rule. They couldn't fathom the idea of making the world safe for democracy through force abroad, then ducking their tails and cowering once they returned home.

As returning black veterans began resisting white mobs, whites brainstormed on how best to keep blacks in their place. In so far as they were concerned, nothing had changed, and whatever uppity outlook black soldiers had picked up overseas needed to be left at the country's border.

In Chicago, as Krugler recounts, a black infantryman from the 370th patrolled black neighborhoods against white "athletic clubs", which were really government backed terror squads. There was a similar scene throughout the country as blacks discovered they no longer had anything to lose. Persevering and being law abiding, even spilling blood, had not resulted in equality. The question became not whether you would die, but how? Through back breaking physical cruelty, disease, or lynching, all burdens of being black in America—or while fighting.

In the bloody year of 1919, that question would be answered. Blacks set about doing what their government would not do. If there was no protection from the government, then blacks would protect themselves, or die trying. Black History Month, a 28-day period marked by the fetishization of turned cheeks that withstood abuse, hardly ever marks the violent clashes where armed blacks either beat back violent white mobs or succumbed to them only after finding that they were outnumbered. Black people and organizations had risen in solidarity against lynching, and although self-defense afforded them some protections, lynchings did not wane until the 1930s, owing in part to the Great Migration, a period during which millions of blacks escaped Southern terror. The irony here is that although blacks risked life and limb in defense of self, saving one's black life would in the end be owed, at least in part, to running away from white mobs.

In the mid-twentieth century, lynchings were on a downward trend. And unlike President Theodore Roosevelt, who'd blamed black rapists for lynchings, Harry S. Truman pushed to make lynching a federal crime. But an earlier incident shows just how invested white racists were, and how they circled the wagons to thwart legislation that benefited blacks. As David McCullough recalls in *Truman*, Senator James Byrnes overtly charged in 1938 that blacks, like NAACP head Walter White, had taken over the Democratic Party. "The Negro has not only come into the Democratic Party", he alleged, "But the Negro has come into control of the Democratic Party." He specifically mentioned NAACP head Walter White, who was sitting in the gallery during Byrnes' speech.

Lynchers, and those who encouraged them with outlandish tales of black inferiority and voracious sexual appetite, were

rarely required to make amends. Only one percent of lynchers were ever punished. On suffering's scale, where bright light represents a post racial, meritorious utopia, and torture is signaled by an inkwell of unending darkness, lynchings represent one of the most pitch-black periods in this country's history. It would both fit a groove already etched in the fabric of Americana, and predict an emerging pattern: This would not be the first, or the last time America failed its African-American citizens.

Rudy Giuliani is the progeny of that failure. Instead of owning it, and trying to make it right, he revels in the unfairness of it all and traffics in it still today. Let me walk my own tightrope here: I am not absolving Giuliani, nor am I casting the shadow of history to paint him as a modern day lyncher. I do not know the man's heart and, if it obliges you, I'd prefer not to get within earshot of the beat. The point is that this sort of white conqueror's narrative runs as a thread through the cord of oppressive American mythology. America's hero's tale has always included the diminishment, and sometimes snuffing out, of black life and achievement. This thread that runs through was once rope wrapped tight around a neck, attached to a black face with bulging eyes. Unprovoked celebratory hangings in broad daylight are now replaced with behind closed door sharp elbowed jokes about how our first black president has no love for country. About Obama, Giuliani is wrong. Mr. Obama has espoused a loyalty to America unsurpassed by any other president, cheesy flag pin notwithstanding.

Clarity, though, would ask what have blacks to be proud in a mother who orphaned us? As the EJI report makes clear, it's not just the lynchings back then, but the way we pay homage now to white supremacists with Confederate statues, while erecting little as remembrance to the innocents slaughtered by white mobs. If Mr. Giuliani and his brothers-in-arms viewed blacks as anything more than the backdrop for narcissistic adventure tales, then there would be empathy. There is no empathy where blacks are concerned since the American complex is built on shaming blacks into a preferred position of servitude instead of welcoming blacks as equals. Mr. Obama is half white and ingratiating and yet, unwelcome. If the charred bodies of slain innocents calling out from the grave for a reckoning doesn't stir your heart, then what can a right of center black president hope to evoke?

Ida B. Wells-Barnett once said "Somebody must show that the African-American race is more sinned against than sinning." We have shown it again and again and yet, still, they refuse to believe. **CP**

YVETTE CARNELL is editor of *Your Black World*.

Netanyahu the Rejectionist

The Cul-de-Sac of Israeli Politics

BY AJAMU BARAKA

In an instant, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of the two-state solution obliterated the most valuable weapon that the Israeli state had been able to deploy over the last two decades to maintain popular support in the U.S. and Europe and obscure the oppressive reality of its colonial project. And despite Netanyahu's effort to walk back from that position, the negative reaction to his pronouncement created the first real crisis of legitimacy for the Israeli state.

Liberal Zionists and many supporters of Israel in the U.S. and elsewhere were outraged by the Prime Minister's tactics in the last days of the Israeli election. Their anger was fueled not only because the tactics may have swayed the election in his favor, but also because his direct appeal to racist elements in Israeli society and antipathy toward a Palestinian state exposed the ugly reality of Israeli politics and the two-state ruse that both Likud and the Zionist camp have perpetuated. What liberal Zionist lobby outside of Israel did not want to be discussed publically was that there is absolutely no meaningful constituency in Israel that supports the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state.

However, in an ironic twist, Netanyahu's reelection and the critical scrutiny of the two-state issue that it generated has empowered the Prime Minister to develop and test counter-themes (a "new political line") on the question of a Palestinian state. Not that the two-state solution has been entirely abandoned—there is still some support, however shaky after Netanyahu's denunciation, for the position in the international community, and it still provides a useful device for maintaining the idea of an end-point for the conflict that can assuage the consciences of liberals who support Israel.

But in order to redirect the mounting pressure on Israel to move toward a more serious peace process, Netanyahu and the more pragmatic elements of the Zionists recognize that they are going to have to respond with a political position that will both maintain international support and relieve the pressure to deliver on the promise of a viable Palestinian state.

The contours of this "new approach" were revealed a few months ago by Netanyahu in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris. What is interesting about this approach, however, is not its newness but its familiarity. The theme that Netanyahu used to reframe the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was the same one that various Israeli leaders employed for decades to justify denying Palestinians their fundamental human rights. That theme is the security of both Israel and the West against the hordes of racialized "others"—a motif linked to a world-view and the primordial fears infused by racism and Islamophobia, but bound to resonate with its in-

tended target—the Western publics.

* * *

The compliant support of Israel by the U.S. and Europe over the last two decades combined with Israeli arrogance and its sense of impunity had led directly to policies that resulted in what the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* called a global siege on Israel. For *Haaretz*, the primary driver of opposition to Israel was the disastrous war waged on Gaza last summer by the Netanyahu-led government. The images of twisted buildings, bodies of dead children and the attack on children playing soccer on a Gaza beach had finally succeeded in generating some degree of sympathy for the humanity of Palestinians.

Consequently, public opinion in Europe started to shift toward the Palestinians. The attack on Gaza renewed calls from the general public and various European parliaments for a Palestinian state. The Swedish Parliament passed legislation that officially recognized a "state of Palestine." Non-binding resolutions were quickly passed in parliaments in the UK, Northern Ireland and Spain. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said in response to those efforts in Europe, "Governments and parliaments are taking action. That momentum will grow."

By December 2014, Israeli authorities faced the most serious threat to the legitimacy of their narrative and the justifications for their colonial project since the inception of the Israeli state. And with the votes in the French and European parliaments scheduled for December, Israeli authorities were determined to double down on their efforts to stop the momentum. France was the place they chose to draw the line; shifting public opinion in that country was of particular importance for Israeli policy makers.

Under the leadership of François Hollande, the French had pursued what appeared to be contradictory policies on the issue of Palestine. On the one hand, France was the only country that banned pro-Palestinian rallies during the Israeli assault on Gaza. Hollande evoked the threat of curbing public disorder that in turn allowed his administration to delegitimize public gatherings and to limit the free speech of anti-war demonstrators. On the other hand, Hollande began to take a more aggressive leadership position on the issue of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and attempted to unfreeze what he considered the "moribund peace process" in the United Nations.

Ominously, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned France that "recognition of a Palestinian state by France would be a grave mistake." He added: "Do they have nothing better to do at a time of beheadings across the Middle East, including that of a French citizen?" Netanyahu's efforts failed, and the French parliament voted to give conditional recognition to a Palestinian state.

Then, on January 7, Said and Cherif Kouachi attacked *Charlie Hebdo*.

For the Netanyahu government, the attack presented

a timely opportunity to realign European public opinion back toward stronger support for Israel and acceptance of its policies related to Palestinians—and by extension all Arab Muslims. His propaganda strategy was clear—link Palestinians to anti-European, anti-Western terrorism and reinvigorate the racist “clash of civilizations” narrative.

So while corporate media pundits, bloggers and commentators of all political backgrounds embraced the specious narrative that the attacks on office of Charlie Hebdo represented an attack on something called “freedom of speech,” the professional propagandists from the Israeli state were busy pushing another ideological connection: that the attack represented the inherent irrationality and violence of Arab and Muslim culture.

The clear intent of this Orientalist framing was to reverse the growing support for a Palestinian state by suggesting that the inherent cultural flaws of Arabs render them unable to govern a stable, peaceful state.

And although increasing numbers of Europeans have become less susceptible to the clash-of-civilizations explanation of the situation in Israel and the occupied territories, Israeli authorities have always been able to manipulate the dark themes of racial and cultural superiority that exist just beneath the surface of polite conversation among Europeans.

Israeli authorities have always understood that at the center of the European understanding of itself is a firm commitment to the idea of the superiority of white, Western civilization. Indeed, this sub-textual note framed much of the response to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting from significant sectors of the Western public.

When the French people embraced “Je Suis Charlie,” Netanyahu and his propagandists had already constructed a narrative that linked the killers with all of Israel’s enemies. Echoing a common theme that he used during the assault on Gaza, Netanyahu forcefully argued that the “terrorists” are out to destroy Western civilization and its values: “They might have different names—ISIS, Boko Haram, Hamas, Al Shabab, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah—but all of them are driven by the same hatred and bloodthirsty fanaticism,” he said. “We understand we are in a common battle for our values and a common battle for our future.”

* * *

The struggle to maintain the legitimacy of the Israeli project has now moved back to the terrain of ideological struggle. For more than two decades the Zionist project had the cover of the Oslo accords and the fiction that Israel was committed to a peace process that would result in a viable Palestinian state. This approach cut across and unified all sectors of Zionism from the left, liberal and centrist elements to the far right.

It was an approach that was disingenuous from the very beginning, a rhetorical bone tossed to liberal and leftist Zionists by the Israeli bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, the Israeli state pro-

ceeded with the brutal work associated with maintaining and expanding a colonial project that by definition entails thievery, systematic de-humanization and physical and cultural violence.

The opposition to Netanyahu in Israel represented by the Zionist camp and various parliamentary resolutions were a desperate attempt to undo what most honest observers had concluded about the two-state solution proposal: that continued Israeli expansion into East Jerusalem and the occupied territories murdered the possibility of a two-state solution some years ago.

Yet, because the two-state solution still resonates with many in the West and provides useful cover for Israel to maintain the fiction that it is committed to a peace process, it still has value for supporters of Israel inside and outside the country. However, with the controversy generated by Netanyahu’s rejection of the two-state solution, the security argument that Netanyahu tested in France is increasingly becoming a default position that many in Israel believe will hold primacy in the West.

This argument is important not only because it can generate continued support for Israel internationally, but because there is general agreement on security related to the question of a Palestinian state among parties in Israel.

Despite all of the very real differences among Zionist forces internally, they all agree that if there is to be a Palestinian state, that state must conform to the security concerns as well as political and economic interests of Israel. The consensus objective, therefore, is to buttress the security issue as a moderating position to relieve pressure on agreeing to real Palestinian self-determination.

According to American-Israeli writer and observer Scott Ratner, this means the creation of a Palestinian state in which Israel retains “military control over the borders and airspace, the retention of Jewish-only settlements dispersed widely throughout the region, unfettered control over the internal movement of the civilian population, and the right to exploit the area’s natural resources as it sees fit.”

For those who thought that Isaac Herzog and the Zionist Union offered something substantially different, a quick read of the ZU’s statement on how it saw the “final status agreement” with Palestinians shattered that fantasy. A final status agreement, the statement read, will be based on the following principles:

Demilitarizing the Palestinian state, keeping the settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] under Israeli sovereignty; strengthening Jerusalem and its status as the eternal capital of the State of Israel and ensuring religious freedom and access to the holy sites to all religions, along with maintaining Israeli sovereignty; resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem through the establishment of a Palestinian state and not within Israel.

In other words, the liberal Zionist idea of a Palestinian state is parallel to that of a dependent Bantustan.

This truncated version of Palestinian freedom makes perfect sense for many in the West. The Palestinian national movement has always had to contend with tremendous political pressures imposed by the West to surrender demands for authentic national liberation to the Israeli state. And when the Palestinians refused such schemes as the “generous offer” from Ehud Barak’s government in 2000 at Camp David, Israeli propagandists and their liberal supporters in the U.S. used it to reinforce the racist conception of Arab irrationality.

That is why Netanyahu’s current focus on race and Islamophobia has a real chance at spurring renewed support for its project from the international community (read the white West).

The adroit deployment of Islamophobia has been an effective mechanism to leverage Western support for Israel’s policies and deflect criticism of its ruthless use of maximum repressive force against Palestinians from 1967 to the present. But winning support from the public in Western Europe and the U.S. for the security argument relies on an appeal to an Orientalist conception of Arabs.

So with a nod and wink from the so-called centrist Zionists, Netanyahu’s obstruction strategy on a Palestinian state is obvious. The objectives of this strategy are to 1) ensure that there are no effective “peace talks”; 2) if possible, delegitimize all potential negotiators from the Palestinian side; and 3) remobilize European public opinion against Muslims and Arabs by linking them to terrorism and, more broadly, as an existential threat to European civilization (including Israel).

In a recent interview, Netanyahu hit all of the talking points associated with this strategy. First, he told Andrea Mitchell that the Palestinian leadership refuses to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The implication is that if the leadership of Palestinian people refuses to acknowledge that Israel is a Jewish state, there can be no basis for further discussion, with no credible negotiating partner.

Netanyahu knows that most people are now aware that the

Palestinian Authority that emerged from the Oslo Accords clearly recognized Israel’s right to exist. So he invoked the “ Hamas factor ” by suggesting that the unity government with Hamas objectively means that the PA has taken a stance to destroy Israel. And he wrapped it all together by arguing that Islamic forces in the Middle East have moved into spaces wherever there have been weak governments and conflict, i.e. an independent Palestinian state poses an existential threat to Israel.

Ron Dermer, Netanyahu’s representative in the U.S., added that the Prime Minister is a man of peace committed to two states for two peoples, but “ what has changed is the circumstances over the last few years .”

The only circumstance that has really changed over the last few years is that public opinion in Europe has started to catch up with global perceptions regarding the nature of Israel’s colonial project and apartheid policies.

The Zionist movement refuses to acknowledge a key fact: that any possibility to redirect the Zionist project was extinguished with the assassination of Yitzhak

Rabin in 1995. On the issue of peace

with the Palestinians, it is a mythological reading of Israeli politics to believe that a vast chasm exists between the perspectives of Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak and all the “ great Labor Party leaders ” and those of the rightist Likud governments of Menachem Begin and Benjamin Netanyahu. And while Netanyahu is criticized for voicing the true intent of the Israeli project, the fact that 95 percent of Israeli society supported last year’s attack on Gaza, and that Netanyahu won reelection by appealing to Israeli racism and intransigence on the two-state issue, revealed the moral rot that is at the heart of the Israeli settler-colonial state.

That rot is only matched by the U.S. settler-colonial state that supports it. Both societies are based on a lie that promoted the erasure of the humanity of the people indigenous to their respective lands. In the U.S. the hunger for the land resulted in the continuation of the genocidal policies against native people that began with the invasion of the Spanish in 1492. The criminals who broke away from British authority in 1781 shot, plundered and murdered their way across the land



Israeli wall near the village of Ni'lin. Photo: Naseer Nasser.

mass that became the United States. For Palestine, the settler colonial process has been more gradual but just as deadly in its effects, a process Ilan Pape correctly identified as “incremental genocide.”

So while left, liberal and even centrist supporters of the Zionist project congratulate themselves on their supposed “principled” differences with Netanyahu and the even more far-right elements in Israeli society, the terrible reality that they are loath to accept is that the moment Zionism justified to itself the taking of land and the expulsion of Palestinians, it was morally doomed.

The specific details and strategic differences among those forces seem insignificant when viewed from the perspective of the oppressed other—the Palestinians, who have been forced to accept a monumental historic compromise by being confined to just 22 percent of historic Palestine, even if an agreement is ultimately based on the 1967 borders.

The J Street liberals in the U.S. who vociferously denounced and opposed Netanyahu still found a way to support his government in its murderous attack on Gaza. The U.S. Congress could give unanimous support to that same attack and replenish the Israeli military as it ran out of bullets and bombs attacking people trapped in an open-air prison under occupation by the most powerful military in the region. And the President of the United States can vow with earnest sincerity that his administration will always protect the security of Israel. Yet, the humanity of the Palestinians freezing to death in the rubble of their bombed-out houses and apartments in Gaza with very little food or water and no electricity don't even rate an occasional story in this country's corporate press.

Is it possible that truly ethical individuals can morally justify the periodic attacks in Gaza with all the attending carnage, argue why it is impossible for Palestinian refugees to return to their land and reclaim their property, and state as a perfectly understandable position that an Israeli political party could never form a government with the representatives from the Arab List?

They cannot, because at the core of Zionist ideology resides the same ethical contradiction that haunts the European humanist contradiction—the division of humanity between those real humans with rights – male, white, Western, property owner etc.—and everyone else. The fact that this division is virtually unacknowledged is a testimonial to its deep embedment in the consciousness of the white West.

That is precisely why Frantz Fanon said that “When a native hears a speech about western culture, he pulls out his knife.” **CP**

AJAMU BARAKA is an Associate Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in Washington, D.C.

Among the Others Reinventing the Foreign Correspondent

BY PATRICK SMITH

Between 1990 and 2004, three years before he died at 74, Ryszard Kapuściński gave a series of lectures around Europe. These shared a theme that suggests a late-in-life preoccupation. A half-dozen of Kapuściński's talks were published posthumously (in 2008) as *The Other*, and that was his running topic during these years. “Every encounter with the Other is an enigma, an unknown quantity,” Kapuściński said in one lecture. “I would even say a mystery.”

Kapuściński's decades abroad as Poland's most celebrated correspondent—for a long time its only foreign correspondent—were behind him by this time. At this point, he spent his days in his Warsaw study, sifting old files and notebooks and reflecting back. And it was as if he had only then understood what it was he had been doing all those years in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America—practically all of the “non-West,” let us say. He had been breaching all the walls—brick, mud, glass, sand—that separated him from other people. Everything he had ever asked anyone had concerned the questions of difference and no-difference. Nietzsche, who surely would have loved this man, would have said he sought “the perspective of the foreign,” or was “taking off the garb of Europe”—the better to know himself.

The pithiest of Kapuściński's presentations, three of the six Verso published, are collected as “the Viennese Lectures.” They are not the typical talk of correspondents, to put the point mildly. They are determined, even insistent explorations of the existential circumstance activated in every encounter a correspondent abroad has in the course of his or her work. Kapuściński gave these encounters, irreducible features of his profession, a history that extends back to Herodotus (whose *Histories* he always carried in his suitcase). From the great Greek he learned the essential lessons. There was this: “To get to know Others you must set off on a journey, go to them, show a desire to meet them.” And this: “To understand ourselves better we have to understand Others, to compare ourselves with them, to measure ourselves against them.” And then this, an address to our moment: “The idea of equality with the Other occurs only very late on, many thousands of years after man first left traces of his presence on Earth.”

I do not think it coincidental that these observations belong to a noted foreign correspondent, as against, say, a scholar, diplomat, or emerging-markets investor. Nor that the correspondent was a Pole who spent much of his life on the border between East and West and then watched as this border—supposedly, at least in theory—was erased. Nor that Kapuściński wrote and delivered his “self-and-Other” lectures

in the last years of the last century and the first years of this one. Kapuściński, as was evident to anyone who knew him, understood: Correspondents abroad, wherever they are from, operate at the rock face of our time's essential task. This is to delete "the imaginary line that separates East from West," as Herodotus put it—from the Earth and from our consciousness. It is to describe a world wherein old barriers are discarded, a post-Western world, a world that learns to live on differently and better now that half a millennium of Atlantic primacy passes into the past.

Regrettably enough, very few correspondents now in the field have the remotest clue as to the special responsibilities they bear in the context I briefly describe. In consequence and no surprise, few of them are any good—a judgment I may as well share straightaway. Some have good instincts, true, but these are no substitute for the thought our new and singular moment requires. The conflict between East and West re-emerges sharply even as it is fated to disappear. In what is now the West's confrontation with the Islamic world, one would think we had reverted to the 18th century, if not earlier. The distance between self and Other seems to expand when it is supposed to shrink. In every case—on the Russian border and in Ukraine, in the Middle East, across the Pacific—most Western correspondents, and emphatically the Americans among them, hold the wrong end of the stick, making matters worse with no idea they are doing so. In the most egregious cases, one reads or watches or listens and thinks of children playing with matches.

It is always important, and especially in journalism, not to magnify the moment to any point of distortion. Correspondents have had heavy, even decisive responsibilities in the past. Staying clear of comparisons, let us say simply that what they do is now crucial. Two examples among numerous are readily at hand. Many are the prominent journalists and officials who now acknowledge that George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 would probably never have occurred had the press done its job properly. As we speak, Washington has brought relations with Moscow to a dangerous pitch even as America's provocations in Ukraine and the ever-more repressive character of the regime in Kiev go almost entirely unreported.

"The information age is actually a media age," John Pilger, the noted Australian journalist, said in a speech delivered in London last December. "We have war by media, censorship by media, demonology by media, retribution by media—a Surreal assembly line of obedient clichés and false assumptions." Most correspondents will dismiss Pilger's list of corrupt practices and unnatural acts as the conjuring of a practitioner who has long stood outside the tent urinating in, as they say. But by any detached judgment—rare as these are now—this is an accurate rendering of an appalling reality.

During the Cold War one spoke commonly of an "East-West crisis" or "East-West tensions." Having lived and worked

most of three decades in the non-West, I take these terms to be too narrow now. Easterners and Westerners, Northerners and Southerners, Russians and Chinese, Britons and Americans, Arabs and Africans and Latin Americans—we are all victims of a self-and-Other crisis, in my view. Name our predicament this way and (1) it defines many more zones of conflict than other descriptives and (2) it suggests this essay's subject.

The "foreign correspondent," that trench-coated figure stalking the globe looking but not seeing, listening but not hearing, has become an impediment to understanding—a manufacturer of confusion and disarray. This state of affairs is too dangerous now to accept, given the extraordinary disorder that engulfs us. There is too much good this figure could do were the work to be understood for its complexity and then done well. He or she, in a word, is in need of reinvention.

With notable exceptions, most correspondents I have known over many years are badly read. There are two reasons for this, I concluded long ago. One, they tend to be captives of what I used to call the 800-word imagination, an occupational hazard: They have trouble getting through anything of greater length unless it is a colleague's tales of derring-do, invariably told in tedious first-person detail. Two, there is a pronounced prejudice in the profession against intellectual exploration. Most correspondents see no need for a framework through which to judge events. They are dedicated empiricists, as the work encourages them to be. Theory, in other words, is for complicated Continentals. Practice is all that counts. A three-year assignment is three times 365 days, nothing more.

My intent here is not to insult but to state the case plainly, for inadequate intellectual exposure is a not-inconsiderable hurdle that must be cleared if the profession is to be rethought and remade to suit our time. The point is not to suggest that daily reports should be written as tendentious treatises or histories. It is to say correspondents can no longer do without a conceptual grasp of what it is they are doing. And there is a rich literature available to help them acquire this.

To put the point another way, a lot of people in the field admire Kapuściński's extended reportage on Africa, Russia, or Iran. So they should: The books are exemplary of the kind of work correspondents must learn to produce. But few would be able to converse with the man who wrote *The Other*, a book fewer still, in all likelihood, have ever heard of. In short, the distance between Kapuściński's reportage and the later reflections is the distance correspondents must cross if they are to answer to their era.

Kapuściński's professional trajectory is instructive. When PAP, the Polish press agency, sent him abroad in the late 1950s, his were the first eyes it had ever laid on the outside world. He wrote in Polish his whole life, and for many years his reports reached only a Polish audience. But what he saw in the world changed him, and he let it. He began to write "for people everywhere," as he later explained. By the 1960s, when

the remembered books began to come, he inhabited that high, sparsely populated ground between journalism and literature. The work from there was celebrated in English, Spanish, and dozens of other languages. It no longer mattered that he wrote in Polish. It no longer mattered that he was a Pole. He was something else first, something larger.

We take from this life and work an essential question: Must a correspondent's work remain always embedded in his or her culture or nationality? Must it reflect the assumptions and presumptions, the politics and political positioning—altogether the ideology, we might get away with saying—of the medium for which he or she reports? Or does the work transform the correspondent, such that he is other than an American writing for an American newspaper, or an Egyptian writing for an Egyptian newspaper, or (not infrequently the case now) an Egyptian or Brazilian reporting for American or British or French media?

The question turns into a Zen koan if one lets it, a riddle. But answer it one way or another and we either close the case or crack it open.

The readily available answer is negative, with no nuance attaching. Taking the past as a guide, if you report for an American newspaper or broadcaster you are tattooed “American” and your pieces speak in the tongue, the secret language hidden in every language. In the annals of the profession there are many cases of correspondents who cross this line either out of sympathy for the subject or gradually acquired habits of mind. This, by tradition, is called “going native” and is never tolerated. Correspondents are typically rotated out of foreign bureaus after three to five years to prevent this tendency. One draws only so close to those in whose midst one lives and works, preserving the Other as the Other.

But of all the things the 21st century has to tell us, first among the messages is that the past is only so useful as a guide to the tasks before us. This is especially so given the second half of the last century. The Cold War was the self-and-Other discourse taken to its grotesque extreme—diabolically logical and illogical all at once. In the most fundamental read it was a profound distortion in the human consciousness, embraced by a few and imposed on the rest. Anyone who understands tradition knows that imitating it does it no honor. We honor tradition by adding something new to it, and this is what correspondents working abroad must do. This is my not-readily-available answer to the question.

One of the people Kapuściński learned from on the journey he took after all the others were done—the travels in his Warsaw study—was a 20th century French philosopher named Emmanuel Lévinas. He is notoriously difficult but rewards those who stay with him. Lévinas used a microscope to examine all that occurs in encounters with the Other. He addressed perception, perspective, language, ethics, and, most especially, the responsibility incurred by way of all human en-

counters. We are not responsible merely *to* the Other, Lévinas asserted, but *for* the Other. Only in understanding this is the self-transcended and one's humanity authentically realized. “The self is possible only through recognition of the Other,” he famously declared.

Lévinas was a phenomenologist, and I do not think it coincidental that this school of thought arose in 1920s Germany and flowered again amid the existentialist wave in post-1945 Paris. Think about these interims. They followed world wars; both were marked by intensified processes of massification. Phenomenology is the study of consciousness—the being as it perceives the world and those who live in it. Is it a wonder this discipline advanced after disastrous displays of indifference, one person to another, after identities were perversely defined, and during periods when the individual was subject to immense new systems of social organization and control?

Is it a wonder that thinkers such as Lévinas, Sartre, and many others bear consideration now? I hope not. We find everywhere a heightened awareness of the self, the Other, and the difference and distance between the two. The task of transcending this difference and distance should be clear to anyone who thinks about it. But it is not getting done. And I cannot think of any milieu wherein the failure is more evident than among the people we in the West send abroad to report back on those in the non-West, all our Others.

Correcting this failure, retrieving from something near to disgrace a profession that belongs to those in it and those they address, is a duty correspondents owe everybody. Doing it better is urgent given the frightening disorder to which they now contribute more or less everywhere. And I think the process has to begin among correspondents themselves. They need to define themselves with more thought than most have ever given the matter. Who am I by virtue of what I do? This question leads to others and so is a good place to start.

Here we borrow and simplify one of Sartre's most familiar thoughts. The correspondent is responsible for himself or herself as an individual. He or she, no editor in the head office, determines every action. He lives among Others: This is the irreducible reality of the chosen life and work. It is the one relationship that cannot be altered other than by way of removal. The rest—who employs, the assignment's parameters, all the expectations—are mere frame. I am trying to describe the correspondent's essential solitude—and hence responsibility. No editor is ever there.

To understand the circumstance this way is not a choice or an idle exercise. It is to learn what it means to be truly answerable (and truly human, not a bad byproduct). Does a correspondent answer to his circumstance—O.K., his existential condition—or to the frame, which is by definition temporarily imposed? It is either/or: Failing to recognize the choice—remaining faithful to the frame—is one's choice. Unconcealment—a word from Lévinas, the revealing of who one truly is—is inevitable.

This question of identity is very key. Answer it incorrectly and you get—no need to elaborate—what we find more or less uniformly in our daily media reports. Robert Stone, the late novelist, once described journalism’s purpose as nothing more than the confirmation of what people think they already know. Exactly. All the established prejudices, the ungrounded “facts” that are not facts, the conviction as to what has to be done next are reaffirmed. Nothing new gets done. In this essay’s terms, the self is fortified and the Other remains safely Other.

Answer correctly and a correspondent comes into an immense new freedom. The question posed earlier is perfectly clear: One is not an American or Briton or German among Others. One is simply a human being before any of that. Then comes the sudden recognition that he or she is the stranger, the foreigner, the Other. Then, as I hope is obvious, the work is top-to-bottom transformed. Method changes because purpose does. New realities are discovered and reported. Readers and viewers are properly disturbed by reports of the unfamiliar, the intractable, the not-supposed-to-be-so. The simplified takes on complexity. There is a reduction, at least, in our vast inventory of misapprehensions. The work, in short, gets done as it is supposed to.

Some years ago I taught a course on this topic at the University of Hong Kong. As so often with students, they were less interested in kind of thinking outlined here than in how to get the work done. I had to tell them repeatedly: “The method derives from the thinking and reading. They are not separate.”

Among other things they read Kapuściński’s book, and a little Lévinas, parts of Julia Kristeva’s much-noted *Strangers to Ourselves*, and parts of Timothy Brennan’s *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (which I will return to.) Then I had them read some of Kapuściński’s reportage, keeping the later reflections in mind. I asked them to read John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*—again if they already had. Herbert Matthews’s famous reports from Cuba and Martha Gellhorn’s from the Spanish Republic were in the mix. And I included some of Wilfred Burchett’s reporting of the Vietnam war—unique in this respect—from the North.

Then, question time. Did Burchett upset most people because he was a “Red” or because he forced us to see what the war looked like to those we warred against in their own country? What was it about *Hiroshima* that mesmerized American readers when *The New Yorker* published it in August 1946? Was it simply the shock of what the first atomic bomb did to a large Japanese city? Or was it more the stories of six survivors told in astonishing close-ups? Was it Hersey’s ability to make utterly concrete what the world looked like to the quintessential Other of the American imagination in the 1940s? Was it to make human and ordinary the so thoroughly dehumanized?

One theme came through all the work we read that se-

mester. It was the need to move in more than close—the need to transcend whatever the borderline happened to be. It had been done before. The 21st century task is to make the exceptional in the 20th century the norm in the 21st, full stop.

There are a thousand practical ways at this. A brief list will give an idea of how this argument would turn out in practice:

- Forget the dreams of expatriate grandeur—a form of sequestration. Live locally.
- Ignore colleagues (usually the Americans) who roll their eyes at the word “intellectual.” Becoming one is now part of the job. You are an amateur psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist, economist—and a rampant thief whenever you read (which is often). You steal method, too. Clifford Geertz’s “thick description,” for instance, will serve you well.
- You cover a people, not events. Value history highly—bottom-up history, “subaltern” history, as opposed to the “great man” variety.
- Understand: Your assignment is a canvas, all of a piece. When you are finished you have painted an oil.
- If there is an “other side,” get there and learn it.
- Let the country and the people you cover speak through you—for themselves. Hands on now means hands off.

Two big questions arise. One will seem purely practical and one another case of thinking the problem through. But both are both, for they meet at the horizon.

To begin with, there is nothing here about media as an institution ridden with interests whether these are political, ideological, corporate, or all three (as so often.) Of what use is a brief précis of how correspondents must learn to situate themselves and understand the work if they are effectively prisoners of these interests?

To my students I must have come across as a merciless colonel, for my answer to them is my answer here: Battles must be engaged. The profession has run itself as nearly into the ground since September 11, 2001—a turning point, as argued in an earlier essay in these pages—as it has been since the worst of the Cold War period’s corruptions. Reinvention logically begins with correspondents because they are directly exposed to the world as it truly is. And the world as it truly is the agent of change. It has already begun to make correction urgent.

I describe a generation’s project. In modest respects, the best in the field have already started on it. For the rest, if they begin in 2015 it will take however many years; to begin in 2020 it will still take however many—if not more by then.

Where is the argument against beginning, then? The extent to which the project seems beyond reach is exactly the extent it needs to get done.

A final point in this connection. While the poverty of substance in mainstream media is evident, so is their wealth of infrastructure. So-called alternative media (I do not like the term) have assumed a greater responsibility since 2001, but it is established media that still have the reach to gather information abroad and project it at home. In the process of doing both, in my view, it will become gradually clearer that survival—as in everybody’s—requires that correspondents become more answerable to their circumstances (as I have explained the thought) and less to prevailing expectations. Follow the line of logic, and the only alternative is very grim. We are already well on the way to becoming a nation of fantasists, out of touch with our traditional friends to say nothing of others. The media play a big part in this manufacture of ignorance.

To engage the second question I return to 1991, when I concluded a tour in Tokyo for the *International Herald Tribune*. A fresh-faced American named Bruce Feiler had come over to teach English—a popular diversion among recent graduates then—and he published a book just as my assignment ended. He called it *Learning to Bow* and gave it the enticing subtitle, *Entering the Heart of Japan*. Penetrating the heart of Japan, I ought to add, has been an American pastime since 1945, all who try never coming even close.

You have not heard of this book for the most obvious of reasons. It was a bubble in the froth. Feiler’s project, as the title implies, was to know Japan by surrendering to all things Japanese. A certain kind of worship always attends these sorts of undertakings (disappointment the unfailing follow-on). You learn to bow instead of extending a hand (as the Japanese would expect and respect you for). You master all the angles at which one bows in observance of two millennia’s worth of hierarchical relations, and so you got through to the heart of the matter.

Feiler qualified as what is called a cosmopolitan. And the discourse of cosmopolitanism was just flowering when Feiler wrote his book. It is a problem correspondents must address, the better to avoid putting a foot wrong as Feiler did his.

Cosmopolitanism is nothing new, but its reiteration since the Cold War’s (nominal) end has been prominent among the thinking classes. It posits our need to transcend differences (even as we honor them, somehow) and develop a globe-embracing “polychromatic culture,” as Timothy Brennan, the scholar mentioned earlier, puts it. It is a question of well-meant sentiment and “hybridity”—a favored term among the cosmos—but at the far end you get talk of world government, transnational civil society movements, and the like. I shorthand it, probably unfairly, as “one-worldism,” borrowing from the title of Wendell Willkie’s hugely popular book, *One World*, commissioned by F.D.R. and published in 1943.

This line of inquiry’s attractions are logical enough. The

nation-state outlives its purpose, no longer expressing humanity’s aspirations. Cosmopolitanism stands—common polarity—against pernicious patriotism. It is a positive response, antidote altogether, to our self-and-Other problems.

But there is a trap door in all the good intent. It is the square in the floor Bruce Feiler fell through. Brennan, a distinguished professor at the University of Minnesota and a student and friend of the late Edward Said, located and described it over some years. Credit to him for the distinction with which I conclude.

In a word, cosmopolitanism is spongy, lacking hard edges. Adherents tend to get lost in thickets of idealism. On one hand, we know too well the cynical use the State Department and its creature, the National Endowment for Democracy, make of well-intentioned civil society people. On the other and more saliently still, cosmopolitanism creates no new ground for political expression of any real use. The net effect is acquiescence, political disarmament as the planet neoliberalizes.

Nation states and their rivalries are responsible for much of the violence and repression confronting populations in too many places, surely. But they are not going anywhere soon. In response to the cosmos’ supra-nationalism, therefore, Brennan posits a commitment to internationalism, a familiar enough idea. National institutions still constitute structures within which leverage can be exerted, voices raised, and influence brought to bear. “Good dialectical sense,” he wrote in the *New left Review* some years ago, “would suggest that a political form born in the epoch of colonial conquest might play some role in resisting the next stage of political hegemony.”

What does any of this have to do with the reinvention of correspondents? Much. Reporters working abroad can learn a lot from the discourse of cosmopolitanism, if partly by negative example. A corps of Bruce Feilers running foreign bureaus would be wholly counterproductive. In the context just sketched, they have to stand as internationalists. Their paradox--and their purpose, too--lies in their obligation to extend the boundaries that distinguish self from Other, while reporting back to editors, readers, viewers and listeners who live within those boundaries. It is among them that the correspondent’s voice is most usefully raised.

To explain this, let us take a final look at the questions of responsibility and answerability. If a correspondent’s responsibility is to himself or herself, this means *as* himself or herself. One does not achieve Kapuściński’s “equality with the Other” by surrendering selfhood. Kapuściński died a Pole, in Poland. Transcending, say, Americanness does not mean effacing it. It means remaining responsible to it, however many thousands of miles away one may live and work. Once this is understood, the rest is clear. The truly responsible correspondent answers to readers, viewers, and listeners far away, in the country to which the reporting goes. No one else. To them he owes a debt, a true accounting of what he has seen and heard,

and of the Others he has encountered.

This debt is not now honored, and the lapse betrays everyone—the Russian Other and the Arab, who are not properly portrayed; readers, viewers and listeners, who are misled and so deprived of the means to judge; correspondents themselves, and the profession altogether. Gellhorn once described what occurs between reporter and reader as an honorable transaction. But she understood what correspondents now do not. This is the project: to achieve that understanding, to make the transaction honorable again. **CP**

PATRICK SMITH, a correspondent abroad for many years, is Salon's foreign affairs columnist. His website is patricklawrence.us. Follow him @thefloutist.

The Geo-Politics of Hacking Talking Cyber World War III Blues

BY PETER LEE

A conflict is brewing in cyberspace. And also, perhaps, convergence.

In one corner, the People's Republic of China, an authoritarian state with a socialist constitution reflecting the industrial nation-state's imperative to suppress internal division and confront external threats, marshaling its governmental, technological, and economic assets to enhance its control, security, and power.

In the other corner, the United States of America, a free market democracy that has to deal with the erosion of its military, economic, and technological dominance, wrangle increasingly unreliable allies ... and work around that pesky Constitution, that endearing grab-bag of Revolutionary era Whiggish, bourgeois liberal & French radical tropes reflecting the priorities of the rebels, subversives, opportunists, and the occasional terrorist who wrested the North American colonies from Great Britain.

Now we're well into the 21st century. Whose vision will prevail in cyberspace? The United States with its oh-so-agile 18th century horse & buggy of freedom? Or the PRC, with that mighty 19th century state power locomotive?

As befits its authoritarian principles, the PRC has come up with a rather straightforward piece of scripted legislation, the "Anti-Terrorism Draft Law", which is currently winding its way through the National Peoples Congress process. Under the principle of national Internet sovereignty, it makes the case that the PRC has the right and the need to act as gatekeeper and decrypt and monitor any digital content that circulates inside China. In order to show that this policy has teeth, the PRC has apparently ferociously, if not officially, attacked foreign service and content providers who presume to

give Chinese netizens unfiltered and/or encrypted access to the goodies that the global Internet has to offer.

Earlier this year, Virtual Private Network or "VPN" services offered by foreign providers to customers inside the PRC--which encrypt traffic between paying clients and a computer server to allow users to hide the content of their Internet traffic from hackers and government monitors--were subjected to disruption, presumably by the PRC government's "Great Firewall". This was apparently a demonstration of the PRC government's determination not necessarily to block VPNs outright, but to compel overseas providers to host their services on PRC-regulated equipment and turn over their encryption keys to the PRC government.

The PRC's hacking operations were also presumably behind an attack targeting efforts by GreatFire.org, a U.S.-based censorship evasion site, to make available within China *The New York Times'* English and Chinese-language digital content, which has been blocked by the PRC since the Times published an expose of retiring premier Wen Jiabao's family wealth in December of 2012.

GreatFire employs a "human shield" strategy to make blocked content available to Chinese users by mirroring *The New York Times* on GitHub, computer programmers' preferred online code-sharing resource. The theory is that the PRC would not dare block GitHub (it tried in 2013 but retreated after an outcry by Chinese programmers). Reality may be another matter. In March 2015, GitHub was subjected to the largest Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks in its history, using cloned search requests to Baidu, China's answer to the Google search. The traffic associated with the attack cost GitHub \$30,000 per day. Toronto's Citizen Lab plausibly but with the usual problems of attribution credited a new PRC superweapon, the "Great Cannon" for the operation. And as is now also usual, the *Washington Post* pointed out that the alleged Chinese program mimicked the function of a similar NSA program revealed by Edward Snowden under the code name Quantum.

The New York Times' managing director for China, Craig Smith, subsequently went on the record with Quartz to tout the successes of what has evolved (or deteriorated) into a primarily adversarial approach to the PRC market, claiming though not enumerating the existence of millions of readers inside China. It remains to be seen if yanking the dragon's tail yields revenues and not just intangible psychic benefits for Times' advertisers and shareholders (and GitHub).

In what seems to be a similar vein, the PRC government is currently blocking the websites for the *nyreet Journal*, Bloomberg, and, as of March 2015, Reuters. Reuters has not published articles deemed particularly offensive to the PRC, so it is possible that the block has to do with encouraging media companies to be actively China-friendly in their content and siting. Both Reuters and Bloomberg, which rely on their (currently unblocked) financial news services for the

bulk of their China revenues, are presumably considered to be open to PRC blandishments.

And the PRC has pressured foreign IT equipment vendors to turn over their source code, especially in products for the Chinese financial sector, something that has elicited strong, personal pushback from President Obama. In a report that sent shudders through the U.S. IT community, PRC media reported (and the US side promptly denied) reports that Apple had knuckled under and made its iPhone source code available to China.

Apple is definitely the weak brick in America's Great Wall of Internet Freedom resolve, given its growing market in the PRC. Currently, the U.S. market accounts for 37% of Apple revenues, and the PRC for about 21%, but the trendlines for China are up. In January 2015, the sales figures for the last quarter of 2014 were toted and it was finally concluded that Apple had not yet sold more iPhones in the PRC than the US. But it's only a matter of time before Apple sales—and the stock price that underpins the portfolios of thousands of rich, influential people and institutions—rely on China as the primary growth driver.

Per an excited Apple executive on the quarterly results conference call:

“When I look at China, I see an enormous market where there are more people graduating into the middle class than any nation on earth in history. Incredible market where people want the latest technology and products that we're providing. We're investing like crazy in the market, we're more than doubling our stores. ... Revenue more than double the previous year. Chinese developers have created 150,000 apps on App Store. I see lots of very positive vectors there and I couldn't be more excited.”

If Paris was worth a mass to Henry IV, in other words, Apple might decide its access to the PRC market might merit giving the PRC a peak at the source code.

All in all, in cyber policy the PRC is methodically deploying economic carrots and coercive and regulatory sticks—pretty much unhampered by constitutional and legal qualms—and the exploitation of its demographic and market strengths to advance its international security, strategic and economic agenda.

The response of the U.S. government, as befits a free-market law-based democracy chockablock with globally minded corporations, and with an immense surveillance, espionage, counterintelligence, and subversive infrastructure that chafes at constitutional limits and is determined to “have it all”, has been all over the map.

In contrast to the PRC's rather conventional nation-state concept of Internet sovereignty, the United States has publicly declared a human right to Information Freedom, asserted the constitutional right of U.S. citizens against unreasonable

search and seizure ... and at the same time secretly charged its security organs to do everything in their power to make the world's digital communications accessible to the US government.

That's a lot of conflicting agendas to keep straight. Unsurprisingly, setbacks are common.

In the run-up to the first summit between President Obama and PRC supremo Xi Jinping at Sunnylands, California in June 2013, the United States had spent well over a year carefully orchestrating an escalating campaign of revelations, allegations, and innuendo concerning the PRC's enormous hacking, intrusion, and cyber-theft operations against US targets, and had effectively blacklisted Chinese telecom equipment firms Huawei and ZTE from the U.S. market as security risks.

But the methodical U.S. campaign to position itself as the protector of the global Internet commons against the Chinese bandits slammed into the revelations of Edward Snowden, which began to appear just before the scheduled personal presentation of the China hacking dossier by President Obama to Xi at Sunnylands.

Revulsion at atrocious Chinese cyber-malfesance was supplanted by the perception that, if the PRC's efforts are enormous, the U.S. efforts are, by comparison, awesomely ginormous and further involve the wholesale corruption of the global Internet hardware and software infrastructure, corruption the PRC as yet cannot even dream of duplicating, and corruption which the U.S. is apparently in no hurry to remedy or reveal to at-risk individuals or corporations.

Since the 1990s, the U.S. government, primarily through the NSA, has fought the “crypto-wars”, spending billions of dollars and employing the nation's best mathematicians and computer scientists in an attempt to overcome the virtually infinite encryption possibilities presented by the microprocessor. If a quantum computer—a device capable of simultaneously containing several different states of existence at the atomic level—is ever perfected, chances are it will be working in the bowels of NSA headquarters in Fort Meade to crack high-strength encryption.

At the same time, the Snowden documents reveal, the U.S. government has resorted to less savory means to cope with the current challenge of mathematically impregnable encryption. It has sought out and stockpiled vulnerabilities in commercial software that allow encryption to be circumvented or passwords recovered, while leaving users open to attack by hackers also able to discover the weaknesses. It has installed key loggers or beacons in target equipment, and created spyware that can even survive a hard disk wipe. It has methodically attacked every communications provider holding encryption keys for their customers. It has even corrupted encryption standards in order to introduce enough predictability to give the NSA an edge in cracking vulnerable systems. And, as needed, it has also obtained the active assistance of

some of the biggest U.S. tech companies in turning over data records for targeted or bulk collection.

With regard to the PRC, NSA and CIA efforts are complemented by initiatives to balk the PRC censorship regime by exploiting vulnerabilities in the Internet, spearheaded by organizations that are ostensibly private but at the same time exhibit close US government links. GreatFire, which gives the PRC conniptions by documenting and circumventing the Great Firewall, receives funding from the Open Technology Fund of Radio Free Asia (formerly a CIA operation; now funded by the Broadcasting Board of Governors).

As Mark Ames reported at *Pando Daily*, another important initiative, TOR (aka The Onion Router anonymization network) was developed by the U.S. Office of Naval Research and still receives hefty U.S. government funding, from the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and from the State Department and the Department of Defense via various grant-offering cutouts. In fact, propagation of the TOR network into the public realm (including its massive popularity among drug dealers and porn hounds as well as journalists and dissidents) is also a tactic to drown and disguise what would otherwise be identifiably pure U.S. spook traffic passing through its exit nodes. As to the question of whether the U.S. government really unleashed the ultimate anonymization weapon on the world and against itself, it appears that TOR anonymity is crackable—if the cracker happens to be the world's largest signint outfit with access to colossal data collection and analytic resources.

In the purely corporate sphere, the United States government has received China-related aid and comfort if not advice, counsel, and encouragement from Google, a close ally of the Obama administration. The first salvo in the open U.S.-PRC cyberwar was fired by Google's Sergey Brin in early 2010, when he deemed an apparent PRC intrusion into Gmail targeting Chinese activists so odious that Google would no longer filter its PRC search results.

Although little noticed at the time, Bruce Schneier pointed out that the hackers, Chinese or otherwise, had exploited an inadequately concealed e-mail monitoring utility in Gmail ar-

ranged by Google to facilitate the U.S. government's access to metadata (not message text). Now that Snowden has documented the bulk collection of metadata by U.S. government agencies, the U.S. dismisses metadata shenanigans as a minor, venial cybersin.

Google piggybacked its public indignation at the Gmail hack on back of a bigger, more sophisticated (but failed) simultaneous hack of Google and perhaps two dozen other Silicon Valley worthies exploiting a zero day vulnerability in Microsoft Explorer, apparently in a search for source code.

Again, post-Snowden, we learned of the NSA's inclination to inventory software vulnerabilities. Indeed it transpired that Microsoft had been advised of the problem several months



Google China's HQ. Photo: Liu Jin

prior and had, either for reasons of laziness, unconcern, or a willingness to oblige the NSA, failed to patch it until the hackers busted down the door. Bill Gates declared himself unfazed at what he declared was an insignificant hack, thereby earning Brin's public obloquy.

The adversarial back-and-forth between the PRC and Google continued and in late 2014 Google's Gmail service was essentially blocked inside China. In March of 2015, Google apparently riposted by announcing that its Chrome browser would reject digital certificates for encrypted communications signed by the PRC's only trusted certificate authority, the China Internet Network Information Center or CNNIC, as punishment for a minor and consequence free infraction by an Egyptian partner of CNNIC's, harrumphing that "CNNIC ... delegated their substantial authority to an organization that was not fit to hold it." One can speculate that Google was also supporting GreatFire and the New York Times in the wake of the massive GitHub DDoS attack; Greatfire has been calling for revocation of CNNIC's certifi-

cate authority since 2013.

Since the Internet is an irony-rich environment, it should be noted that Gmail displayed an error message for its 300 million+ users for three hours on April 4 ... because somebody at Google (which is itself a Certificate Authority, presumably of infinite fitness compared to CNNIC) forgot to renew Gmail's security certificate.

In the vein of the completely unsavory, the US government directed black hat hackers to attack foreign targets, probably including the PRC. The *New York Times* reported that Hector Xavier Monsegur (aka "Sabu"), the notorious empresario of the Lulzsec hacking spree turned government informant, orchestrated hacks of Iran, Syria, Brazil, and Pakistan, and other targets while under FBI supervision. Judging from the profanity-laced Spanglish rants by "Hardcore Charlie" associated with the posting of extensive and somewhat inexplicable hacks of obscure Chinese websites by "Anonymous China" in 2012, I suspect that Monsegur was also unleashed on the PRC.

Courtesy of Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald revealed in February 2015 that the NSA, GCHQ, and Canadian spooks were also acquiring and exploiting useful intel on "Chinese Human Rights Defenders", "Tibetan Pro-Democracy Personalities", and "Uighur Activists" and other groups, apparently by hacking the take of PRC government hackers. The question as to whether the targets were warned, or if the US government kept mum so it wouldn't disturb its convenient access to the Chinese hackers' "take" is unanswered.

Snowden's China-related revelations were capped in 2014 by reporting on a massive NSA hack of Huawei Corporation, a PRC company that is one of the world's largest suppliers of telecom equipment—outside of the United States and other Anglophone countries. The NSA developed a special program, "SHOTGIANT", just for penetration of Huawei.

And penetrate they did. Since the NSA's "Tailored Access Operation" unit (aka Meatspace) black bag operatives were involved, we can assume that somebody got into Huawei headquarters in Shenzhen and was able to load some spyware on its network. The NSA gained access to the e-mail archive, got Huawei's customer list, and obtained sourcecode for some Huawei products.

According to *The New York Times*, an internal document stated:

"We currently have good access and so much data that we don't know what to do with it."

The Huawei campaign began in 2007. Huawei's headquarters was penetrated in 2010.

For the PRC, this would seem to put orchestrated US indignation at PRC hacking—and President Obama's insistence that US companies not be required to reveal their source code to the PRC—in an interesting and unfavorable light.

In March 2014, David Sanger & Nicole Perlroth dipped their beaks in the Snowden trove thanks to *Der Spiegel* and

delivered the U.S. justification:

One of the goals of the operation... was to find any links between Huawei and the People's Liberation Army... But the plans went further: to exploit Huawei's technology so that when the company sold equipment to other countries — including both allies and nations that avoid buying American products—the N.S.A. could roam through their computer and telephone networks to conduct surveillance and, if ordered by the president, offensive cyberoperations ...

The Obama administration distinguishes between the hacking and corporate theft that the Chinese conduct against American companies to buttress their own state-run businesses, and the intelligence operations that the United States conducts against Chinese and other targets.

American officials have repeatedly said that the N.S.A. breaks into foreign networks only for legitimate national security purposes.

A White House spokeswoman, Caitlin M. Hayden, said: "We do not give intelligence we collect to U.S. companies to enhance their international competitiveness or increase their bottom line. Many countries cannot say the same."

Considering that since the dawn of the Internet PRC economic policy, nefarious and otherwise, has raised 300 million people out of poverty while legitimate US national security policy has killed upwards of one million people in the Middle East, "China hacks for money" might not be the most devastating indictment imaginable of PRC cybersneaking.

It's been a long, hard slog for President Obama since the disappointment of Sunnylands, and the lost ground in the anti-PRC cybercampaign hasn't been completely reclaimed.

Herding the legal, political, security, political, media, and corporate cats to create a PRC-focused coherent public cybersecurity doctrine hasn't been easy, thanks both to the conflicting agendas of the various stakeholders and the intoxicating mix of borderline illegality and human rights braggadocio that pervades U.S. Internet policy.

In order to buttress government initiative in responding to cyberattacks (post-Sony, some pundits floated the appalling idea of U.S. corporations counterattacking suspected foreign hacking sites vigilante-style), President Obama issued an order establishing the executive branch's authority to sanction foreign companies benefiting from hacking of US secrets, and convened a "Cybersecurity Summit" in February 2015.

The summit was intended to institutionalize a private-public partnership between the U.S. government and corporate entities at risk of being hacked or, to look at it another way, develop a joint strategy between the world's biggest hacker and its corporate enablers to handle blowback. The Cyber Threat Intelligence Center, a new initiative with a slight whiff

of boondoggle, was simultaneously set up as a clearinghouse for timely reports on hacks.

However, in the post-Snowden age, U.S. based but internationally oriented tech corporations with big consumer operations were not keen to encourage speculation that they were exchanging data relevant to their vulnerabilities—and the personal data of their customers—with the US government.

Corporate attendance at the summit was less than stellar. Tech industry stalwarts Larry Page (Google), Eric Schmidt (Google), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Marissa Mayer (Yahoo) and Satya Nadella (Microsoft) were conspicuous by their absence. The only A-List attendee was Apple's Tim Cook, presumably there to demonstrate he was not an utter slave to Beijing. In return, Cook was tossed a tasty biscuit: the announcement that Apple's struggling ApplePay "your iPhone is your debit card" system would be linked to the GSA SmartPay program for federal employees, which handles \$25 billion in transactions per year.

The United States government, while piously expressing a desire to respect the constitutional right of American citizens, has been absolutely unapologetic about maintaining and expanding the U.S. government's unrivaled intrusion, data collection, and analysis capabilities.

A Justice Department official made the rather eyebrow-raising declaration that absolute secrecy in private communications through encryption was not just inconvenient or dangerous: it was un-American. Deputy Assistant Attorney General David Bitkower stated that absolute user control over data has not been "standard American principle for the last couple of hundred years."

Deputy Attorney General James Cole journeyed to Apple headquarters to tell its Chief Counsel, Bruce Sewell that, literally, "A child will die" because Apple's iOS 8 allows the user to generate his or her own unbreakable encryption for files on the iPhone (instead of relying on a key provided by Apple), thereby putting the data on the phone out of the reach of Apple and law enforcement. Regrettably Cole is right. Despite the indignant rebuttals of privacy advocates and I would be surprised if there actually isn't a way to penetrate an iPhone in cases of avowed national emergency.

The head of the NSA, Mike Rogers, has proposed a "split key" system by which the government would have access to encryption keys, but the key would be split between multiple parties and would presumably require some legal system-related folderol to assemble the key and attack a target.

Currently, privacy advocates are scuffling with the government over the wording of the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act, or CISA. If it passes, CISA will probably involve too much promiscuous sharing between private corporations and the government in the name of security and too little concern for the niceties of warrants and due process to please privacy advocates, and it is feared CISA will simply institutionalize the hand-in-glove private sector/government coop-

eration that was previously largely ad hoc and furtive and is now a badge of shame for the big Internet companies.

Snowdenites place their ultimate hopes in the privacy afforded by end-to-end encryption but I daresay that the NSA, with a budget of \$10 to \$20 billion dollars and a lot of resourceful people—and targeting the baling wire and chewing gum structure of the Internet, its distracted, imperfectly informed, and fallible human subjects, and its profit-hungry and patriotic corporate providers—will eventually find satisfactory workarounds.

Inconsistencies, immorality, conflicts, and compromises aside, in the U.S. government's eyes, the debate over government domination of cyberspace is pretty much over. In fact, the U.S. *de facto* policy looks suspiciously like the PRC idea of Internet sovereignty...but extending beyond America's borders to claim hegemony over as much of the global cybercommons as the US can grab and hold on to.

This probably has less to do with a Jeffersonian impulse to propagate universal values globally than a US desire to project power beyond its borders in cyberspace, as it does in the military and financial realms, through national policy, alliances, and international institutions.

It also isn't just a matter of "keeping America safe". The U.S. government is committed to cyberspace as a national strategic and diplomatic asset, commanding the loyalty and obedience of GCHQ and other collection partners in the Anglophone world (the "Five Eyes") and beyond in Europe and the Asian democracies, a weapon as useful against its friends as it is against its enemies.

Currently the PRC's anti-terrorism legislation is on hold, as are regulations pertaining to revealing source code for IT products for the financial sector, apparently in response to US urging. President Obama is considered to be an infinitely more agreeable interlocutor than the anticipated next White House occupant, Hillary Clinton, and I expect the PRC hopes to achieve some *modus vivendi* on cyber issues during Xi Jinping's state visit to the United States in September 2015.

However, the U.S. wants to win cyberspace. The will is there, and the money, and the desire to leverage US advantages in the IT realm against the PRC while there's still time. It's a complex and expensive question of how to thread the needle between the demands of the Constitution, the needs of politics, the limitations of technology, and the self-interested or principled squealing of corporations, to acquire the maximum data payload...and to overcome the PRC, which is holding a few powerful political and economic cards of its own. **CP**

PETER LEE edits China Matters and writes about Asia for *CounterPunch*.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

GIVING VOICES TO THE COLLECTIVE

DRIVING THE KING

BY LEE BALLINGER

“In real life the chauffeur sees everything. He’s the perfect narrator, but working-class people’s stories are too often forgotten. Think about how many folks were not part of the record. There were 50,000 black people in Montgomery during the boycott, so you think about all of those stories that are pretty much anonymous. They’re part of the collective, and in fiction we’re peeling characters away from that collective and giving them a voice.”

—Ravi Howard, interviewed by Tayari Jones

Ravi Howard’s new novel, *Driving the King* (Harper, \$25.99), takes the true story of an attack on singer Nat King Cole at a concert in Birmingham, Alabama in 1956 and fictionalizes it by placing the event in Montgomery and by telling the story through the voice of made-up character Nat Weary. Weary leaps on stage to defend Cole and saves his life. But he has to beat up a white man to do it and he’s sentenced to ten years in prison as a result. Weary grew up with Cole and when he was released from Kilby Prison, he went to work as the singer’s driver.

The book jumps back and forth in time, which could be just a stylistic device or it could be a reflection of the end of continuity in the Southern world the book describes. It works

because the novel is held in place by two parallel timelines—the Montgomery bus boycott and the entire day of a homecoming show by Nat King Cole at Montgomery’s Centennial Hotel. Make that three timelines—there’s also Weary’s ongoing relationship with Mattie, who waits for him while he fights in Europe during World War II, then marries another man while he’s in prison. Ultimately, they reconnect when she becomes a leader of the bus boycott.

“[Nat King Cole] was attacked in 1956 and I moved that moment to 1945,” Howard told Jones. “I thought the moment of his attack fit what happened when black veterans were attacked after World War II.” Howard’s protagonist Nat Weary is a victim of a legal lynching, so much so that he says of the constant ringing in his ears that was the legacy of being an artilleryman: “Some called that sound an affliction, but I had learned to love it, because that was the sound of me killing men, Germans, hell-bent on doing to me what that judge had done.”

Weary’s ears are ringing when he beats back Cole’s attacker. When asked if he used a trumpet or a trombone to do it, Weary replies: “Neither. I beat him with a microphone.” He says it matter of factly, but you can feel the satisfaction he takes from his action.

What made him do it? Three hundred years of history came to a head that night. “When I saw him swing for Nat Cole’s skull, I thought of other friends ambushed by men who’d been hiding and waiting.” Weary also said “All I did was stand between a friend and his trouble.” In Alabama in 1945, it was almost impossible to separate history in general from specific situations. Nat Weary makes that clear when he explains that he got his first name when his parents named him after Nat Turner, leader of an 1831 slave rebellion. “Mama

and Pop had been called by their first names all their lives, by adults and children. It galled them to the core. So they said fine. If people were set on calling us by our first names, they would call us by these. Any name-calling might summon something my parents had planted. Everything they gave us, from our names to our work, came from that idea.”

In prison, Nat Weary is in the same cellblock as one of the Scottsboro Boys and the taste of Southern ‘justice’ was often in the air: “When that wind hit us, we couldn’t help but know what was mixed in it, the last bit of breathing a man did when they strapped him in, and after that, the warm smell of his smoke.”

Even the music the prisoners made to ease the pain of work gangs preys upon Weary’s soul. “If my mind went bad before the rest of me, I hoped those songs were the first things I forgot. My worn-out memory may show me mercy in the end. It would be nice to die believing I was never there.”

Upon his release, Weary exults in the simple act of taking a walk in a straight line (“My legs were too used to turning at a fence”). It must have felt like freedom but Montgomery blacks were not free.

Almost casually, Howard brings in the realities of the South and the civil rights movement that sought systemic change. He doesn’t announce it, doesn’t paint the page with ideology or rhetoric, but it’s right there. The bitter history of the past and the new history being made. The picture is razor sharp and it bleeds.

The Montgomery bus boycott wasn’t just about where people were forced to sit. Before the boycott, harassment and violence against bus riders flowed like dirty water. The bus drivers, all of them white, wore pistols on their hips and the police shot and killed a black man when he wouldn’t get off the bus.

In the novel, Nat Weary describes the buildup to the boycott. Clandestine newsletter distribution. A women’s

political council. Secret meetings. Snitches. People are skeptical that it can be effective, that people will be able to organize and endure the walking and riding necessary to keep the busses empty. But then, seemingly overnight, coming at you on page 187, it happens.

This escalation brings civil rights leaders into the book: Rosa Parks; Ralph Abernathy. Nat's father sneaks Bayard Rustin out of town in the trunk of his taxi.

Meanwhile, Weary hangs out with Martin Luther King Jr., discussing the movement, King's piano playing, and the attack on Nat Cole.

Of course, the main celebrity in the book is Nat King Cole. "He was the most famous man, black or white, ever to be born in my hometown." Nat Weary had driven a cab for his family's taxi

company and so you believe him when he says, "Nat Cole was good cab conversation whenever his songs came on the radio. You know, he was born right here. He played the kind of music that made people tip more...as though his crooning could get somebody from here to there a little bit faster, make the ride that much smoother."

One of the main outlets for Cole's music in Montgomery was the radio show of George Worthy, a DJ as smooth as the King. "George put a little more space between his words and talked in a whisper, his voice turned down and softened, a little brush on a snare drum." Pop music's smooth luster put a shine on the dirty-shoed shout of gospel, blues, jazz, and rock and roll. It appealed to such a large audience that Nat King Cole became one of the first singers to have his own television show. But he was unable to find sponsors

and had to pay for the show himself. "Madison Avenue is afraid of the dark," Cole said.

But he had bigger problems than a lack of advertising. Cole had moved to the ritzy Hancock Park neighborhood of Los Angeles where the reception was anything but neighborly. "A bullet through a window. The IRS trying to take his house. All manner of things in the mailbox."



Nat King Cole. Photo: Chuck Stewart.

Even fan mail could be dangerous. "The black stars of Hollywood had found all manner of letters from adoring folk, but they had also found straight razors and barbed needles nestled between parchments. Fingers had gone into envelopes and come out bloody."

After the onstage assault, Cole vowed never to perform in the South again. In real life, he never did. In *Driving the King*, under the influence of a Nat Weary who badly wants to stage a show to make up for the one disrupted by thugs, he begins to reconsider.

"Sammy's singing 'Route 66' in his Vegas show. That's where he had that car crash. He said singing about a road he almost died on takes the sting out of driving on it. I tried to write one about Alabama, but nothing worked. Maybe coming back might do the trick."

This is Ravi Howard conjuring up history out of thick air, since, as he

told Arun Rath on NPR recently, his goal is to convey not just "what that history was, not just the facts of it, but how people might have felt within that moment."

It's effective in *Driving the King* because Howard is able to lose himself so effectively in the voice of Nat Weary. From the outside it might seem unlikely that a driver, an ex-con, could communicate for 321 pages so expressively,

with so many writerly mannerisms. Yet when you're inside the book you don't even notice it. Howard hones in on details yet his storytelling is cinematic. It suffuses earthshaking events into the lives of its characters and vice versa, similar to films like *Ruby* (the Kennedy assassination) or *Casablanca* (World War II).

Howard uses the freedom of fiction to make connections.

While working for Cole in Los Angeles, Nat Weary makes friends with the editor of a local black newspaper. He introduces her into the inner circle of the bus boycott. The result? "Before she left Los Angeles, she had written about Jim Crow in Hollywood like it was the City Lines bus, and she had written up the boycotters like they were superstars."

Driving the King ends with the most powerful connection in the book. Busses emptied by the boycott rattle and whine as they pass the Centennial Hotel, where Nat King Cole is pouring out his heart to a full house. It's the end of a story well-told, but obviously far from over. **CP**

Lee Ballinger is an associate editor at *Rock & Rap Confidential*. Free email subscriptions are available by writing rockrap@aol.com.

CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

www.counterpunch.org

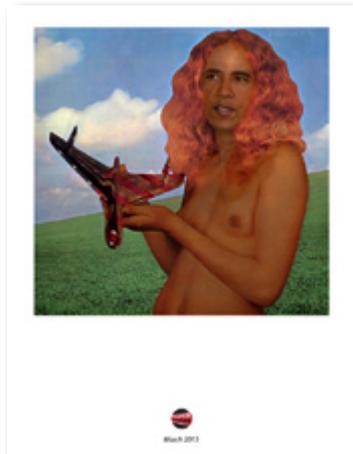
1 (800) 840-3683

\$5.00 per issue

P.O. Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

return service requested



You asked for it: CounterPunch Posters

11 x 17 gicleé prints now available in our online store - counterpunch.org