

# CounterPunch

FEAR AND NUKES ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL BY JOHN LAFORGE

THE FBI'S PURSUIT OF SAUL LANDAU BY DAVID PRICE

EXECUTING SHEIKH NIMR BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

LIFE IN A CAGE BY JOHN COCHRAN

WHY IS THE MARKET GOING CRAZY? BY MIKE WHITNEY



# CounterPunch

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## Cover Image: Putin the Putto (After Raphael) by Nick Roney

In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941-2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Grow up CounterPunch!

Dear CounterPunch,  
What on earth were you thinking when you decided to use the demeaning, grotesque illustration of a gas-masked Marilyn Monroe with her skirts being blown off by green smoke rising between her legs to an unmistakable destination? You most certainly were not considering your female readers – and a good portion of the other kind. Or were you even thinking at all? Do you know what year this is? If you're seeking to be discredited or made irrelevant to a large percentage of your potential supporters, you've succeeded.  
I'll grant you it's eye-catching. And believe me, every time it catches my eye I get more disgusted and angry. Some people learn and evolve. Some don't. You've left little doubt about your IQs and lack of good judgement.  
You should immediately remove the graphic, and an apology would be a step in the right direction.

*Sincerely yours,  
Susan Early*

## Russia in Syria

Dear Joshua Frank,  
Thank you for your principled article on the Russian imperialist moves in Syria, titled, Putin Adopts Netanyahu's Twisted Logic, in today's CounterPunch.  
As an Iranian socialist, I have been deeply disheartened for some years now by the unprincipled stance taken by a large

section of the American left vis-à-vis the political developments in our region. For one historical fact, Iranians have been affected by Russian imperialism since long before the American imperialism even became a worldwide reality.  
Since 1813, with the Treaty of Gulistan, Russia has been extorting the Iranian nation. That treaty and the subsequent one, Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), were forced on Iran through war, a war that forcefully annexed huge amounts of land (the entire Caucasus region) from Iran, and all the concessions dictated in those treaties included exactly the kind of concessions extracted by present-day imperialist powers: exclusive economic concessions, exclusive access to natural resources, unfair trade deals that benefit one side only (the Russians), and the stipulation that Russia could dictate ANY kind of trade treaty, and Iran had to accept it, with zero power to object to any terms of the treaty.  
This dominant relationship continues to this day. So, Iranians are well familiar with Russian imperialism, and we understand well why Iran's theocratic regime has allied itself with an imperialist power in order to pursue its own expansionist policies in the region. These expansionist policies include a semi-domination of the Iraq's sectarian regime. Iran was in fact instrumental in the invasion of Iraq, had an active interest (as did the U.S.) in the destruction of Iraq, and

in subsequent years, along with the U.S., has been responsible for enforcing extremist sectarian policy of oppressing the Sunni community in Iraq; a policy whose results we can see now in the form of ISIS. This contributions by the Iranian regime to the sectarian nightmare the Iraqi people have been subjected to is largely ignored by the American left. But, that's another matter.

*Reza Fiyouzat*

## Feisty Groups

Jeffrey and Joshua – thanks so much for the excellent list of feisty groups to support. As always, I appreciate the defiance and commitment! A wonderful message to start the new year. I intend to send it out as well.

*Peace,  
Heather Gray*

## Close It Down

Most of the candidates for nomination to the presidency of their respective parties are mere lackeys of the class made up of the 16,000 oppressors; except for three who are of the 16,000. Our enemies are not those they slander to try to get nominated. They vilify the working class by setting us off against one another. They want us to hate one another. They want us to be afraid of one another. They divide and conquer us. They steal from us. They lie to us. They send our children to kill and die in foreign lands far from our shores in their interests, not ours. They control our economy for themselves. They are not loyal to America or its people. Their

loyalty is solely to greed and to power. They are narcissistic and Machiavellian. They want us to fight one another. Their oppression will unite and not divide an informed public. If this truth is not seen, become informed. If not enough of us are informed, we will continue to be controlled and oppressed. We will continue to vote against our and our family's interests and in their interests. Unite. Once united we can Rise up. Stop buying stuff except for basic necessities. Close down work sites. Close down schools. Close down the major cities. Close down the country. They will bend. Break their backs. Be free. Live in Dignity.

*Sanford Kelson  
Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania*

## Enduring List

Jeffrey St. Clair and Alexander Cockburn put together a great list of the best 100 non-fiction works from the 20th century that were published in English. I just wanted say this list has not grown old. I've enjoyed using it as inspiration for books to read for the past ten years.

*Paul Brenzel*

## American Mussolini

US median real dollar wage peaked in 11/1973 and minimum wage peaked in 1/1968. The Gini of income has been increasing since about 1969 and wealth sometimes in the 70s. Our oligarchical political system likes to deliver more and more of the economy into fewer and fewer hands. Our propaganda system has delivered us inverted totalitarianism from the liberals, the right wants a Mussolini.

*Larry Schultz*



## ROAMING CHARGES

# A Comedy of Terrors

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Poor ISIS. Try as they might, the men in black still can't out-terrorize their enemies or even their patrons (assuming you can tell the difference). For the past three years, decapitations have served as the money shots for ISIS's theater of cruelty. Then on New Year's Day the Saudis upstaged ISIS by audaciously chopping off the heads of 47 men, including a prominent Shia cleric.

This act of brazen butchery is made all the more heinous by virtue of the fact that the Saudi head-slicers recently landed a seat on the UN Human Rights Council, largely at the insistence of British Prime Minister David Cameron, who vouched for the petro-autocracy's acute sensitivity to matters of civil liberties and humane treatment of prisoners. Then again the troika of Britain, France and the U.S. also enjoy seats on the council, so perhaps the Saudis have the cred for their slot after all.

With his peculiar fondness for porcine heads, Cameron is probably the Kingdom's most un-kosher ally, but he is far from Saudi Arabia's only political cheerleader. Showing a stunning lack of judgment, Comandante Bernie Sanders says his Syrian strategy relies on the Saudis taking the lead in the fight against ISIS. "They've got to get their hands dirty," Sanders inveighed to Wolf Blitzer on CNN. "They've got to get their troops on the ground. They've got to win that war with our support." Apparently Sanders skipped the briefing on how ISIS's apocalyptic ideology has been inspired by fire-breathing Wahhabi preachers financed by the Saudi royal family. The red senator also seems ignorant of the fact that ISIS functions as shock troops for the House of Saud in its proxy war against Iran, now raging in Yemen and Iraq, as well as Syria. You'd think that Bernie would

be getting better advice from his friends in Israeli intelligence.

Sanders' policy on Syria is naïve to the point of doltishness. But Hillary's Syrian war plan—shared by most of her Republican rivals—borders on the pathological. Having not missed a minute of sleep haunted by the corpses of Libya, Mrs. Clinton is now stumping for the dismantling of Syria, using the carefully cultivated domestic anxiety over ISIS as the pretext. The cornerstone of Hillary's rogue scheme is the imposition of a no fly zone over that embattled country.

Sounds like a relatively benign plan, right? But wait. ISIS doesn't have an air force. They don't even have a drone. Russia, of course, *is* flying daily sorties in Syrian air space, at the invitation of the government and some kind of confrontation would be inevitable. Still, Hillary doesn't flinch, zealously vowing to shoot down any Russian plane that violates her unilateral ban.

But NATO's latest recruit, Turkey, jumped the gun. Erdogan's trigger-happy generals didn't wait for any such fanciful legalisms and downed a Russian jet for briefly breaching Turkish airspace. Then Turkamen fighters gleefully trained their machine-guns on the pilots as they slowly parachuted toward the desert. Vladimir Putin fulminated to his domestic audience, but prudently declined to retaliate, perhaps intuiting that it would snap a tripwire for a full-frontal confrontation with NATO.

Everyone has been consulted about the future of Syria, except the Syrians themselves. Why? Because Syrians don't matter. They are quite beside the point. Thanks to fresh reporting by Seymour Hersh, we now know that the subtext for Obama administration's Syrian strategy, dating back to Clinton's tenure at the State Department, has been

largely geared toward ensnaring Russia in the Levantine quagmire. This is chaos theory marketed as foreign policy.

The rubble of modern Syria has become a multi-national bombing range, a kill zone of neo-Cold War contention. Each new act of domestic terrorism, from Paris to San Bernardino, has been used to rationalize more airstrikes on Syria, even though the killers in both slaughters seemed mainly to be attempting to impress the terror network, which is like blaming Jodie Foster for *inspiring* John Hinkley's wild fusillade at Reagan and his entourage.

Even Putin, that strange hero to some precincts of the anti-imperialist Left, has upped the ante by threatening to launch a nuclear strike against ISIS in response to the bombing of a Russian passenger plane over the Sinai, even though there's no direct evidence that the bomb was planted by the zealots of Daesh. Not to be outdone, Ted Cruz, the natural-born Canadian, has vowed to make the sands of Raqqa glow, despite the fact that few Americans could point to Raqqa on a map or explain why this city of a quarter-million people should be incinerated in retribution for the murderous rampage by the Bonnie and Clyde of San Berdoos.

The war on terror has exploded in the face of the West, with spreading chaos across the Middle East and unraveling conditions on the home front. One chilling measure of the savage toll from 14 years of war is the rate of US military suicides, which now total more than 4000 since the first cruise missiles struck Afghanistan. There is a desperate motive to externalize the blame for this bleak situation, to target a scapegoat. The rancid resumes of ISIS and the despotic Assad regime make Syria a convenient landscape for more imperial bloodletting. There's not even the faintest flicker of an anti-war movement left to impede their shameful enterprise.

In this comedy of terrors, the apex predators are the familiar ones circling overhead, waiting to blow Syria apart and plunder its bones. **CP**



## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Don't Fear the Reaper

BY CHRIS FLOYD

On the night of the Paris attacks, I wrote a brief post, *Empire Burlesque: "Age of Despair: Reaping the Whirlwind of Western Support for Extremist Violence."* At the core of the piece was a simple question: How did we come to live in a world where such atrocities can happen? The answer: this particular historical nexus was built largely by the deliberate decisions of Western leaders to foment, support and empower sectarian extremism to advance their own geopolitical agendas.

I went on to note just a few examples of these deeply cynical and sinister policies. Such as Zbigniew Brzezinski's proud, even cheerful admission of how he and Jimmy Carter essentially created the global jihadi movement—with ample help from the Saudis—in order to create violent chaos in Afghanistan and force the Soviet Union to step in to support the secular government there. "We can give them their own Vietnam," Brzezinski told Carter. And that's just what they did. The U.S. poured in money, arms, equipment, terrorist training—even "educational materials" to teach young children the way of violent jihad. The U.S.-backed campaign of murder and chaos finally led the Kremlin—after fierce internal debates—to launch their ill-fated intervention. (Which at the time, of course, was universally painted in the Western press as an unprovoked act of motiveless evil on the part of the Commies.)

I also touched briefly on the invasion of Iraq, the evisceration of Libya, the murderous shit-stirring in Syria and the many years spent "quashing ... secular political resistance across the Middle East, in order to bring recalcitrant leaders like Nasser to heel and to back corrupt and brutal dictators who would advance the U.S. agenda of political

domination and resource exploitation."

Now you might think a recitation of historical facts would not be controversial. Of course, one might disagree about their relative importance in the rise of violent extremism in the modern world, or place a greater emphasis on different factors, or even see these obviously deliberate policies as "tragic mistakes" or "good intentions gone awry." But the historical facts themselves are not in doubt.

Yet this short article, offering nothing but plain facts culled from the most mainstream sources—and seen in its original form by the merest handful of readers—was soon being held up in the Houses of Parliament as a screed of such poisonous filth that even the remotest association with it would taint a politician beyond redemption. Even more striking was the sight of Labour MPs feeding Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron softball questions about the heinous "reaping the whirlwind" post so that the smarmy, smirking Tory boss could use it to bash their own leader, Jeremy Corbyn, for being a "terrorist sympathizer." Corbyn finally, and fecklessly, joined the ranks of all right-thinking people and denounced it.

But the imbroglio wouldn't die. References to the post keep cropping up in the ongoing struggle of Blairite apparatchiks to thwart the will of ordinary Labour members—who had chosen old-school anti-war socialist Corbyn by an overwhelming margin—and replace him with a Tory-lite technocrat more pleasing to the profiteers and plutocrats to whom Tony sold the party all those years ago. "Reaping the whirlwind" has entered the UK political lexicon as a shorthand phrase for lazy journalists and mendacious politicians seeking to

boil down complex issues of war, death, ruin, chaos and human despair into tidy soundbites for factional infighting.

And there, as they say, is the rub. For it was not the blazing moral acumen of my fire sermon that so disturbed the political firmament (or should that be "fundament"?); it was its usefulness as a weapon in the backstabbing hands of the Blairites. As the political editor of a national newspaper told me, when I offered to set right the many egregious misconstruals of the piece: "Look, nobody's read the actual article. They're just talking about the tweet."

Ah, the tweet. Not my tweet, mind you, but a tweet from Stop The War Coalition, a leading anti-war group which Corbyn had headed until his recent election. Someone at StWC had seen my post and put it on the group's website, under my byline but with a tweaked headline about Paris reaping the whirlwind. They then tweeted the link—which was instantly seized upon by Blairite attack dogs, who claimed Corbyn's group was "blaming the victims" in Paris and sympathizing with terrorist murderers, etc.

The tweet was quickly pulled, but too late. Although I had nothing to do with StWC (or Corbyn for that matter), the Blairites and the Tories (or is that a tautology?) had a stick to beat Corbyn with, and they went a-flailing for all they were worth, with a relentless stream of lies about the post that continue to this day. (Most recently in resignations from Corbyn's shadow cabinet by a few pro-war pipsqueaks outraged when Corbyn replaced his shadow defence minister—an obscurity who immediately took to the airwaves to claim he'd been sacked because he'd boldly denounced the pro-terrorist "reaping the whirlwind" philosophy. The squeaky pips say they don't like those nasty reaper types either!)

And thus are the "great debates" of our day manufactured: out of arrant bullshit, malicious twisting, timorous conformity and fatal ignorance – all in the service of a dominationist cult that is eating the world alive. **CP**



## GRASPING AT STRAWS

# Why is the Stock Market Going Crazy?

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Imagine you went to the corner grocery store and found that all the items you typically buy had doubled in price overnight. This is essentially what's happened to stocks in the last seven years. The Fed dropped short-term interest rates to zero in 2009 following the Wall Street crash, and kept them at rock bottom until December 17, 2015. The effect of that rate suppression, along with the Fed's aggressive liquidity-injection program called Quantitative Easing (QE), sent stock prices into the stratosphere, while the real economy remained mired in a long-term slump.

But why did stock prices surge while the economy stayed flat on its back?

It all has to do with the way that money enters the economy. If the Fed just creates reserves at the banks and holds down rates, that still doesn't get money into the pockets of the people who will spend it and rev up the economy. For rates to have an impact on growth, people have to be willing to borrow money from the banks and spend it on goods and services. When lots of people take out loans and use it on projects or luxury items, that's called a credit expansion. When credit expands, money changes hands fast, the economy grows, and the virtuous circle begins.

But it all gets back to spending, that's the key. Spending, spending, spending. Spending is growth and growth is spending. No spending, no growth, no jobs, no capital investment, no virtuous circle.

The Fed knows all of this, but for seven years they've watched as the monetary base has ballooned to mountainous proportions while loans and bank credit have barely budged. The

Fed also knows why households aren't borrowing; it's because many of them are still trying to reduce their debts. Businesses, on the other hand, aren't taking out loans because retail sales and personal consumption are still significantly weaker than they were before the Great Recession. The point is, the Fed knows that its "transmission mechanism" (aka—credit), for getting money circulating in the economy, isn't working. And they've known it for the better part of six years.

So what is the Fed up to? Why has it dumped cash into the financial markets when there's no chance that the policy will strengthen growth? The obvious explanation is that the Fed has a clear bias towards Wall Street. Central Bank policies are crafted in a way that best serve the interests of their constituents, the banks, over the needs of the real economy.

What many people don't know is that the Fed's policies require the collaboration of Congress and the President to succeed, that is, to transfer a greater portion of the nation's wealth to the one-percent elites. How does this work?

It's simple. The politicians keep a lid on public spending to ensure that the economy doesn't get a head-of-steam that would increase hiring, boost wages and push up inflation. That's the goal: keep inflation low so the Fed can continue to pump cheap money into the financial markets as it has been doing for nearly a decade. The plan is so simple we won't dignify it by calling it a conspiracy, which it isn't. It's simply the way that capitalism favors the interests of elites over everyone else. Is capitalism a conspiracy? No? Then neither is this uncomplicated wealth-transfer strategy.

Some readers might have noticed the steps Obama has taken to put a damper on growth. For example, since Obama took office in 2008, nearly 500,000 public sector workers have lost their jobs. According to economist Joseph Stiglitz, if the economy had experienced a normal expansion, "there would have two million more."

Just think of how much faster the economy would be growing now if Obama had made some attempt to rehire the people who lost their jobs in the crash. But Obama's not interested in lowering unemployment anymore than he's interested in strengthening growth. He's a creature of Wall Street just like the Fed.

And then there's the deficit cutting. Why has Obama been so focused on slashing the budget deficits when the economy is growing at less than 2 percent? Basic economic theory suggests that when private sector spending is weak, then government spending must increase to keep the economy from collapsing. Instead, Obama has trimmed a full trillion dollars from the deficits since Bush left office. Why would he do that? Increasing the deficits provides vital fiscal stimulus to keep the economy growing, but Obama doesn't want strong growth because that would push up inflation and force the Fed to raise rates which would cut off the flow of cheap money to Wall Street. That's what's really driving this "austerity fetish": the demand for more cheap cash to the investor class.

So why is the stock market going crazy? It's because rate suppression has a limited shelf life. Eventually prices begin to reconnect with underlying fundamentals like they are now. Stocks have been gyrating because prices don't accurately reflect future earnings potential or value. And there's a good chance the chaos in the markets will spill over into the economy in the form of corporate defaults, higher unemployment, and deepening deflation. Once again, ordinary working people will suffer for the excesses in the financial markets. **CP**

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## MIDDLE EAST NOTES

# Executing Sheikh Nimr In the Wake of the Tempests of the Modern Middle East

BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

On January 3, 2016, Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties with Iran. Its pretext was an attack on the Saudi Embassy by Iranian civilians expressing anger at Saudi Arabia's execution of a prominent Shi'a cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, condemned the embassy attack that left part of it in flames and, according to Rouhani, Iranian authorities acted swiftly to prevent any further violence. Saudi Arabia's decision to cut ties with Iran was an attempt to take the media spotlight off its execution of 47 people -by beheading or firing squad - on January 2nd, including Sheikh Nimr. Most of the prisoners were accused of being terrorists connected with al-Qaeda. Nimr al-Nimr's case was quite different.

The decision to label the prominent Shi'a cleric, Sheikh Nimr, a terrorist and to execute him along with the 46 others on the same day, was a calculated political move designed to provoke outrage by predominantly Shi'ite Iran and its allies across the region. Saudi-Iranian animosity has intensified as the fires of war in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere have raged. Increasingly chauvinistic and ideological sectarian hatred between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, a direct result of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, is ripping apart the nations of the contemporary Middle East—nations the British and French victors of the First World War created by drawing lines on a map a continent away in Paris and London. Their map became the foundation for what we have always known as the modern Middle East. The tempests sweeping across the region today are threatening to erase the political boundaries that have defined this colonial order since the end of the First World War.

Until recently, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been fighting their battles for regional dominance as proxy parties backed by the United States and Russia respectively. Saudi Arabia's decision to execute Sheikh Nimr has raised the stakes to another level, however. It forces us to examine the Saudi-Iranian power struggle within a broader international context. Parallel to this, however, is a domestic context in which the current leadership of Saudi Arabia has gone on the offensive to send a message to the people of Arabia and the Saudi royal family. It has attempted to dispel any rumors of weakness or instability within the highest ranks of leader-

ship and announced its unwillingness to tolerate any form of dissent within its borders whatsoever. It has painted itself as the victim of Iran as a way to deflect public attention away from economic woes facing the Saudis including the erosion of the social welfare state it has long nurtured.

According to Bruce Riedel ("Saudi Executions Signal Royal Worries;" *Al-Monitor*), "The executions of 47 accused terrorists in Saudi Arabia Jan. 2 and subsequent severing of relations with Iran underscore the Saudi royal family's deep concerns about stability in the kingdom. The mass executions are a warning that dissent will not be tolerated, especially by Iranian-supported dissidents." In other words, King Salman and Prince Nayef, the relatively new faces of the Saudi leadership, chose to execute Sheikh Nimr for a number of reasons the most important of which was probably domestic.

Sheikh Nimr's real crimes were his open criticisms of the Saudi state. Interestingly, Nimr refrained taking part in overtly anti-American or pro-Iranian actions. He never advocated unification with Iran or the Iraqi and Bahraini Shi'a populations. He also condemned those supporting Bashar al-Assad of Syria because of the latter's brutal social and political record. Nimr's threat was to highlight the Saudis' miserable human rights record, the need for a fair and transparent judicial system, and to call attention to the appalling discrimination against the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia, approximately 15% of the population. At one point Sheikh Nimr suggested the Shi'a province of Arabia secede from the country.

This last point would have hit a nerve with the Saudi royal family because Saudi Shi'is live in the Eastern province of Qatif, the oil rich region from which Saudi Arabia derives its vast wealth. Secession would be an economic deathblow to the kingdom but, it should be added, was never seriously considered. Significantly, Sheikh Nimr opposed violence advocating instead the weapon of words. It will not surprise those who follow events in Saudi Arabia to learn that Sheikh Nimr's nephew, Ali Mohammad Baqir al-Nimr, was among the youth arrested for partaking in demonstrations against the regime during the Arab spring in Saudi Arabia. Ali Nimr, only 17 at the time of his arrest, has been sentenced to die by beheading and, according to some sources, crucifixion. He is still languishing in one of Saudi Arabia's dismal prisons awaiting his fate.

As noted above, however, there is more at stake than Saudi Arabia's image at home. The initial U.S. reaction to the execution of Nimr was to call for restraint—a typical, obsequious reaction to its allies' behavior, most notably Israel—but it also warned that the execution of Nimr could fuel regional tensions and deepen the sectarian divisions that have plagued the region since the catastrophic, U.S.-led war against Iraq in 2003. Unsurprisingly, while no mention was made of its role in sparking these tensions, the U.S. had a State Department representative, John Kirby, call upon Saudi Arabia to respect human rights, permit the peaceful expressions of social and



political criticism, and assure “fair and transparent judicial proceedings.” (BBC; 3 Jan. 2016) We can interpret this to mean that the U.S., a country where the death penalty is also legal, will do nothing to punish Saudi Arabia.

Our hypocritical, toothless and belated calls for our ally to honor at home the most fundamental human rights, while irksome—considering our decades of utter indifference to the Saudi state’s sponsoring of terror and brutality—have nevertheless to be taken seriously by U.S. foreign policy makers. The international stage, especially the Middle Eastern region, cannot afford an intensification of hostilities between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the fires of war, terror, and hatred blaze from Damascus to Baghdad, Sana’a and beyond.

As Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for regional dominance upping the ante daily, over four million Syrian refugees have already fled the holocaust at home pouring into other Middle Eastern and European nations, while approximately 6 million more have become internally displaced within the borders of their own country. With nearly 350,000 dead, including 12,000 children (most recent statistics, Al-Jazeera America) daily massacres and destruction are descending as well on people in Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Citizens of France, Russia, Lebanon, the U.S., Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Nigeria, Sudan and a host of other countries have also become the victims of this poisonous whirlwind.

Perhaps most unsettling of all are the violent responses these powers have sanctioned in their alleged attempt to contain this juggernaut. Fighting fire with fire, the states ostensibly involved in stemming the violence are contributing to it. Ultimately, this places them on the same side as their adversaries, increasing the insecurity of their people as they cultivate a desire for power and revenge that accomplishes nothing. Major political players Russia, the US, Turkey, France, and the UK recognize the immediacy of the threat that groups like ISIL, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of the Sinai Province, Boko Haram and others pose but are unwilling to respond in a rational, non-violent, non-military manner that would alleviate at least some of the on-going and overwhelming suffering. This leaves the real victims—the children, women, men, and elderly people, abandoned in the midst of these horrors—struggling to hang on to their humanity. **CP**

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## The Mad Bombers Fear and Nukes on the Campaign Trail

BY JOHN LAForge

Senator Ted Cruz of Texas has said that Donald Trump has “questionable judgment,” and he ought to know. Cruz said during the Dec. 15 debate, “If I am elected president...we will carpet-bomb them [areas of the Islamic State] into oblivion.”

This evangelical Christian of unquestionable judgment said in Cedar Rapids Dec. 8, “I don’t know if sand can glow in the dark, but we’re going to find out.” Sen. Cruz’s seemingly glib statement was a thinly veiled threat to use nuclear weapons in the Syrian civil war. Back when the magnitude and effects of nuclear weapons were more generally understood, Barry Goldwater was pilloried for such talk and lost a presidential election.

I can understand why Sen. Cruz has to try and verbally out gun, or rather out nuke Mr. Trump—who has set the bar so bloody high. Investigative journalist Richard Hobuss reported last August 10 that Trump said on Meet the Press a day earlier that he’d “absolutely” use nuclear weapons against the Islamic State.

“It starts with the deployment of four or five of our Ohio-class [Trident] nuclear submarines to the Persian Gulf... I’m talking about a surgical strike on these ISIS stronghold cities using Trident missiles,” Trump reportedly said. But this was Trump the jackass uncorked. Since Trident missiles can fly 4,570 miles, the Navy doesn’t have to risk sailing the shallow, narrow and deadly Straits of Hormuz to smash cities in the Middle East. They can do that from the Atlantic. Wannabe nuclear gunslingers on the dusty campaign trail ought to have a better grasp of the country’s intercontinental ballistic range. Then they could properly boast that the U.S.—to paraphrase Dr. King – is the greatest purveyor of terrorism in the world.

Just how terrifying we are is understood by some military officers. Using Trident nuclear weapons against ISIS-held areas like the city of Al-Raqqah would cause an “astronomically high” number of civilian deaths, according to CNN military analyst Peter Mansoor (U.S. Army, Ret.) Hobbus reported. “Al-Raqqah alone has a population of over two hundred-thousand people, the vast majority of whom are not affiliated in any way with the Islamic State,” Mansoor said. “A strike of this magnitude would ... result in the loss of millions of innocent lives...”

Current US warhead statistics bear this out. The smallest nuclear weapons in the arsenal—the B61 gravity bombs deployed with US B-52 and jet bombers in the United States, Europe and Turkey—are up to 33 times the power of the city-busting bomb that killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima. The

B61s with their 100-500 kiloton “variable yield” warheads can each theoretically destroy up to 4.6 million people. The 475-kiloton warheads on Trident submarine-launched missiles that Mr. Trump spoke of are 31 times the force of the Hiroshima bomb; they could each turn 4.4 million people into powder an ash. Think for example of the entire civilian populations of Boston, or Phoenix or San Francisco—gone.

Looking at the geographic consequences, the crude 15-kiloton bomb dropped on Hiroshima pulverized seven square miles. All else being equal, any one of the imminently usable B61 or Trident missile warheads could each atomize roughly 233 square miles. Imagine cities the size of Chicago, or Austin, or Lexington—rubbished.

### **Desert already glowing in places**

Sen. Cruz could, of course, find out if sand can glow in the dark by visiting any of the 600 bomb craters left in desert southwest by 100 above-ground, and 825 underground, bomb tests conducted at the Nevada Test Site -- 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas. As Dr. Arjun Makhijani recounts in *Nuclear Wastelands* (MIT Press, 1995), the 1,350 square-mile bombing range is “highly contaminated...many parts of the Nevada Test Site have substantial amounts of transuranic contamination from plutonium dispersion tests...”

The U.S. has already heated up the sands of southern Iraq with radiation—having fired some 360 tons of (armor piercing) uranium-238 munitions (so-called “depleted uranium” or DU) into the region in 1991’s Desert Storm, and another 170 tons in the 2003 bombardment and take-over. The government of Iraq has formally asked the United States to fund decontamination efforts, but our government has refused; it has not only denied Iraq any reparations or environmental cleanup compensation, but it has dismissed all the evidence of human health effects resulting from the “aerosolized” uranium that is dispersed when DU shells smash a hard targets. The U.S. has obvious reasons not to acknowledge a connection between uranium weapons and the skyrocketing rates of birth abnormalities and childhood illnesses in southern Iraq: the legal and financial liability would be spectacular.

### **This is what nuclear looks like**

The butchery that Ted Cruz and Donald Trump are promising was famously outlined by Helen Caldicott in her book *Nuclear Madness* (Revised, W.W. Norton, 1994). “Population centers would be smashed flat. Each nuclear weapon’s shockwave would come with a searing fireball with a surface temperature greater than the sun’s that would set firestorms raging over thousands of acres. The fires would scorch the earth, consuming most plant and wildlife.” A 1977 study by the Departments of Defense and Energy titled “The Effects of Nuclear Weapons,” put it this way. “The frequency of burn injuries due to a nuclear explosion is exceptionally

high. Most of these are flash burns caused by direct exposure to the pulse of thermal radiation, although individuals trapped by spreading fires may be subjected to flame burns.”

If target populations had time to find cover, “People caught in shelters near the center of the nuclear blasts would die immediately of concussive effects or asphyxiation brought on as a result of oxygen depletion during the firestorms. Exposed to immense amounts of high-energy gamma radiation, anyone who survived near the epicenter would likely die within two weeks, of acute radiation sickness,” Caldicott noted. The DoD/DoE study explained likewise: “In addition, persons in buildings or tunnels close to ground zero may be burned by hot gases and dust entering the structure, even though they are shielded adequately from direct or scattered thermal radiation. Finally, there are...harmful effects of the nuclear radiations on the body. These represent a source of casualties entirely new to warfare.” (Well, not entirely new. By 1977, the government writers certainly had knowledge of some of the radiation effects that were endured by initial survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.)

“Those who survived, in shelters or in remote rural areas,” Caldicott warned, “would reenter a totally devastated world, lacking the life-support systems upon which human beings depend. Food, air, and water would be poisonously radioactive.” Wind-blown fallout would radioactively contaminate territories and populations not party to the conflict, which—as if mass destruction with nuclear firestorms weren’t criminal enough—would constitute further violations of the Hague and Geneva Conventions, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Beyond the radioactive fallout, enraged resentments directed at the United States would grow worse and spread further than today and make retaliation and reprisals like Paris and Russia’s Metrojet flight 9268 more likely than ever.

### **Chicken hawks’ warheads ready and waiting**

Although Chicken Hawks Cruz and Trump may not know it—neither was ever in the military—about ninety US B61 bombs are deployed at Turkey’s Incirlik Air Force Base. These US warheads are armed and ready for loading onto US fighter bombers. Turkey has reluctantly joined in the incoherent bombardment of Syria, and it could justly be afraid of brutal retaliation for it, especially now that nuclear war-fever is being spread by know-nothing presidential hopefuls. Indeed, using the United States’ rationale for its 2003 war on Iraq, the so-called Islamic State could use Vice-President Dick Cheney’s own words to justify pre-emptive self-defense against US nuclear weapons in Turkey—and say the attack was Made in America.

Messrs. Cruz and Trump and their constituents would benefit from reading General George Lee Butler (USAF Ret.), a former commander of all U.S. nuclear weapons at

Strategic Command. Writing 17 years ago for the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Gen. Butler condemned the thought of initiating nuclear war. He said, “First-use policies are in direct contradiction to our self-interest...” The same year, Paul Nitze, a former hardline presidential advisor in the Reagan administration and founder of the anti-Soviet Committee on the Present Danger, wrote in the New York Times, “I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons.”

The irrationality of nuclear weapons could hardly be more obvious. **CP**

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## Portrait of the Radical as a Young Man

### The FBI’s Early Pursuit of Saul Landau

BY DAVID PRICE

When Saul Landau died in September, 2013, America lost one of its brightest public intellectuals. Saul contributed to *CounterPunch* since its earliest days, and following Landau’s death, Jeffrey St. Clair asked me to file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for files held on him by the CIA, FBI, and Department of State. The FBI acknowledged it has significant file holdings on Landau totaling over 14,000 pages. The FBI is now declassifying and redacting portions of these files, but this past month the Bureau sent me an initial release of 337 pages of FBI files which had previously been processed in the 1980s as part of a previous request—presumably a request made by Saul Landau himself.

As these files are released, I’ll report in on their contents, but this initial file’s account of the FBI’s monitoring of young Saul Landau presents an intriguing portrait of a young radical coming of age as seen through the eyes of an oppressive governmental agency concerned about forms of political expression and analysis that challenged the narrow choices of main stream American politics. The story arch within this

first FOIA release of Landau materials finds the FBI monitoring Landau as a student in the 1950s involved in what would become the roots of the New Left, with growing FBI concerns over his socialist critiques and support for the Cuban Revolution.

Saul Landau was born in 1936 in New York to Sadie and Leon Landau, a New York pharmacist. He was a prolific author, documentary film maker, and public intellectual – publishing 14 books and making 40 films, and a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies since 1972. He was a close friend of sociologist Cecil Wright Mills, helping Mills with his post-Cuban revolutionary experimental novel *Listen Yankee*, and traveling in Europe and the Soviet Union with Mills during the last year of Mills’ life. He produced films on topics like Castro in Cuba, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Cuban Five, or Brazilian torture, working at an accelerated pace, reaching audiences with timely critical information in a pre-internet age, where things like secret wars or bombing campaigns could still happen, and when Americans could still be shocked by such atrocities. His work with the late Haskell Wexler, on several films, like, *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang*, *The Sixth Sun: Mayan Uprising in Chiapas*, or *Brazil: A Report on Torture* created a symbiotic partnership that enhanced the work of both filmmakers.

Landau emerged as an important critical public intellectual voice, a writer, investigative journalist, social critical and film maker—changing public discourse on issues ranging from Cuba, the 1976 Washington D.C., assassination of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier, and the CIA’s covert war in Nicaragua, and these earliest entries in his FBI file show him developing progressive political views as an undergraduate and graduate student studying history and politics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, earning his BA in 1957, and his MA in 1959.

#### The Young Radical

Saul Landau’s FBI file opened with a report from two Washington, D.C. FBI field agents sent directly to FBI Director Hoover, on March 6, 1956, after they observed two men, one a “white male, 26-28 yrs., 5’8”, 140 lbs., black hair” and horn rimmed glasses,” the other a “negro male... wearing dark blue topcoat, black trousers,” enter the Soviet Embassy and then emerge sixteen minutes later, driving away in a 1954 Ford with Wisconsin plates that later investigation determined was registered to Saul Landau. Further FBI investigations determined Landau was enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, studying, where a campus informer told the FBI he was a member of the Madison Chapter of the Labor Youth League (LYL).

A report from the Milwaukee FBI’s Special Agent in Charge identified an April 7, 1955, letter to the editor of the *Daily Cardinal* written by Landau defending the LYL, in which he wrote that, “the Attorney General and the Subversive

Activities Control Board have proved nothing against the LYL except that the group does not go along with US Government Policy.” The FBI reported that, “LANDAU further stated in references to the LYL, ‘It is called subversive for what it says, for wanting to end segregation, establish rest control, live in peaceful co-existence, and study Marxism. These are not subversive acts. They are beliefs which don’t conform to ‘good American’ views.’”

FBI records listed Landau’s name among Wisconsin citizens opposing a Subversion bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee, and the Bureau collected further biographical information on Landau and his family; noting Landau’s involvement in the National Student Association—a left-leaning organization that would later be revealed as secretly coopted by the CIA at the national level; revelations of this would not be public until the publication of a 1967 *Ramparts* exposé. Within a few months, the FBI determined that Landau, and the unidentified Black male also observed entering Soviet embassy had attended the Washington, DC NAACP convention, as representatives of their campus chapter. The FBI tried to determine which of the black males traveling with Landau had entered the Soviet Embassy.

For several months during 1956, a series of Kafkaesque FBI reports flowed between Washington, DC and Madison struggling to determine exactly how the Madison office knew Landau was affiliated with the LYL. Crucial missing documents cast doubts on the sourcing of the agents initial report, and the informer originally identified as saying Landau was a LYL member, could not recall making this report; this led to an internal FBI investigation resulting in senior Special Agent Alexander D. Mason being disciplined. The obsession with tracing the source of this particular information seems odd, given the overall laxity of Bureau agents in such matters, including the common practice of inventing sources to support Agent’s hunches, even trolling cemeteries and phonebooks for names of fake informers—as described by former FBI agent Wesley Swearingen in his memoir *FBI Secrets: An Agent’s Exposé*. The FBI determined Landau was a member of the Wisconsin Student Peace Center, but the Bureau’s failure to confirm his LYL membership led to a rejection for a request to place Landau on the Security Index—the FBI’s national list of subversives, who were to be monitored, and in the event of national emergencies, detained. At its height, the FBI’s Security Index held the names of half a million Americans—including luminaries like Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Dalton Trumbo, Lillian Hellman, and James Baldwin. The Security Index became a register of visionary nonconformity, a monument to the FBI’s foundational paranoia, and a muted proclamation of American un-Freedom.

While the reliability of the FBI’s initial report identifying him as a LYL member was not fundamentally different from most other field reports of this period—perhaps more accurate than most, given that Landau was in fact a LYL member.

Decades later, Landau described the high level of secrecy governing Madison LYL meetings, where members were organized in secretive cells because of Party concerns of government surveillance and fears of a coming crackdown. In an interview with Matthew Levin, Landau described elaborate ruses, where LYL campus leader Henry Wortis would “put on his trench coat, ask me to feed his dog if, or some reasons, he didn’t get back in time, and then mysteriously leave the house often turning his head several times to check that no one was following him.”

Like many other US university campus groups with ties to the Communist Party, the Madison campus branch of the LYL disbanded in 1956 following Khrushchev’s revelations about Stalin. The campus Socialist Club soon rose in prominence for campus radicals, and sponsored campus talks and forums on political issues like US interventions in Lebanon, Nixon’s visit to Latin America, and the Cuban Revolution.

The Bureau’s questions about Landau’s LYL affiliation ended when Agent Mason filed a June 1959 report on Landau’s activities in the Wisconsin Socialist Club, including a report on his attendance of the National Conference of American Socialists in Cleveland. An FBI agent monitored Landau’s campus talk at a forum sponsored by the Wisconsin Socialist Club, reporting that “a group of students gave extemporaneous speeches on the United States foreign policy with regard to the Lebanon situation. Several of the students were from Arab countries, and the Agents observed that some of the Arab students gathered together in a group around another student who also spoke to the gathering.” The FBI reported Landau’s “attendance at a public forum conducted by the Wisconsin Socialist Club” discussing the “War Over China.” In 1958, Landau was elected Chairman of the Wisconsin Socialist Club and he again attended the organization’s National Conference.

### **Landau and Cuba**

The FBI reported that at a talk at University of Wisconsin on October 30, 1960, Landau “had recently returned from a four month stay in Cuba, [and he] criticized the United States Department of State for such policies as a firm supporter of former dictator Batista and was markedly pro-Castro in his comments.” The FBI characterized Landau as a “prominent member” in the pro-Cuban advocacy group, Fair Play for Cuba, which was “beginning to create a stir across the nation.” The FBI noted Landau’s work as an editor for the group’s semi-monthly bulletin, and monitored his work organizing a trip taking groups of students to Cuba during the 1960 Christmas Break. Because with hindsight we know that Fair Play for Cuba’s most famous member would be Lee Harvey Oswald, a tension is created reading these FBI entries monitoring Landau, as the dates of FBI reports count down towards the date of Kennedy’s assassination, November 23, 1963.

During February and March of 1961, a series of FBI records show the Bureau concerned that Landau may have moved to New York and rented a room using the name David Eakins. After FBI investigates further, it determines that Eakins is in fact a grad student from Madison who worked with Landau in the Fair Play for Cuba group.

In his roles as editor of the Madison based publication *Studies on the Left*, Landau was at the forefront of a wave of new political expression emerging to form what would become the New Left. Landau helped establish *Studies* as leading the way for campus free speech, anti-war, and socialist movements arising on American college campuses in the coming decade. Following Landau's vision, the third issue of *Studies on the Left* was an expanded issue devoted exclusively to the Cuban Revolution and Castro's efforts to address poverty. This issue had a print-run three times the normal size, and rapidly sold all copies.

### C. Wright Mills

Landau met American sociologist C. Wright Mills in Cuba in 1960. The two men hit it off and Landau soon became the key interlocutor shaping Mills' critical understanding of life in Cuba. Mills' political critique had been building to a crescendo the previous few years, with his works on *The Sociological Imagination* and *The Power Elite* exposing how capitalism short circuited American democracy. Working at a frenetic pace, Mills quickly cranked out a novel, *Listen Yankee*, that used composite fictive narrations of several Cubans describing the largely positive changes in their lives following Castro's revolution.

In June 1961, the FBI learned of Mills and Landau's plans to travel together to England, Yugoslavia, Poland, and the Soviet Union, and that "according to the informant, Landau was supposed to be helping Mills write a book" and Mills and Landau would "attend a Cuban Rally to be held in London." In effort to track Landau and Mills' travels, the FBI checked with New York American Express offices to see if travelers checks had been issued, but the Bureau failed to identify the purchase of any travelers checks. In July 1961, a postal carrier in Madison reported to the FBI that someone known to Landau [identity redacted] received a postcard mailed by Landau from Munich, Germany.

Mills' years of hard living, manic writing binges, drinking, smoking, motorcycles and fast living were catching up with him; a serious heart attack at only age 44 a few months earlier pushed him to look beyond his professorship at Columbia University, as he considered relocating to the UK. Mills and Landau set out for Europe, with a stop in the Soviet Union to see if their doctors could offer him better medical hope than he had received from American doctors. Landau accompanied Mills, traveling as his secretary, but Mills was enough of a mess that he needed someone to sort of his affairs.

Landau later published an account in *Ramparts* of traveling

with Mills, describing Mills' dissatisfaction with American liberalism and American universities, and writing that Mills had hoped the Soviet medical system could treat his heart condition that would kill him at age 45, half a year later. Landau captured Mills' critical approach to all social life, writing that while impressed with Soviet progress in some areas, on his last night in the USSR, Mills toasted a group of party leaders, lifting his glass saying, "here is to the day when the complete works of Trotsky are published and widely distributed in the Soviet Union." His hosts were not amused.

In the fall of 1961, the FBI learned Landau had written the Passport Office requesting clearance to travel to Cuba on behalf of C. Wright Mills and Ballantine books, "to gather facts and documents for defense of court actions" from Amadeo Barletta's lawsuit against Ballantine Books and C. Wright Mills. The Barletta suit sought \$50-million in libel damages, claiming that Mills' character in his novel *Listen Yankee* was clearly identifiable as Barletta. Barletta owned 42 radio and television stations in Cuba, and the suit claimed that Mills made false and damaging claims that Barletta was connected to the Dominican Republic's Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo and organized crime before being ousted by the Castro régime. The U.S. had no interest in helping Mills by allowing Landau to travel to Cuba to search for documents or testimony supporting Mills' depiction of Barletta as a crook, and the FBI's records show his passport application was denied.

### Early 1960s San Francisco

The FBI tracked Landau's October 1961 move from Madison to San Francisco, noting that Landau was working as a social worker at the County Hospital. The FBI's interest in Landau intensified, and a June 15, 1962 memo from SAC, San Francisco informed Hoover that Saul Landau was being moved off of the FBI's "Reserve Index" and was being placed on the FBI's Security Index. Once placed on the Security Index, the FBI's monitoring increased, and his file shows the FBI monitoring his public talks, such as a Secret memo reporting on a KPFA radio broadcast where Landau said that "US congressmen foam at the mouth 'like rabid dogs' in their obsession to invade Cuba."

An artifact from late 1962 marks how quickly shifts in political consciousness can occur within social movements. With no inkling of the radical changes coming to American university campuses in just a few years, Landau's FBI file shows him, in 1962, worried about the conservative politics of American university students. The FBI reported that when speaking at an event sponsored by the National Guardian, Landau said that he had spoken about developments in Cuba, and that, "he said he found the hatred in the eyes of the students and felt that they wanted to lynch him. He stated many educators fear that the right wing is gaining control of the universities."

A June 11, 1963 FBI memo listed Saul Landau as a witness at

upcoming proposed open hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), slated for Los Angeles the following month. Landau was listed with 21 other individuals selected to be subpoenaed by HUAC to testify about their activities and contacts with Cuba in an Open Hearing in Los Angeles, and later memos suggested that separate hearings could be held in San Francisco.

The FBI appeared increasingly concerned that Landau planned to travel again to Cuba, even though such travel was now forbidden by the US government. An update in his Security Index file shows the FBI monitoring his remarks at the July 16, 1963 public meeting of the Bay Area Opposition (BAO) group. The FBI reported that Landau:

“spoke concerning the Cuban situation with particular reference to the 59 students who had recently visited Cuba for the purpose of testing the law banning their travel. He described the ban as immoral and a restriction of the individual’s freedom to travel. He suggested that the students be met at the airport and a reception be held in their honor. He further felt that a series of speeches throughout the country by these students would be enlightening. He further brought forth the idea that on the day of their return or shortly thereafter to have one of their number go to the passport office of the State Department and pay the \$10.00 required for a visa to Cuba and at the same time have pickets posted outside the building with banners on the travel restrictions. Source advised that these ideas were presented to those present and voted on in the affirmative and that the Subject then picked several persons to head the committees charged with implementing his ideas”.

A September 24, 1963, decoded FBI Cablegram sent from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City to FBI Director Hoover reported that Landau “has been in Mexico City several months and plans to leave for Cuba in near future to teach English literature and political science at University of Havana...Source advised [in] September 24 [telegram] that subject has left Mexico to return to San Francisco briefly to wind up affairs, after which he will return to Mexico and proceed to Cuba.”

The FBI intensified its focus on Landau, and Hoover’s message to the San Francisco Special Agent in Charge expressed his desire to arrest Landau on his return from Cuba, and to file felony charges against him. Landau’s passport had been stamped as invalid for travel to Cuba and other Communist countries, and a September 1963 FBI report clarified the need for the Mexico City Embassy to collect evidence relating to Landau’s travels, and detailed the chain of evidence needed for a conviction of violations of Section 1185 (b), Title I of the U.S. Code, including knowledge of where he departed from the U.S., evidence of his entry to Cuba, and evidence of his intentions to travel to Cuba. The memo stressed the need

to monitor Landau’s movements so that the FBI would know when he left San Francisco for Mexico, and it urged the FBI to alert their San Francisco informers to monitor Landau’s movements.

The FBI contacted one of Landau’s neighbors, who reported that Landau had not mentioned leaving San Francisco, and who assured the FBI that she would promptly notify the Bureau if Landau left town. The FBI monitored airline flights, and in mid-October the Bureau requested authorization for a mail cover for Landau’s home address. Throughout the fall of 1963, the FBI was convinced Landau was about to travel to Cuba, but he remained in San Francisco and the FBI was not able to fulfill its plan of arresting and prosecuting him as he returned from Cuba. It is possible that news of Lee Harvey Oswald’s connections to Fair Play for Cuba led Landau to suspect the likelihood that travel to Cuba was increasingly being monitored.

Two years later, on December 14, 1965, J. Edgar Hoover sent a confidential memo “concerning Presidential protection” to the Secret Service claiming that Saul Landau could present a danger to the safety of the President of the United States. Hoover filled out a form claiming that his concerns were raised, “because background is potentially dangerous; or has been identified as member or participant in communist movement; or has been under active investigation as member of other group organization inimical to U.S.” and that Landau fell under the category of “Subversives, ultrarights, racist and fascists who met” the checked criteria of making “expressions of strong or violent anti-U.S. sentiment.”

It is difficult to interpret this move as anything other than J. Edgar Hoover using another governmental agency to harass Landau. The coversheet for one FBI report had noted that Landau was “not to be interviewed because...in view of his activity, there is no indication that he would be anything but hostile, and since he is a writer, the risk of embarrassment to the Bureau far outweighs any potential accomplishment.” With this backhanded passive-aggressive gesture, Hoover outsourced Landau’s harassment to another governmental agency. Hoover wasn’t stupid. Hoover knew Landau posed no threat to the President’s life, but with the assassination of Kennedy, Oswald’s membership in Fair Play for Cuba, and Landau’s prominence in the group, this was an easy form of remote harassment for Hoover to arrange. Hoover also sent an identical Secret Service alert the following year.

This first release of Landau’s file ends with a 4 page, March 1967, State Department report summarizing Landau’s past passport applications, including a 1965 attempt to travel to Cuba as one of three *Ramparts* reporters. When the FBI questioned *Ramparts* sending so many reporters to Cuba, the FBI reported that *Ramparts’* publisher and editor-in-chief (likely Robert Scheer), amended his request, dropping Landau and the other reporter from the request, and traveled alone to Cuba.

This initial release falls silent with this 1967 passport report, but the FBI's admission of identifying another 14,000 pages of files they are now processing for release, means I will have future installments reporting on the FBI's monitoring of Saul Landau. Like many of the hundreds of FBI files I have read, this initial release of FBI files marks the narrowness of political dissent in a nation that so fervently self-identifies as a bastion of liberty—with narrative records depicting America's secret police's efforts to criminalize the human right of free movement, dissent from international policies, and advocacy for new approaches to democratic change.

But the knowledge that the state put such concentrated efforts into tracking his movements, work, and views could not have been surprising to Saul Landau. He, more than most, understood the nature of the struggle in which he engaged; and this knowledge did not slow him down or discourage his advancement; if anything, it was oxygen for the fire that burned within him and moved him to describe and confront the corruptions of power, and beacons of resistance that marked the times in which he lived. **CP**

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## **Abolish Small Arms**

### **The Real 2nd Amendment Debate**

BY ANDREW SMOLSKI

The world's small arms cause irreparable damage through human rights abuses and the militarization of global conflicts. Their production is carried out by a government-supported industry promoting aggression as a solution. It is blaringly apparent that more small arms do not make us safer, especially when their proliferation is used to justify the use and monopoly of violence by governments and corporations. That violence is then wielded by these autocratic organizations with their dangerous authoritarian beliefs to reproduce the stratified inequality of the capitalist world-system. Simply put, small arms are a principal technology for oppression.

The problem of small arms proliferation is exacerbated by the U.S., with a sizable minority of the population obsessed with guns for a variety of vacuous reasons. Typically they fall into two types: self-defense (crime is in decline) or to defend against tyranny (US military capacity far exceeds any insurgency citizens could devise). This minority has oversized power in the debate because they are represented by a lobbying organization, the National Rifle Association (NRA),

funded quite well by the small arms industry. Year upon year the NRA spends 1.5 million to 3 million USD lobbying senators and representatives at the federal and state levels, along with their media campaigns and spokespersons advertising fear and paranoia.

And while gun ownership by household has been on a long-term decline according to the General Social Survey, now at around 32%, gun sales have been skyrocketing in recent years. This situation produces what Robert J. Spitzer calls a "security dilemma", whereby "a national policy that encourages and implements weapons ownership as a recognized means of self-defense invites a domestic arms race," one participated in by both citizens and their government. Our right becomes their fatuous reason to prepare for war. With mounting casualties from mass shootings and police brutality, we must begin to recognize that gun ownership in the US is untenable, as well as massively destructive for the rest of the world. From that, we must ask ourselves, what do we do about small arms?

The obvious solution would be universal small arms abolition as a way to deal with the crisis. Contemporarily, small arms abolition is rarely, if ever, mentioned. Using the productive capacity for a beneficial alternative is considered a fantasy of the perpetually ignored idealist. Disarmament is a deceased dream of the hopeful. Rather, we have resigned ourselves to the insane drive to further escalation. We do not question the dystopian picture painted by the chaotic splatter of empty shells. Small arms have fully integrated themselves into the treadmill of production built on the capitalist drive towards infinite accumulation. In order to understand how this monstrously productive death machine works, we should start from a global look at the small arms trade and go towards a national look at the country with roughly a third of all small arms manufacturers, the United States.

The internationally recognized definition of small arms is any weapon designed for personal use. The UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms clarified further in 1997 that this included revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. In 2003 an Oxfam-Amnesty International joint report stated that there were "approximately 639 million small arms in the world today" and "eight million new weapons are produced every year." According to research fellow Mike Bourne, in 2007 worldwide there were 1085 manufacturers of small arms and light weapons, with 68-84 countries participating in the production of rifles, assault rifles, or sub-machine guns and 45-60 participating in the production of pistols. Bourne also reports that in the 1990s there was a 96 percent increase in companies manufacturing weapons.

As he states, "much of this increase was due to systemic shifts adding to the ongoing evolution of the producer base of the global trade: the fragmentation of the USSR into new republics, and the break-up of state controlled industries into

numerous privatized facilities, added to the spread of production capacity through licensed production to dramatically expand the number of producers.” In other words, the neoliberal logic governing global affairs during the post-Soviet era increased the number of parties with an economic interest in the production and sale of small arms, even though this was a time of shrinking global production. As Andrew Cockburn elucidates in *Harper’s*, arms manufacturers were busy lobbying for another government-supported arms profits bonanza throughout the 90s based on militarily aggressive policies, such as the expansion of NATO.

And so, by 2001 the Small Arms Survey (SAS) had calculated the legal small arms trade at 4-6 billion USD. By 2011 it had doubled. The arms trade was booming once more. In 2012, there were a total of 13 exporters with over 100 million USD in small arms exports, who “were, in descending order, the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Austria, South Korea, the Russian Federation, China, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Norway, and Japan.” That same year Israel, Spain, and Switzerland dropped out of this infamous group into the group of 38 total countries with “only” at least 10 million USD in small arms exports, a group whose own total exports increased by 340 million USD from the year before. Worldwide, small arms are big business, and while an overall tiny portion of global world product (77 trillion USD), still an integral part of global trade and imperial control.

By far the U.S. plays the leading role in the industry, with not only the highest exports, but also the highest number of imports. It is the core of the small arms trade system, an ammunition depot pariah. In 2012, it had over 500 million USD in exports, as well as over 500 million USD in imports. In 2010, SAS calculated that the US alone accrued around 2.7 billion USD in sales revenue, making it by far the largest small arms supplier in the world, much of this going to its own domestic population and foreign governments. Further validity of U.S. arms trade dominance is provided by the fact that small arms are a very small percentage of overall U.S. military armament profits; global arms trade for all categories (tanks, missiles, etc.) was 85.3 billion USD in 2011, with the U.S. taking 79 percent at 56.3 billion USD. As such, it is not hyperbolic to claim the U.S. deals in death as a principal economic activity.

As Gideon Burrows explains in the phenomenal *No Non-Sense Guide to the Arms Trade*, “[small arms and light weapons] are linked to the vast increase in civilian deaths generated in today’s wars—an estimated 80 per cent, compared with only five percent at the beginning of the 20th century.” SAS estimated in 2001 a minimum of a 500,000 dead per year due to small arms. As Hillier and Wood point out, it is the poor who bear the brunt of this, whether in conflict zones or crime-ridden areas, all the result of deprivation under neocolonialism. Following statistics from the U.S. National Criminal Victimization Survey of 2001, 46.6 per 1,000 people making less than 7,500 USD a year experi-

ence some form of violent crime. Compare that to 18.5 per 1,000 for those making 75,000+ USD a year. In a world where money equals power, to be poor is to be marginalized and oppressed, an easy target for all nefarious elements in society.

Furthermore, militarized state actors increase social harm both directly through participation in human rights abuses, and through the proliferation of arms and subsequent paramilitarization of criminal sectors of the population. For instance, according to Hillier and Wood, in 2001 the U.S. “offered the government of the Philippines military equipment worth more than U.S.-\$100 million—including...30,000 M-16 rifles”, whereby “U.S. military aids risks exacerbating patterns of human rights violations, aggravating local tensions, and prolonging the armed conflict in central Mindanao.” As Hillier and Wood go on to explain, “through loss, theft, or illegal sale” the “injection of military equipment from the USA...may contribute to a further proliferation of these weapons.”

Other primary importers of U.S. small arms in 2014 are also notorious human rights abusers, like Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Each of these countries has played a pivotal role in U.S. imperial dominance over the region. As such, we cannot ignore the reality that imperialism, profit, and arms are fundamentally linked. How else would we explain North Africa and the Middle East as the principal importers of U.S. military equipment?

Thus, when the people in the U.S. discuss small arms in isolation from global trade and geopolitical hegemonic conflict they retreat into egotistical and poisonous hyper-masculine fantasies. They ignore the role of small arms as, to repeat once more, principal technologies of oppression. This is why I consider the 2nd Amendment debate to be nothing more than a sham, good cover for horrendously retrograde policies. The debate around the 2nd Amendment acts as an ideological cover for the massive scale of small arms production and sale. Rarely in the raucous 2nd Amendment debates do the ideas discussed here prior become discursively central. Because of this, the ideas underpinning the right to bear arms have been warped beyond recognition. Now, those ideas are employed for the economic interests of the small arms industry, whose principal political representative is the NRA.

This is contemporarily important due to the effects of the 2nd Amendment debate on the U.S. Senate’s failure to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The U.S. State Department states that the regulations to be put in place by ATT match with existing national regulations, and merely add a universal sales analysis requirement based on human rights and humanitarian law. As Talha Khan Burki discusses in *The Lancet*, it adds this layer by:

“[requiring] governments to scrutinize sales of conventional weapons—tanks, for example military vehicles, missiles, or firearms, on a case by case basis. If there is a “substantial risk” that weapons might be used to violate human rights or



humanitarian law, end up in the hands of terrorists or organized criminals, impair poverty-reduction and sustainable development, or foment local or regional instability, then the sale cannot go ahead.”

The NRA has consistently lobbied against ratification based upon the spurious claim that ATT would restrict gun rights in the U.S. This “despite the draft specifically stating that each nation state would be free to define its own gun laws.” That is, it only applies to exports, which is international trade! The Senate still blocked it. In either case, the idea of the ATT in the short or medium term having some substantial negative affect on small arms ownership, proliferation, or production/sale is slightly more than ludicrous.

So, since the ATT will not affect any of the NRA’s members, nor seriously restrict global arms sales, it must be the NRA’s donors who have a qualm with the treaty, as well as seeing it as a great propaganda opportunity for their industry. Major donors to the NRA include all big name small arms producers, such as Beretta USA Corporation, Freedom Group, Smith & Wesson, Colt’s Manufacturing Co., Inc., and Glock, Inc. These companies run off the ongoing police militarization trend (i.e., exacerbation of human rights abuses) worldwide. Then there is the civilian market, the one claimed to be the most coveted by the NRA. Add to all that the sales to militaries, and it is reasonable to understand why any *de jure* regulation would be considered abhorrent by the small arms industry, even if *de facto* toothless.

So, they play off the ideological make-up of the NRA to protect their interest and maintain a very narrow debate over small arms. This ideology operates on what sociologist Scott Melzer describes in *Gun Crusaders: The NRA’s Culture War*, as a white, right-wing, hyper-masculine, and ultranationalist culture built upon a history of settler-colonialism. After all, the NRA was the creation of U.S. military personnel post-Civil War. For most of its early history it functioned as a quasi-state civil association, with Theodore Roosevelt even getting them a deal on some army surplus rifles. NRA members are major supporters of the standing army and police, which are the primary institutions for installing and maintaining a tyrannous government.

And this support for the police is important for police budgets, which is important for small arms manufacturers. In a survey of 53 large police departments in the US conducted by Police Executive Research Forum, each department spent on average 43,894 USD on firearms and 248,940 USD on ammunition per year. With more than 12,000 local police departments across the nation, the small arms industry has clear economic reasons why they must work to maintain the NRA’s and wider societies pro-police ideology. As taxpayers we should dare to criticize this overly friendly accommodation between public officials and private corporations.

Further, with such high levels of support for the police by NRA members, the constantly professed liberal principle of

individual gun ownership for self-defense becomes nothing more than a hollow vigilante creed to assume for themselves an automatic right under any circumstances to kill in “self-defense”. As Black Lives Matter has shown, this vigilantism is primarily meant to uphold status quo systemic violence. That systemic violence is made apparent from the racist application of “justifiable” homicide and police brutality in a society built on white terrorism of blacks from slave patrols to the KKK and Jim Crow. It also fuels a “preemptive strike” mentality, dangerous in a society that so frequently contravenes international laws of war by committing crimes of aggression.

NRA members are perfect fodder for the party that plays to their nativistic id and employs all rhetoric to hide their parasitic economic aims. This bodes well for the partisan necessities of the NRA’s biggest political proponents, like Sen. Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) and Sen. Cornyn (R-Texas), whose campaigns run on NRA (i.e., small arms industry) dollars and exploiting NRA member paranoia. Both of these men, amongst others, have made statements and amendments to derail ATT ratification. These are the same politicians who support all sorts of imperial interventions in foreign countries, pork barrel “defense” contracts, and the erosion of our civil rights.

Not only does NRA ideology support small arms proliferation, but it does so in a manner that supports U.S. imperialism and police militarization. It is toxic. And why would the small arms industry have any other ideology? Shouldn’t it be assumed if your industry develops death dealers that the capitalist logic behind it would be about repressing freedom and spreading domination (i.e. increasing the level of violence)? Knowing as much, it is apparent that the small arms industry, the NRA, and American imperialism are of one. To end this gruesome production machine based in the U.S. and to actualize ideas outlined in the ATT, it is time to move the debate quickly and forcefully towards abolition and disarmament.

In stating what amounts to blasphemy to some, I would like to end by noting that not so long ago this would’ve been mildly mainstream. In 1976 Alva Myrdal, Nobel Peace Prize recipient and sociologist, wrote an awe-inspiring book, *Game of Disarmament: How the United States & Russia Run the Arms Race*. In it she called for universal international disarmament as vital for the survival of the species and betterment of civilization. The distinguished Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which Myrdal was the first chair of, along with the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, continue to consistently advocate for disarmament as necessary. So, if our goal is safe, decent societies, societies working for the expansion of democratic principles, small arms proliferation is antithetical. If we want a better, more fulfilling society that can provide a decent, dignified wellbeing to all, then we must begin to demand what currently is considered the impossible. It is the only realistic stance, small arms abolition or bust! **CP**

**ANDREW SMOLSKI** is a writer and sociologist..

# Down in Sonora

## Smashed Dreams and Political Murder in the Desert

BY LAWRENCE REICHARD

I awoke in Magdalena de Kino, an hour and change south of the U.S. border and two hours south of Tucson. I packed my things, did my stretches and took off by bus to Altar, the most popular jumping-off point for undocumented travel north into the U.S. I took a bus 20 minutes south to Santa Ana, and then another bus 45 minutes northwest to Altar.

In Altar I walked around with my 25-pound backpack, looking for a hotel. Things were pretty quiet around Altar. Few migrants make their way north this time of year. They wait until after the holidays so they can spend the holidays with their families. But at an outdoor grill I met two young men from the southern state of Oaxaca who had tried to cross the border but had got busted by *La Migra*, held for 36 hours and deported. They had walked from Altar to the border, a journey of maybe sixty miles, with two coyotes and 13 other migrantes, but at the first sight of *La Migra* the coyotes fled and left the migrants to their own devices, and to their doom.

The men had paid the coyotes \$4,500 each. A king's ransom, and all the money had been borrowed from friends and family. Now they are in a deep, deep hole. They told me they were on their way to Mexico City to try their luck there. Work in the city pays about \$32.50 a week, they said, and on top of living expenses and their \$4,500 debts, they had families to feed back home in Oaxaca, where tourist delight in the ancient ruins of Monte Alban and too many locals desperately hunt for too few jobs that pay too little to live on.

The men had been heading for Florida. "Do you have family or friends there?" I asked. "No," the bigger one said. "Then why Florida?" "Work." It could just as well have been North Dakota—work was the thing.

My hotel costs \$20 and my dinners have been running \$6-7. I wouldn't last two days, let alone a week, on \$32.50. And if these men are lucky enough to find work, they will have to survive a week on that, and feed their families back home, and pay off their debts. If they were to sleep in the street, eat nothing and send no money back home, it would still take them 32 months to pay off the debt. They were in their early twenties and they were staring right into the eyes of financial ruin. The sadness and hopelessness in their eyes seemed like wells with no bottom. And beyond the financial disaster they had the look and smell of failure, personal failure. How does one go home and face one's family after such ruin?

I ran out of questions and began to feel a bit awkward. What does one say in such company? A saint might know – I am no saint. We had met at the chicken place; they shared

my table. They split half a chicken just as I was finishing the amount they were going to split, and they asked me for the unfortunate salad I was neglecting. I should have bought them another half-chicken. I didn't. At that point I was unaware of their plight, though it certainly seemed possible they were in a tight spot. It wasn't until I ran into them again, where the long-distance buses stop, that they told me their story.

The men were heading southeast to Santa Ana and on to Mexico City, but five days before Christmas all the buses going that way were full. I ran out of questions for the men, and started to feel conspicuously wealthy and awkward in their presence, so I bade them farewell and set off on foot. I walked 2-3 blocks to Altar's main plaza, where a Red Cross trailer advertised aid for migrants. I went in. It looked like a financially-strapped medical clinic, with 2-3 small, narrow examination rooms with an open, narrow "hallway" passing through each examination room. Clearly patient privacy was in short supply. There was no one there but staff, a product, I supposed, of the season of low migration.

A young, uniformed Red Cross worker asked me what I wanted. I was woefully unprepared for this obvious question. I stumbled and faltered and tripped over my words. I had heard about Altar and had come to see for myself what was going on—could I ask him a few questions? The answer was swift. "No." Red Cross policy. Was I a writer? "Sometimes I write and sometimes I don't." Woefully unprepared. His eyes told the story. Such a ridiculous response cut no ice with this hardened, battle-tested, front-line veteran.

It's very possible I should have stayed longer in Altar. Perhaps I should have stayed and unearthed more stories like that of the Oaxaquenos, but I didn't. I walked a mile east of town to the Pemex gas station to try to bum a truck ride back to Santa Ana, to continue my overland journey to Guatemala. A cop told me to station myself beside a humble but allegedly popular eatery on the eastbound side of the road. "The Pemex is no good," he said, "It's on the wrong side of the road." But yes, he said, the truckers will give you a ride...if you're lucky.

When I got to the restaurant there was one truck parked there. "Can you give me a ride to Santa Ana?" I asked the driver. "Oh, I don't know," he said, "I'm not supposed to give rides." But his response was not firm. I pushed a little. "It's only 45 minutes," I said, "and I won't tell anyone." "Alright," he said, "get in."

He lived and worked out of Monterrey, sixteen hours east and about four, maybe five, hours south of the Texas border. He drove all over northern Mexico, but mostly he did the Tijuana run, and he was on his way home from there.

Eighteen years ago his father crossed undocumented into the U.S. and took up residence in San Antonio and is now a legal permanent resident. His brother went to visit his father eight months ago, crossing over legally, but he had overstayed his visa and is now working illegally in San Antonio, appar-

ently with no plans to leave. My truck driver said he was tempted to make the same journey, but he had a wife, kids, and a good job in Monterrey. "It's a shame," he said, "having one's family spread out like that, but what is one to do. That's just the way things are."

All buses south from Santa Ana were full for the next four days—the holidays. "Everybody wants to go south," the agent said. "I've never seen anything like it." I caught a bus back to Magdalena and was lucky enough to get room number seven in Hotel El Cuervo, where I had spent the night before. El Cuervo is only a block from Magdalena's very attractive main plaza, but it is surprisingly quiet and wonderfully dark at night. Room number seven has its own concrete patio with a good view of a tree-lined, park-like riverbed and a big mountain rising behind. At \$20 a night, it's a real find. A few blocks away \$15 will fetch a loud, dingy room.

For dinner I went back to Marco Antonio's unnamed outdoor grill right across the street from the southwest corner of the plaza. The night before Marco Antonio and I had split no less than two-and-a-half liters of Tecate, and he served up the best tacos I'd ever had, grilled strictly on mesquite. And he told me of his life. Almost finished a degree at Ohio State, studied gastronomia in Guadalajara, and five years of a 15-year sentence in Kansas for drugs. "Damn good thing that wasn't nowadays," he said in accented but perfect English. "If it were nowadays, I'd have to do the whole damn thing, fifteen years - man, that's crazy." That's all he had to say about that. He wanted to talk of better things.

But eventually I brought up what is perhaps the biggest tragedy to ever strike Magdalena de Kino, the still unsolved 1994 murder of its favorite son Luis Donaldo Colosio, favored to win the presidency in 1994 and become the first progressive president since Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940). Colosio was shot and killed at a campaign rally in Tijuana. I asked Marco Antonio who killed Colosio, and I got more or less the same answer I always get to this question - practically the only things that ever change are the facial expressions and hand gestures. "Nobody knows, but everybody knows. The rich, the powerful, the ruling class—call it what you want. No one was ever caught, but we all know who did it."

Since the Colosio killing, the Mexican ruling class has turned to tidier tactics. Like its counterpart north of the border, it now prefers election theft to political murder.

Marco Antonio seemed to know everyone in town. A steady stream of cars cruised the plaza and passed in front of us, and half of them honked and waved at Marco Antonio and called out this or that greeting. Marco Antonio said the population of Magdalena is some 35,000, but yes, he said, "I know everyone in town that is more or less my age, I grew up with them."

For several years Marco Antonio worked in administration of a Canadian gold mine on the other side of the big mountain that rises up from the north side of town. "I made good

money, very good money," he said. "I was rich by Magdalena standards. But my first love is gastronomy, cooking."

Well into our second liter of Tecate, Marco Antonio's language became more more colorful. He said cancer rates are well above average for Magdalena women. "Because of the mine?" I asked. "Well, yes, of course it's because of the goddam mine." "It seeps into the groundwater?" "Well, yes, of course it seeps into the goddam groundwater. But they don't care one whit. They have their goddam money, they live somewhere else. What the hell do they care?" He said the mine is constantly changing hands, and each time it does the stock price goes up. "A shell game?" I asked. "Hell yeah, it's a goddam shell game," he said. "That's exactly what it is."

Marco Antonio introduced me to a friend who was seated at a table with Marco Antonio's wife Claudia. Alejandro. I shook his hand and we exchanged pleasantries. Later on when Alejandro got up, walked across the street to a late model SUV and left, Marco Antonio said the man was rich, quite rich, that he was a coyote. Packing at least 50 extra pounds, Alejandro didn't look up for the rigors of a week-long march through the desert. "But he doesn't do the actual treks," I said. "He organizes them, right?" "Yeah, that's right. But it's risky." "How so?" I asked. "It's illegal." "Illegal?" I asked. "Really? What does the Mexican government care—they're just walking through the desert." "It's the US," Marco Antonio said. "They pressure the government to crack down."

Later on a friend stopped by. Juan Carlos. Just like the king who briefly ruled Spain in the 1970s after Franco died. Juan Carlos had a degree from Cal State and had served in the US Air Force. From his wallet he extracted a small photo of a handsome young man in a crisp, freshly pressed Air Force uniform. Clearly he carried the photo everywhere he went.

Juan Carlos's sister was married to Colosio, and I wanted to pump him on this, but all he wanted to talk about was US history. Every time I tried to steer the conversation back to Colosio he acted as if I had never uttered a word. I'll try again next time I see him, but I'm not hopeful. **CP**

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# Notes From Prison

## Life in a Cage

BY JOHN COCHRAN

“When my friend, Paul Krassner, asked me to write a story about prison life for *CounterPunch*, I was not sure what sort of article to write, what flavor to put on it. I have been in prison for more than fourteen years here in Colorado, in Texas and in the federal prison system and I have a lot to say about living in a cage, about other people living in the cage with me, about the people who put me in the cage, about the people who built the cage, about the people who legislate and administrate the cage, about the people who run the cage, fund the cage, exploit the cage, use and abuse the cage. With what I know about prisons, I could fill volumes. But this is to be a story about live in prison rather than the life of the prison, the latter of which may be too vulgar and profane for a publication of this stripe. And so I will attempt to place you, dear reader, here in prison with me as you read along. Don't worry, there will be parole.

In deciding the hue and tenor of this piece—the story's flavor—the choice became clear to me on my way to the chow hall this noon. Life in prison has but one flavor and one flavor only and I have tasted it for fourteen years: shit. *Pure shit*. As of the day I write this story, 5173 days of the same shit, day in, day out, all day, every day. Shit, shit, shit. Turdburger stew and crap sandwiches all the time. A veritable smorgasbord of shit.

Of course prison is not supposed to be fun. It is, by design, a punitive arrangement. Lawbreakers are to be punished and that punishment begins with one's freedom being made forfeit. Nearly everything there is to living life, other than the barest necessities, is taken away and usually those things are gone for good, as it is impossible for most people to maintain relationships, jobs, businesses, mortgages and the like while they are locked up. So, in addition to whatever sentence and fine a judge may impose, there is, most often, the bonus sanction of losing absolutely everything.

The iconic idea in American criminal justice today is corrections, but corrections is just a feel-good word meant to convey the notion that some sort of meaningful rehabilitation is taking place. That simply does not happen. Ever. If by corrections, the intended meaning were that criminals are temporarily deleted from the surface of society (which is a perfectly valid objective) then departments of corrections are doing a splendid job. But such is not the case. Prison is punishment and that is crystal clear.

Prison affects more than just relationships, material possessions and personal solvency. Prison life is strongly didactic and may also have a profound affect upon one's fun-

damental worldview. An unexpected twist that life in prison has wrought in me is that it has turned me against the death penalty. I have not always been opposed to executions, but I am now and probably not for the reasons you might suppose. Although a convict, I am no friend of evil and evil certainly lives here. I would not make a popular warden among that portion of the prison populace. If I were in charge we might see a reintroduction of corporal punishment and there would likely be stocks and dungeons on prison grounds. Still, even without medieval implements of torture, prison is a pretty dismal place. It is, in fact, so miserable, so full of abject gloom, so flush with suffering, that it shifted my opinion on capital punishment.

I had always been convinced that capital punishment is fatally flawed. It is outrageously expensive; it is unevenly applied; it takes far too long to carry out; and, it is quite simply wrong to kill people. Wrongness aside, I once did, as many people do, suffer from cognitive dissonance when it came to what I'd want to do if someone killed a person I love. I would have wanted the killer executed. Living in prison has untangled that dilemma for me. If someone hurt or killed one of my children, do not execute him. Put him in a small concrete box for the rest of his life. Put him in prison. A personal eternity of this place is far worse than death.

Each day in prison is a fresh torment. Every morning I wake up lonely and alone on a hard plastic mattress, cold beneath a worn-out blanket woven out of radioactive dog hair and recycled fiberglass. And I suffer. Daily, unable to get in my car, go to work, and grow my life, it hurts and I suffer. Each time I sit down in unpleasant company and force down tepid, tasteless prison fare, I suffer. I suffer every day that goes by when I cannot go camping or rafting or do some other thing I love. Galloping boredom rides through my days and nights. I am perpetually surrounded by hate and violence, tedium, ignorance and stupidity. Every day I don't get to see or touch my children, to play with them, to watch them grow, my heart breaks and I suffer. Life goes on but mine does not and it is torture. Prison takes everything there is to being a man away from you.

Most people who would commit murder have no respect for human life in the first place. If you take their life, you take no great thing from them. Let the murderer keep his life. Imprison him in a small box made of concrete and steel—and he may live long.

Prison is tough. It is a violent, vile, vicious place with almost no redeeming qualities. Prison has no rehabilitative component that I've ever been able to discern, but, in its trenchant misery, prison is punitive. At enormous expense, somewhere north of \$80 billion a year in the U.S., the prison industry does serve the function of punishing wrongdoers... and removing them, of course, from society.

Although prison is eternally terrible, I am eternally optimistic. Shitty though it may be, where life has given me poop,

I have made poopsicles. Prisoners who are non-violent and well-behaved are generally given lower custody classifications and consequently more privileges and better living conditions. I don't think I'd ever use words like "good" or "nice" to characterize the place where I live, but minimum custody prison beats the dog-snot out of Max. There are typically fewer prisoners in minimum-security facilities. A smaller population means less noise, fewer fights, better food, shorter lines. Moreover, having fewer people somehow lends itself to a general improvement in the manners and common decency among both staff and inmates. At a minimum security prison camp, once you become acclimated to what you've lost, you may begin to find some degree of consolation, comfort camaraderie or at least commiseration. Doing time becomes almost tolerable.

In prison you have the dubious benefit of very nearly zero responsibility. Once the accouterments of life in the free world are gone, a new, warped sense of liberation settles into the low spot left by freedom. Unless your name is Martha Stewart or Ivan Boesky, gone are the things to which monthly payments and bills attach themselves. No more house payments, car payments, insurance or utility bills. No more groceries or clothes to buy. No entertainment expenses. There are no kids to take to school or help with their homework. No yard to mow. No wife or girlfriend or boyfriend to worry about, no friends to see to. No accommodations to be made. No arrangements to arrange. I once loved having bills and obligations, but must confess a certain lightness in their absence. Prison is very nearly a perfectly selfish universe where one's own small soul is the axis of the space it inhabits.

There is a lot of empty time here. Time like you'd never see in the free world. Every morning after breakfast, I take an hour for yoga and then another for the gym, followed by a three mile run. What sort of slacker has two-and-a-half hours a day, every day to work out? If you're in prison, you do. There's plenty of time to read. I devour at least three or four books a week. I love books and have read nearly all of them in the prison library. Here, you even have time to read the books you don't really want to read, but are supposed to read; the books everyone wants to say they've read; the books you lie about and say you've read; the *Finnegans Wakes*, the *Iliad's* and the *Odysseys*. Here, there's time for all that.

If you wake up and feel like going in late to work—no problem. Hell, kick back until after lunch or just take the whole day off for that matter. It will have no effect on the paycheck you don't get; and, even if you did get paid, it's not as if you could go anywhere to spend the money. So fuck it. Relax.

I do have a job here. Actually, I have two and I enjoy them both. I work in the carpentry shop taking care of minor maintenance issues and I teach algebra to GED students in the evening. I am fortunate to have a job I like and have a difficult time understanding why anyone here would do a job he didn't love. (Washing dishes... Yuck.) I understand the necessity of a

paycheck driving someone in the free world to do work they don't like. But in here? Misery is provided free of charge—hard time, complimentary.

Living in this pervasive wretchedness, one must take light and humor where it can be found. Some few months ago I had the job of remodeling the prison's bathrooms. Among other things, I had to replace all of the exhaust fans before the toilet stalls, two in each restroom, five restrooms in all. When my boss ordered the supplies for the remodel, he made a mistake on the order for the flexible duct work that carries the air from the toilet exhaust fan through the ceiling, outside. I needed about about ten feet per exhaust fan for a total of fifty feet. He put one too many zeroes on the "50" making it "500" feet and I found myself with a huge surplus. Never one to waste materials, I put it to good use.

The prison is a building shaped like a five-pointed star. Five wings of cells with restrooms at the end of each wing. At the hub of the star is the control center, a small ten-foot-by-fifteen-foot room where two or three guards sit all day and watch what goes on in the cellblock. Instead of ducting the exhaust fans to the vents on the roof outside, I ducted them into the air-conditioning supply vent to the control center.

Each evening after dinner, the restrooms become a popular place. Ten toilets for two-hundred people make for a busy bathroom. With my adaptations to the new ventilation system, they also now make for a dank, dismal control center. Each guard blames the other and tempers are raging. Some of them have quit speaking to each other. I doubt they will ever figure it out. It is possible to be entertained in prison, but entertainment is not a naturally occurring thing. It must be carefully cultivated, constructed and brought to life, like a science project. In this instance, like Frankenstein, perhaps. I just hope it doesn't follow the same course as Mary Shelley's novel and ruin its creator. Perhaps I'll be spared by my creation's absence of ambition.

And so, while I could sit here and tell you fourteen year's worth of funny, amusing stories of a childish prison prankster or of the fountain of youth enjoyed from having an abundance of hours in which to run and workout, I would just rather remind you of the toxic ennui that poisons my shit soup. Excuse me, I think I just heard the dinner bell. **CP**

**John Cochran** is an inmate in the Colorado state prison system.

# Money, Race and the Sweet Science

## The Political Economy of Boxing

BY DAVID MACARAY

When doing a piece on a subject as multifaceted as professional boxing, it can be hard to know where to begin. That's because boxing has way too much of everything: Too much corruption, too much heartbreak, too much carnage, too much hypocrisy, too much greed. Too much of everything.

Of course, given its rich history, one approach would be to present a straightforward chronology of the sport, beginning with, say, the landmark Jack Johnson vs. Jim Jeffries heavyweight championship match, the so-called "Fight of the Century," held in Reno, Nevada, in 1910.

For one thing, the Johnson-Jeffries fight has been called boxing's first "modern" bout; for another, it was positively drenched in racial and sociological implication; and for another, it was covered by the renowned writer and boxing aficionado Jack London, reporting from Reno for the *New York Herald*.

Although Jim Jeffries, a Caucasian and former undefeated world champion, hadn't fought in six years, he had reluctantly come out of retirement to take on the African-American Johnson largely due to pleas from the public urging him to "save the honor of the white race."

Racism in the U.S. in the early 20th century was as deep-seated and conspicuous as it had ever been. Despite Johnson having won the world championship, fair and square, in 1908, in Sidney, Australia, by beating the outclassed Canadian Tommy Burns, the notion of a Negro heavyweight champion (boxing's most glamorous division) was too disturbing.

In fact, it was Jack London (reputed to be a white supremacist) who was credited with coining the phrase, the "Great White Hope." London freely admitted that, as a white man, he wanted to see a representative of the "white race" reinstated as champion.

Alas, those six years of inactivity—including having to lose more than 100 pounds to prepare for the fight—had taken their toll on Jeffries. His return to the ring didn't go well. After seeing their guy hit the canvas twice (the first time in Jeffries' career that had happened), his corner threw in the towel in the 15th round, not wanting his record to be blemished by a "knockout."

As for the great Jack Johnson, America's first black heavyweight champion, no athlete in history has been more vilified. Even Muhammad Ali being stripped of his title during the Vietnam War for refusing to be inducted into the military didn't compare to the ignominy Johnson endured.

While Ali retained legions of supporters—academics, students, sports writers, artists, politicians, et al—and eventually triumphed by proving his critics wrong, the "Galveston Giant" (as Johnson was known) was a pariah. The case could be made that, years later, only Bruno Hauptmann, the Lindbergh baby killer, would be as universally reviled by the American public.

Of course, Johnson's defiantly flamboyant life-style didn't help. He was married three times, all to white women. In 1912, he was arrested on trumped-up charges of violating the Mann Act, and sentenced to a year and a day in prison. He jumped bail, fled the country and remained in exile until 1920, when he returned to the U.S. to serve out his sentence at Leavenworth.

In 1915, at the relatively advanced age of 37, he fought Jess Willard in Havana, Cuba, for the world championship. Under a scorching sun in an outdoor arena, Willard knocked him out in the 26th round of a scheduled 45-round (!) bout, in front of 25,000 spectators.

Although people claimed for years afterward that Johnson had purposely lost in order to let a white man become champ, hoping this would lead to his Mann Act charges being dropped, most boxing historians believe he was legitimately beaten. Those 26 rounds beneath a blazing sun had simply done him in. As Willard later noted drolly, "If he was going to throw the fight, I wish he'd done it sooner. It was hotter than hell out there."

Or instead of a chronological approach, one could jump from topic to topic and era to era. Given the array of anecdotes spanning boxing's history, there is little chance of coming up empty. As the *New Yorker's* David Remnick once remarked, professional boxing is a "morality play." Any account, past or present, is bound to have its share of drama.

For instance, one might consider the 1993 bout where former WBO heavyweight champion and Olympic Gold Medalist Ray ("The Merciless") Mercer allegedly (he was indicted but acquitted) offered a bribe to Jesse ("The Boogiemán") Ferguson, asking him to throw the fight.

One cool thing about boxing is the nicknames. While baseball has had a few memorable ones—Dennis ("Oil Can") Boyd, Ty ("The Georgia Peach") Cobb—boxing has had dozens. Among them: James ("Boncrusher") Smith, Evgeny ("The Mexican Russian") Gradovich, Carl ("The Truth") Williams, Rubin ("Hurricane") Carter, Eligio ("Kid Chocolate") Montalvo.

Boxing, like horse racing, began as a "gambler's sport," and can trace its roots back not only two centuries to when white plantation owners pitted black slaves against each other, but all the way back to the gladiatorial arenas of ancient Rome. Not surprisingly, boxing (like horse racing) has a reputation for dishonesty, which is to say, fights are occasionally "fixed."

In 1947, Jake LaMotta (the subject of Martin Scorsese's "Raging Bull") tried throwing a fight to Billy Fox, a boxer

so inept, he rendered LaMotta's attempt painfully transparent. The boxing commission withheld each fighter's purse. LaMotta confessed to taking the "dive" (along with paying the Mob \$20,000), insisting this was necessary to guarantee a title shot with Marcel Cerdan.

But what made the Mercer incident unique was not only that it was Mercer himself (and not a "handler") who offered the bribe, but that he offered it during an actual fight. He did it in the ring. He offered a bribe during the third round of their scheduled 10-rounder, as the men were locked in a clinch.

Mercer, who reportedly came into the bout overweight and out of shape, desperately needed to win this "tune up" fight with the journeyman Ferguson in order to qualify for a \$2.5 million payday with Riddick Bowe down the road. He couldn't afford to lose.

According to what Ferguson told his crew when he returned to the corner after the third round, Mercer said to him, "Man, I don't got it tonight. I'll give you \$100,000 to go down." And that third-round proposition was but the first of many, as Mercer continued offering bribes throughout the fight, whenever they clinched.

When the case went to court and Mercer's lawyer tried ridiculing the notion that a fighter could "talk" this much while clinching, Ferguson replied disdainfully, "When you're in a clinch, you can preach a sermon." Ferguson rejected the bribe and went on to win a unanimous decision.

And then there's Antonio Margarito, the welterweight who was found to have put cement in his gloves prior to his 2009 fight with Shane Mosley. If baseball fans think spitballs and corked bats represent an unfair advantage, try being hit with a block of cement. Mosley was nonetheless able to win by knock-out, and Margarito wound up being suspended.

While cement gloves seems worthy of a stiff punishment, Antonio got only a one-year suspension. That's boxing. And of course, there was the night in 1997, when Mike Tyson bit off part of Evander Holyfield's ear. The fight was halted, the ear was examined, and Holyfield was told to continue. Only when Tyson bit him a second time was the bout stopped and Tyson disqualified. Again, that's boxing.

Or instead of focusing on egregious behavior, one might focus on the human element. Lord knows, there's no shortage of heartbreaking and bizarre stories to choose from. Consider the 1997 rematch between American heavyweight Oliver ("The Atomic Bull") McCall and British champion Lennox ("The Lion") Lewis. During that fight, McCall suffered a nervous breakdown.

In the fourth round, he began behaving erratically. Then, in the fifth, he stopped fighting altogether. Instead of engaging Lewis, he turned his back and began walking agitatedly around the ring, muttering to himself, and eventually began sobbing.

This is boxing. Try and imagine such a thing happening in

football or baseball. Imagine Bret Favre wandering away aimlessly from the huddle, babbling, or Derek Jeter leaving the batter's box and weeping.

The fight was stopped and Lewis was awarded a technical knockout (TKO). As for McCall, it was business as usual. Yeah, he had a nervous breakdown, but that's boxing. No biggie. McCall went on to have 38 more fights, his last one at age 49, and finished with an unspectacular record of 51 wins and 14 losses.

There was a 1989 bout in England, where light-heavyweight Tony Wilson was taking an early beating from Steve McCarthy. By the third round, Wilson's 62-year old mother had seen enough. She climbed into the ring and began pounding on McCarthy's head with her shoe. Bleeding and confused, McCarthy fled the ring and refused to return. The ref felt he had no choice but to declare Wilson the winner. Thanks, Mom.

Or, ignoring the criminal and the bizarre, one might focus instead on the carnage—focus on the number of men who have died as the result of boxing injuries, because over the years there has been an astonishing number of deaths.

No one is certain of the precise number, but since 1884, when the Marquess of Queensberry rules went into effect, it's estimated that 500 prize fighters have been killed in the ring. Ring Magazine reported that in 1953 alone, 22 fighters died from boxing injuries, the most ever in a single year.

When you consider that all of these men were professional fighters, paid to perform in the ring, and presumed to be capable of "protecting themselves," that number is absolutely staggering.

Although it is no less tragic, one can almost understand how a man could be killed in an obvious mismatch, where an inexperienced or badly outclassed fighter was recklessly put in the ring with a seasoned pro, and a derelict referee failed to stop the fight before it turned deadly.

But these weren't all mismatches. Far from it. Over the years there have been several boxers killed in world championship bouts. Consider: When the two most accomplished fighters in their weight-class square off to see who's the best, nobody expects to see one of them get beaten to death. That seems impossible.

Yet it's happened several times. In 1947, in a welterweight title fight, Jimmy Doyle died of brain injuries after being knocked out by "Sugar" Ray Robinson. In 1962, Benny ("Kid") Paret was beaten to death by Emile Griffith in a title bout, a fight that Norman Mailer attended ringside and chillingly recounted.

A year later, in 1963, Davey Moore died from blows delivered by Ultiminio ("Sugar") Ramos in a featherweight championship fight held in Los Angeles. Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs wrote folk songs about it.

There are more. In 1978, Angelo Jacopucci died after losing to Alan ("Boom Boom") Minter for the European middle-

weight crown. In 1980, fighting for bantamweight title, Lupe Pintor pummeled Welshman Johnny (The Matchstick Man) Owen into a coma; Owen never regained consciousness.

In a 1982 WBA lightweight title fight, Ray (“Boom Boom”) Mancini knocked Duk-koo Kim senseless; Kim died four days later. In 1983, in a WBC bantamweight title fight, Kiko Bejines was beaten to death by Alberto Davila. There are several more examples, all of them championship fights.

And of course, besides the brutality of the sport, there’s boxing’s near-legendary corruption. One could write a thousand-page book dealing solely with the instances of corruption and greed found in professional boxing.

As a starting point, just consider the disparity in pay. Where show biz agents generally receive 10-12 percent of their client’s income, and sports agents take in the range of 3-6 percent, boxing promoters get a whopping 30-percent of the purse. That’s 30-percent right off the top. And when it comes to pay-per-view matches, which are much in vogue these days, the promoter gets 45-percent.

So after paying his promoter, his manager, his trainer, his sparring partners and his corner men, a boxer can find himself with an absurdly small portion of his winnings. In fact, he’s lucky if he doesn’t wind up owing people money. Which is why we hear of so many supposedly “well paid” boxers dying broke.

This level of exploitation is going on even today, when athletes are thought to be way more savvy regarding their legal and financial rights than fighters were, say, in the 1940s and 1950s, when they were routinely cheated out of their winnings by unscrupulous handlers. It’s going on today because it’s an inherent part of the game.

It’s been cynically observed that 10-percent of professional boxing is devoted to the manly art of pugilism, and the other 90-percent to blood-sucking parasites looking to profit from it. You hear people complain about how the record business is run by greedy and unscrupulous businessmen. While that may be true, compared to pro boxing, music executives are Trappist monks.

Consider boxing’s basic structure. There was a time not long ago when boxing had eight weight divisions and one champion in each division. Those eight weight divisions were: Heavyweight, Light-Heavyweight, Middleweight, Welterweight, Lightweight, Featherweight, Bantamweight, and Flyweight. What could be simpler?

But look at what we have today. Because promoters have determined that the only fights the average fan wants to see are important ones, meaningful ones—elimination fights, championship fights or “unification” fights (fights where a world title is consolidated)—they have found a way to exploit that preference.

Not only has professional boxing gone from eight weight divisions to seventeen, it now has five federations, each recognizing its own champions. Actually, there are six sanction-

ing bodies if we count Ring Magazine which, in 1922, began awarding championship “belts” of its own.

So besides having six versions of the world champion, we now have them in seventeen different weight-classes (e.g., junior featherweight, featherweight, super featherweight). So instead of eight champions, it’s now possible to have more than a hundred. The only newly invented weight-class that makes sense is “cruiserweight,” which falls between light-heavy and heavyweight.

Those five boxing federations (not counting Ring Magazine) are: The World Boxing Organization (WBO), World Boxing Commission (WBC), World Boxing Association (WBA), International Boxing Federation (IBF), and International Boxing Association (IBA).

On the subject of “uniformity,” another odd thing about boxing is that there is no regulation size ring. A ring can range anywhere from 16 x 16 feet to 24 x 24 feet. Slow guys and “brawlers” like smaller rings; dancers and dodgers prefer the larger ones. When negotiating a fight, managers try to arrange dimensions that best suit their boxers.

As for the increase in the number of weight divisions, boxing bureaucrats like to pretend it was done for “safety,” the assumption being that a heavier fighter is going to beat a lighter fighter, and that a three-pound differential between, say, two welterweights (maximum weight: 147) would be an unfair advantage.

But fighters don’t get “weighed in” on fight day. That spectacle is conducted the day prior to the fight, rendering this whole “making weight” business slightly ludicrous. Boxers have been known to gain 10-12 pounds during the interim between the weigh-in and the fight. Thus, a welter could legally report for the next day’s bout weighing enough to qualify as a middleweight. So much for “safety.”

And then there’s the highly volatile and exploitable issue of comparative rankings. With rankings being so important to a boxer’s career (as well as being so wildly subjective and open to manipulation), it should come as no surprise that every manner of behind-the-scenes mischief goes on.

If a promoter or manager wants his guy to have a shot at the title, he typically needs to be the number one, two or three contender in the division. And in order for a boxer to be deemed a top contender he has to be officially recognized as such by one of the federations.

Federations bribe federations, promoters bribe federations, promoters bribe other promoters, managers bribe other managers, boxers bribe other boxers. As an indication of how corrupt the system is, when high-profile promoter Bob Arum admitted during a federal trial that he had bribed the IBF to give one of his fighters a higher ranking, Don King, an even higher-profile promoter, referred to Arum as a “rat fink.”

King’s response was not only predictable, it was emblematic of what the sport has become. Rather than expressing dismay or outrage that this kind of thing was taking place at



boxing's highest levels, King's only objection was that Arum had brought attention to the practice by admitting to it in open court.

Speaking of Don King, let us consider his unique contribution to the sport. Let's begin with what Mike Tyson had to say about him: "King is a wretched, slimy, reptilian mother-fucker. This is supposed to be my 'black brother', right? He's just a bad man, a real bad man. He would kill his own mother for a dollar. He's ruthless, he's deplorable, he's greedy....and he doesn't know how to love anybody."

Tyson once sued King for the \$100 million he said King had stolen from him. They settled out of court for \$14 million. When it comes to lawsuits, Don King is a virtual litigation magnet. He has been sued by numerous boxers, all of whom accused him of cheating them out of money. Among those who chose to do it publicly: Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes, Tim Witherspoon, Terry Norris, Lennox Lewis, and Chris Byrd.

It goes without saying that boxing tends to attract a seedy crowd, both in the ring and out of it. While we occasionally hear of football players who had poor citizenship records in college (drunk in public, petty theft, cheating), no sport can hold a candle to boxing when it comes to nasty pedigrees.

Before taking up the "sweet science," heavyweight champ Sonny Liston, who, oddly, had "no listed date of birth" printed on his boxing license (no one, including Sonny, knew when he was born), had been an enforcer for the Detroit mob. Long suspected of having "tanked" the Ali fight, Liston died at the estimated age of 50, "officially" from a heroin overdose and "unofficially" from foul play (to shut him up). He was buried in Las Vegas.

In 1962, during the run-up to his title fight with Floyd Patterson (the "good Negro"), a hostile media asked Liston (the "bad Negro") if, considering his criminal record (he'd spent five years in prison for armed robbery), he "even deserved" to fight someone of Patterson's caliber. Sonny replied laconically, "Floyd ain't exactly no Phi Beta Kappa himself."

When Liston knocked out Patterson in the first round, and became world champion, it put much of the boxing world, both black and white, in a monumental funk. As Jim Murray of the LA Times wrote, "having Liston as champion is like finding a live bat on a string under your Christmas tree."

And speaking of pedigrees, Don King ain't no Phi Beta Kappa either. Indeed, King is guilty of having killed two people, thirteen years apart, in Cleveland, Ohio. It's a fact. Consider: Is there any sport other than boxing where top management personnel are known to have killed people and done jail time?

The first victim was an employee who was attempting to steal money, and whom King shot in the back (it was eventually classified as justifiable homicide). The second was a man who owed him \$600, whom King stomped to death. That death was reduced from "second-degree murder" to "non-

negligent homicide," for which King served almost four years in prison.

For the last quarter-century, Bob Arum and King have not only been boxing's most successful and high-profile promoters, they've been its most criticized and reviled. Boxing promotion is a sleazy, unsavory endeavor, and King and Arum are both accomplished sleaze artists. Stories of King's criminality and rapaciousness have circulated for years. Tyson (no angel himself, having served three years for rape) had reason to say what he did.

One of the most audacious King scams involved him funneling money to his family. A former Don King Productions financial officer (the company's comptroller from 1986 to 1991) stated in an affidavit that not only was King withholding boxers' fees, he was siphoning money from Mike Tyson's bank account and giving it to relatives.

This officer reported that, among other things, King was paying \$15,000 per fight to his son-in-law for doing basically nothing; he was paying his daughter \$52,000 a year to serve as president of something called the "Mike Tyson Fan Club"; and paying \$50,000 to \$100,000 in "consultant's fees" to his wife, Henrietta, and their two sons.

Basically, Don King was treating Tyson's treasury as his own private ATM. This officer also swore that King had taken \$750,000 of Tyson's money to cover overhead at King's New York company. According to Tyson, these examples were merely the tip of the iceberg. King was systematically robbing him of millions.

Bob Arum is scarcely more principled. In addition to amassing \$200 million (literally, off the sweat and blood of other men), Arum has had dozens of monetary disputes with boxing's federations and TV networks, including HBO, whom he sued. As part of an on-going investigation into boxing corruption, the FBI once raided Arum's offices looking for evidence of fight fixing.

The fundamental difference between him and King is that Arum is wealthier and more "polished." When Margarito was caught cementing gloves in the Mosley fight, Arum (Margarito's promoter) reflexively labeled the suspension "racially motivated." Antonio Margarito is Mexican American, born in Torrance, California; Shane Mosley is African American, born in Lynwood, California.

Clearly, professional boxing has evolved into a commercial and soul-crushing monstrosity. Too much money, too much heartbreak, too much deceit. In fact, it barely warrants being called a "sport." Still, as any hardcore boxing fan (and there are millions of them) will tell you: What's not to like? **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## The Root of All Evil

BY LEE BALLINGER

*"I am from a slave-breeding state—where slaves are reared for the market as horses, sheep, and swine are."*

—Frederick Douglass, 1846

*The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Lawrence Hill Books, \$35) by Ned and Constance Sublette is immense, intense, and passionate. It is scrupulously researched, well-written, and, unlike so much scholarship about the South, offers not a hint of apology for slavery or for "southern institutions." Everything in the book's 668 pages flows from the assessment that "The paradox of liberty versus slavery at the nation's birth is no paradox at all. Liberty was the right to own property. Slaves were property. Liberty for slave-owners meant slavery for slaves."

"We remind our reader," the Sublettes add, "that 'southern institutions' centrally included the legal right to force-mate adolescent girls and sell the resulting children."

The American Slave Coast takes slave-breeding out of the historical shadows and places it front and center. The book describes how 389,000 imported African slaves, bred like horses or sheep, became four million enslaved African-Americans, a population explosion of great commercial importance. Slaveowner Thomas Jefferson wrote that: "a child raised every two years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man...it is not their labor, but their increase which is the first consideration with us."

The forced mating of slaves was also of great political importance. Despite attempts at the 1787 Constitutional con-

vention to require direct national elections, an electoral college was established instead. It gave slave states more voting power based on the number of slaves they held captive. Virginia, the largest slave-breeding state, was the big winner with 12 out of a total of 91 electoral college voters, more than a quarter of the 46 needed to win the presidency. As a result, Virginia's Thomas Jefferson was elected president in 1800.

With the tide of abolitionism rising around the world, election-rigging was essential in maintaining the rule of slave breeders, who continued to be elected after the founding fathers faded away. Andrew Jackson personally drove a slave coffer and owned 160 slaves while in the White House. James Polk owned a plantation and, when not busy launching a war against Mexico to expand slavery, directed the purchase of slaves from his high-backed chair at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Zachary Taylor died in office in 1850, leaving behind an estate of 131 slaves.

Under pressure from domestic slave breeders, the United States enforced a ban on the international slave trade. But the end of slave imports from Africa was no victory. It simply meant that "plantations could only grow as fast as the enslaved women of the South could turn out babies."

A lot of babies were required, as the number and size of plantations continued to grow in order to provide cotton to the British textile industry, which was expanding exponentially. "Enslaved wombs" nurtured the captives who would pick the cotton and who were the most essential element in the worldwide network of cotton, industry, and finance that quite literally gave birth to the capitalist world we live in today.

As slave-breeding spread to more states, new slave territories were

needed to serve as markets for them. We are taught that the Louisiana Purchase was something that essentially just happened, but the reality is not at all mysterious. Once Louisiana had been purchased and become a territory of the United States, it meant that only slaves bred in the U.S. could be sold there. This greatly increased the value of every North American slaveowner's human capital. The same scenario played out later with the so-called Republic of Texas.

The Sublettes present both the most gruesome details of slave-breeding and its full context—European and Caribbean politics, the run-up to the Civil War, and the role of slaves as money.

What if the money in your wallet could multiply all by itself? This was the position the slave-breeders were in. They controlled the nation economically and politically and their slaves were collateral for loans, a liquid currency in a country that didn't yet have an effective form of paper money, and the foundation of credit for financial empires.

Over time, northern industries based on free labor clashed with an agricultural capitalism based on slavery. "Our country is a theater which exhibits in full operation two radically different political systems," said future Secretary of State William Seward in 1858, "the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freemen."

This was fought out in many ways, including a struggle between two forms of money.

"The discovery of gold was a turning point on the way to Southern secession...the world's economy was transformed by the new money, the specie failed to go South. Ultimately, the California gold strike was the death knell for an archaic modality of agrarian capitalism. But the South was locked into holding its wealth in the form of slaves, with human fecundity still the road to monetary increase."

The irrepressible conflict between slavery and free labor ultimately found expression in the Civil War. The Sublettes describe the outcome: “When slavery was abolished and the on-paper value of flesh and blood capital disappeared from the balance sheet, the wealth of the South evaporated. The security for hundreds of millions of dollars in debt walked away, leaving the obligations valueless, the credit structure imploded, the hundred dollar Confederate notes trampled in the mud, the planters owning worthless land.”

This is where the narrative of *The American Slave Coast* ends, at the completion of a revolution in which four billion dollars in property was transferred from slaveowners to the emancipated slaves themselves. But that revolution, so important and historically necessary, left much to be done. *The American Slave Coast* details many of the connections between then and now. In fact, if you substitute the words “financial capitalism” for “antebellum slavery” in the book’s next-to-last paragraph, you will have an accurate description of America in 2015.

“Antebellum slavery required a complex of social, legal, financial, and political institutions structured to maximize profits that flowed only to a small elite, while leaving the rest of the population poor. . . . It existed at the cost of everything else in society, including the most basic notions of humanity.”

Slavery remains the time-released poison pill of American history. The exceptional violence that defines the United States has its roots in slave patrols and constant wars to acquire slave territory. Waterboarding and other torture techniques flow from the savagery visited upon slaves to wring out every ounce of profit. In 1830, future president James Polk took to the floor of the House to sing the praises of the lash, just as members of Congress today rhapsodize about drone strikes and bombing runs.

Louis Agassiz was a famous lec-

turer in the U.S. before the Civil War, his message summed up by the statement that “The brain of the Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a seven month old infant in the womb of a White.” Agassiz married the first president of Radcliffe, received an endowment to fund a Harvard professorship for himself, and founded the National Academy of Sciences. Fast forward to 1966, when the tobacco industry, a direct product of the unpaid labor of countless slaves, gave the American Medical Association twenty million dollars and the AMA dutifully produced a study claiming that smoking increases intelligence. The gross distortion of science continues today with the surge of climate change denial, which finds its organizational center in the states of the Confederacy.

Former slave states dominate the burgeoning prison industrial complex—ten of the top eleven American incarcerators are Southern. Universities, supposedly a moral compass for our country, see private prisons as just another investment opportunity. In response, a movement to force schools to divest from private prison corporations has arisen in recent years and, only under pressure, the University of California has promised to do so. Yet a November 30 press release by the Afrikan Black Coalition revealed that the UC system has a \$425 million stake in Wells Fargo, one of the largest financiers of private prisons. So UC’s pledge to divest serves mainly as a fig leaf to cover up continuing massive involvement in modern day slavery. It should be noted that for-profit prisons got their start with the establishment of jails where slaves were held pending their sale into agricultural captivity.

Even American anti-communism has its roots in slavery. At the 1850 Nashville Convention called to begin to plan for secession, South Carolina’s Langdon Cheves denounced abolitionists as communists, a term then coming into use as a result of European upheavals and the publica-

tion of *The Communist Manifesto*. Richmond’s George Fitzhugh, author of *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters*, warned that “abolitionists were really Communists using slavery as a Trojan horse.” That exact same line of thinking was a staple of segregationist propaganda during the civil rights movement.

We cannot escape the lies of the past culturally either. In 2005, the American Film Institute released a list of America’s Greatest Movies, chosen by a “blue ribbon panel” of 1,500 Hollywood insiders. Number 44 on the list was *Birth of a Nation*, D.W. Griffiths’ ode to white supremacy and the Klan.

Slavery was an international system that wreaked destruction on people of all colors, creating a common core in the midst of racialized wealth and privilege. Approximately two million African slaves died on the passage to the New World, but they were not alone. The Sublettes note: “Slave ships were death ships, the bottom of the employment ladder for sailors. Stephen D. Behrendt, analyzing the mortality of 58,778 crewmen on 1,709 voyages out of Liverpool from 1780 forward, found 10,439 deaths, or 17.8 per cent.”

A similar dynamic continues today. In 2015, according to *The Guardian*, a black person is two and a half times more likely to be killed by the police as is a white person, yet the raw numbers also reveal that 48.7% of those who die at the hands of the police are white.

*The American Slave Coast* gives us all a moral and intellectual platform to stand on, a place from which we can more fully and clearly see the brutal muck of history. The book also serves as a mirror in which we can see ourselves as we live today, inspiring us to renew our efforts to break the chains which still bind us to our masters. **CP**

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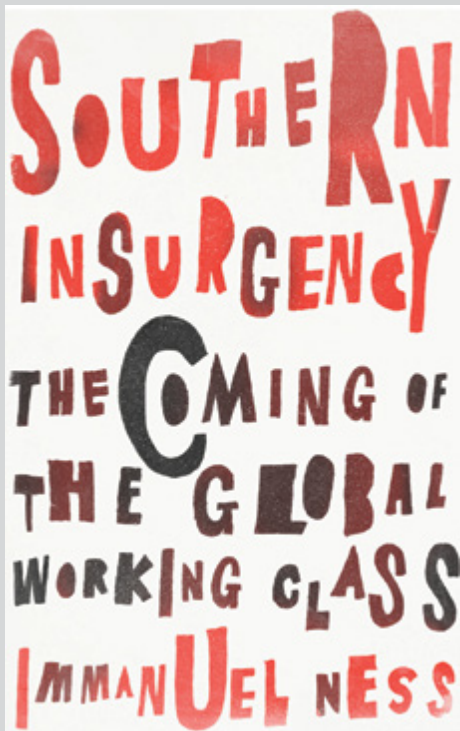
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