

CounterPunch

TRUMP AND WHITE IDENTITY POLITICS BY ERIC DRAITSER

WHEN THE US MEDDLED IN RUSSIA'S ELECTIONS BY NICK ALEXANDROV

WHAT BLACKS DON'T OWE OBAMA BY YVETTE CARNELL

AMERICA'S HOMELESS CHILDREN BY ERIC LAURSEN

A WORLD BEYOND TRUMP BY MATTHEW STEVENSON



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"The Coronation of Donald the First (After David)" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941—2012

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Attack the Establishment!

Bravo Jeffrey St. Clair, really bravo, for your 'Nasty as They Wannabe' piece, absolutely one of the toughest, rawest, cut close to the bone, unflinching critiques I've seen in many a moon, including among the admirable John Pilger stuff, nobody's written this mean and clean for years. You're really to be congratulated (and appropriately villified I assume if anyone of 'that ilk' can read). I've left China Daily and decamped to CONUS as we said in the Navy and I hope I can lend my support more to your effort closer to home. Here in D.C. I can feel the mean-ness by the day and am fascinated. All the best, and that was a splendid but really nasty attack on the established order.

Goodonya.

Roger Bradshaw

*Former Snr Foreign Editor,
China Daily*

Fill the Loopholes

Good Jason Hirthler article on Obama but I think it's a mistake to focus on "... deficit spending our way out of this recession.") That is like borrowing your way out of debt, which can work in some situations (borrowing dear money and repaying with cheap money for example) but is more likely a path to poverty. The more effective way to get funds needed for recovery is to eliminate loopholes and other tax dodges depriving the coffers of billions, or hundreds of billions, of dollars. For example, just eliminating two loopholes (the cap on taxable Social Security income and

the complete exemption of "unearned income" from both SS and Medicare would raise sufficient additional funds to FULLY FUND a single-payer typed national health care system for all Americans while, if well run with costs controlled, REDUCING the overall SS/Medicare tax rate for everyone! I'm sure you already know of many more...

Steve Juniper

Russian Fairy Tales

To badger Trump into publicly signing on to the fairy tale about 'Russian hacking' is absolutely essential for the MSM, while the point that 60% of Americans now support replacing Obamacare with a single-payer system has no importance for them at all.

Richard Mynick

Nervous on the Eastern Front

Now we're sending troops to Poland? How absurd to restart the Cold War, for what purpose? Well, some people will make money from arms sales. There is no evidence that Russia is planning a blitzkrieg to seize Europe. We do hear that the U.S. is moving into Poland and the Baltic States because they are "nervous" about having Russia as a neighbor. It seems geography would forever compel them to remain neighbors. Truly remarkable that such a flimsy excuse is offered for the expenditure of billions which only go to increase the risk of a suicidal nuclear war.

Dennis Sullivan

Zbigniew's Dream

Brzezinski's dream was to bring down the Soviet Union and free Poland by organizing bin Laden and the Mujaheddin to fight in Afghanistan. The American army in Poland is beyond his dreams. What are a few stirred up Arabs compared to that glorious triumph?

Jay Sullivan

Bookered

I called Cory Booker's office to get their justification for this vote against Bernie Sanders's amendment allowing importation of drugs. It was: "There was no legislative language guaranteeing that these drugs would be held to the same safety standards as drugs approved in the US." I said I trusted Canadian drug regulation more than ours.

Michael Leonardi

Stop Shaming Bernie!

At least Bernie Sanders is pushing the Democrats. He would have lost more on a vote for pure price controls or price oversight with an ability to impose price controls. Quit shaming the dude and salute his ability to frame some issues and laws instead of rolling over. Some Demos are just weak. Most are in the pockets of one or another of the corporations.

Tom Edminstor

A Grisly Climate

Dear Joshua Frank,
I wanted to thank you for a great job on the recent *CounterPunch* Magazine story on grizzly bears, delisting and climate change! I especially liked your detail of the

California griz history, a tragic commentary of what happened throughout the West.

Louisa Willcox

Shotgun Conservationists

Every late summer and early fall when I fly to Billings, Montana to visit my parents, I invariably see a guy or three like the Trump boys on the plane, typically regaling an unsuspecting stranger with digital photos of he and his buddies with their trophy kills, typically blabbing on and on about the technical qualities of their weaponry and the grisliest aspects of the bloodsport. Sadistic jerks

John Gulick

Pole Position

Two or three years ago a recording was leaked of the then foreign minister of Poland complaining that should Poland go to war against Russia or Germany, the US would do nothing. The new troop deployment is Obama's reassurance to the Poles that they can count on the US to fight a nuclear war for them.

Vaska Tumor

A Well-Grac'd Actor

The imported drug vote was Bernie's part to play. He calls for something "over the top" (translate: something the public wants) and his 'colleagues' can vote it down as not pragmatic or 'doesn't go far enough'.

John Harvey



ROAMING CHARGES

Exxon's End Game Theory

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

If there ever was the sound of a doomsday clock chiming midnight, the signal moment probably occurred this fall, though the alarm went almost unnoticed by the press. In October, major observatories across the world simultaneously recorded that atmospheric carbon levels globally breached what has long been considered the “redline” of 400 parts per million and are likely to keep rising inexorably for the foreseeable future. The 400 parts per million mark has long been considered, even by climate optimists, a fatal tipping point, beyond which there is little hope of return.

One person who probably did take note, however, was Exxon's CEO Rex Tillerson. I don't know if Tillerson cracked an evil grin at the time, but I'm sure he must have felt that this grim milestone validated his strategic thinking for the past ten years as mastermind of the world's largest oil conglomerate.

Despite what you may have heard from the Sierra Club, Rex Tillerson is not a climate change denier. He is something far more dangerous. Tillerson knows climate change is taking place. He was in position to possibly do something about it, evaluated his options and coolly chose not to change course.

Rex Tillerson took over Exxon in 2006, at a fraught time for the oil giant. Its longtime CEO, Lee Raymond, had just stepped down, handing the keys to the kingdom to his protégé, a star player on what the company called the “upstream” team, scouting and securing new oil fields to plunder. During his 12-year term as head of Exxon, Raymond ran the company with a dictatorial and dogmatic hand. He was hostile towards environmental-

ists and unflinching in his dismissal of climate science. Raymond sluiced tens of millions in company money into anti-environmental front groups, pro-oil politicians and industry-friendly scientists. But by 2005, there was a mini-rebellion brewing inside Exxon's corporate headquarters. Like the French Revolution, this revolt was led by lawyers.

The company's attorneys feared that through Raymond's belligerence Exxon was making itself vulnerable to a legal attack for covering up and distorting the threats posed by climate change. The concern here wasn't from lawsuits by outside groups, such as Greenpeace, but from the company's own shareholders who might claim that Exxon had concealed a looming financial risk to the company's bottom line.

One of the big problems confronting Tillerson the day he took over the reins was the fact that the very scientists at MIT and Stanford who had been cashing Exxon's checks for decades to churn out white papers questioning whether fossil fuel emissions were a driving force beyond climate change, had begun to change their tune. In in 2003 MIT's Global System Model forecast a 2.4-degree-centigrade rise in temperatures over the next hundred years. By 2006, those same scientists had more than doubled that estimate. Exxon faced the prospect of being betrayed by their own bought science.

Organizationally, Exxon changes course about as quickly and adroitly as its Valdez tanker did while trying to navigate Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound. But Tillerson is a pragmatist. A Texas boy, Tillerson idealized the Boy Scouts and when he became head of the Exxon behemoth he began handing out

merit badges to company executives who met their production quotas. He set to work with an Eagle Scout's pious determination to quietly recalibrate the company's position on climate change. It was, in Tillerson's mind, a concession to reality.

During the early days of the Iraq War, Exxon set up a special team to run war games on how the invasion would affect the oil industry in terms of pricing, supply and distribution networks. It sent the results of these scenarios to Dick Cheney through Cheney's factotum Douglas Feith, and so war planning and oil development proceeded in harmony. Tillerson was familiar with the Iraq war gaming and decided to use a similar technique to help chart the company's new climate change strategy.

Tillerson wanted his secret squad of climate change gamers to answer four questions: 1. Is climate change real? 2. Is the threat serious? 3. Are there any effective actions that can be taken to halt or reverse climate change or mitigate the damage? 4. Are the world's leading carbon emitters likely to impose binding limits on emissions in time to prevent runaway climate change? The answer to the first two questions was “yes”. The answer to the third question was “maybe” and the fourth “no”.

The lesson Tillerson took from this assessment was that climate change is a serious threat and no government has the will or even the means to confront it. Thus, the only responsible thing to do for the shareholders of Exxon was to push forward aggressively with exploration and development of new oil fields from Amazonia to Russia, before some other company captured the reserves. Internally, this became known as the “end game” scenario.

As CEO of Trump's foreign policy, Tillerson seems eager to impose this cynical template on the world at large by forging new alliances with old rivals in kind of a *Pax petroliana*, where the body count of hot wars will be replaced by the hidden, slow deaths caused by an atmosphere gone lethal. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Before the Flood

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Just after the election of Donald Trump, I wrote a piece pointing out the many similarities and continuities between this supposedly ‘unpresidential’ president and some of the other deeply disturbed berserkers and bagmen who have stunk up the White House joint over the years. I made particular reference to another addlepatented second-rate celebrity prone to compulsive lying and self-fluffing fantasizing who used an egregiously faked “common touch” to front for a deeply sinister gang of extremists bent on financial rapine, military aggression, nuclear expansion, white supremacy and the destruction of any notion of the common good. We survived Ronald Reagan, I wrote then; we’ll survive Trump as well. I have since given this stance some reconsideration.

At the time, I was writing in reaction to the five-alarm, full-bore hissy fit by liberals and progressives who saw Trump as some kind of unique evil being visited upon our pristine republic, as if they’d never cracked a history book in their lives—or indeed, never read a newspaper in this century. Of course, they had probably burned out mass quantities of brain cells trying not to see their beloved peace-loving, “scandal-free” President Obama waging overt and covert war around the world, helping plunge whole nations (Yemen, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Honduras) into howling chaos, deporting millions of people (including children fleeing the hell he helped create in Honduras), running a death squad out of the White House, rescuing the malefactors of great wealth on Wall Street and in the healthcare, drug and insurance rackets, giving a trillion dollars to upgrade our nuclear arsenal (guaranteeing a

new arms race), becoming the greatest weapons dealer in human history and generally stinking up the White House joint in the time-honored way.

After Trump’s triumph, one felt duty-bound to assuage the suffering of these delicate souls by gently directing their attention to a bit of history—including the recent history they themselves had just lived through—to provide some context and reassurance. (And yes, there was certainly some self-reassurance going on as well. But while the search for historical parallels is a useful tool in understanding the present, it carries the risk of underplaying structural and cultural changes between the past and today. And I think my earlier assessment of what’s to come in the Trump era failed to account properly for the extensive, accelerating rot in the American system since the days of The Gipper.

Don’t get me wrong. American society was in an advanced state of decay during Reagan’s time as well. Reagan’s reign was no great fall from a pre-lapsarian golden age. But the rot and retreat so evident then has grown many degrees worse since that time. This is not even controversial. You can find scads of earnest disquisitions about the “crisis of institutions” and the “crisis of democracy” everywhere, even from the most centrist, middle-brow, Broderific think tanks.

Elements of society which once stood—in often wretchedly imperfect fashion—as balks and bulwarks against the unrestrained “operation of the Machine” have since crumbled, diminished or transmogrified into weapons of the Machine itself. Unions, the media, political parties, communities, universities, churches, govern-

ment—all have been eaten alive by the neoliberal ascendancy perhaps best embodied by yet another White House stinker-upper, Bill Clinton, who led the Democratic Party into abject surrender to the Machine in all of its ugly manifestations.

Advances in technology and telecommunications—once seen as vehicles of liberation and choice—have turned out to be the some of the most powerful and pervasive tools of repression and propaganda any ruling elite has ever had. The internet puts state and corporate elites inside our daily lives to a degree hitherto unimaginable; the 24/7 stream of “news” in a multiplicity of media keeps the spin of those same elites constantly churning in a dizzying echo chamber of shallow distraction and sensation. Globalization, financialization and “creative disruption” have destroyed job security; roboticization of labor will soon wipe out tens of millions of jobs altogether. Accelerating climate change will bring further destabilization.

War, with all its brutalizing, morally corrosive effects, is now the permanent, preeminent center of the economy and the political culture. Police power is far greater. The deliberate, ceaseless cultivation of fear has reduced much of the populace to a state of anxious, cringing obedience to authority. Bipartisan austerity has diminished the quality of life, down to its most basic aspects: not even clean drinking water is a given anymore.

In short, America, as a nation, a polity, a society, has far less resilience now, leaving a scared people with few institutional or cultural defenses against the unbridled neofascist-neofeudal apotheosis Trump represents.

That’s not to say that new alternatives, new forms of resistance will not arise. We might be witnessing a pivotal seedling now taking root at Standing Rock, for example. But such things will take time to grow, and the storm is already upon us. I’m less certain now than I was before that what was best in us will survive it. **CP**



EXIT STRATEGIES

The Narcissism of Obama

BY YVETTE CARNELL

The irony of President Barack Obama's legacy is laid bare in one largely overlooked moment that occurred during Ta-Nehisi Coates' interview of Shirley Sherrod for his *Fear of a Black President* essay. Sherrod, who'd been wrongfully and unceremoniously fired from her job at the Department of Agriculture by the Obama administration, was asked by Coates if she thought Obama understood the sacrifices made on his behalf by people like herself. "I don't think he does," Sherrod answered. "When he called me [shortly after the incident], he kept saying he understood our struggle and all we'd fought for. He said, 'Read my book and you'll see.' But I had read his book."

By the time President Obama called Sherrod to smooth things over, Obama had become well practiced at mimicking African-American cultural affectation. As Coates would later reveal in *My President Was Black*, Obama had made a deliberate decision to "download" black culture. In a one-on-one with Sherrod, however, Obama could not summon the programming language necessary to stop him from speaking boastfully to an elder. The mental image of President Obama telling an African-American woman nearing the age of retirement that she should read his memoirs to better understand him, after his administration had wronged her, still stands out for me as one of the most glaring indicators of Obama's rapid narcissism.

Coates explored Obama's blackness in both essays, but failed to provide a thorough evaluation of how Obama leveraged African-Americanness to the detriment of all working class Americans. After all, the job of people like Coates is to walk up to the line, but

never cross it.

Since much of White America relates to Black America through struggle, Obama made growing up the son of a single mother the cornerstone of his campaign. The future president discussed the Punahou School he attended with fond nostalgia, but omitted the prestigiousness of the institution, and the price tag, which presently stands at over \$22,000 per year.

Without blackness, we would've seen clearly Obama's privilege. With blackness, Obama emerged not just as a black man, but as an heir to both Malcolm and Martin. Obama was not the only black figure emerging into prominence during this period. Acclaimed writer Toni Morrison, having at one point dubiously anointed Bill Clinton as the first black president, would later compare Coates to James Baldwin, as well.

"It is often said that Obama's presidency has given black parents the right to tell their kids with a straight face that they can do anything," writes Coates. This is true. It is also wrong. This statement could only be read as true by someone whose yardstick for measuring Obama's African-American bona fides was through skin color and hair texture, as opposed to the life events that were present in his life, that are usually absent in the lives of most African-Americans.

The quintessential representation of this misunderstanding is captured in the photo of a little black boy reaching out to touch Obama's hair. The boy was probably thinking, "his hair looks like mine. He's just like me. I can be him when I grow up!" The truth, however, is that the potential for success among America's black boys cannot be understood through a racial resemblance to Obama. From the Punahou School to

Harvard, Obama's life events paved the way for him.

We know statistically, however, African-American children will probably be missing the life events that helped Obama to become president. African-Americans are on the economic floor in this country. According to Brookings, half of Black Americans born poor, stay poor. In *Dreams From My Father*, Obama spoke of how his grandfather pulled strings to get him into Punahou School. Most African-Americans have no strings with which to pull.

Poor whites are slightly better off economically than African-Americans, the biggest distinction being that African-Americans tend to be flat economically, with most of the group consisting of the working poor, whereas whites have true class representation. But if the first black president was unconcerned about the plight of the group whose identity he'd leveraged to ascend to the White House, then what hope existed for poor whites? President Obama's mention of both affirmative action and poverty were intentionally infrequent during his tenure.

What we are now witnessing with the election of Trump cannot be explained away just as some re-assertion of white dominion. It is, at least in some measure, a rebuke of the first black president who promised hope, but ushered in a period so hopeless that the majority of voters viewed Trump as the only alternative to business as usual.

There is a silver lining. In another flash of narcissism, Obama told the African-American community that he would "consider it a personal insult, an insult to my legacy" if we did not come out in numbers strong enough to elect Hillary Clinton. We didn't. Obama was owed nothing and got no extra effort in return. That is a fitting end to his presidency. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Corporate Profitability is “Job 1” at the Fed

BY MIKE WHITNEY

There are quite a few similarities between the Financial Crisis in 2008 and the terrorist attacks on September 11, the most notable of which is the fact that both events have been cunningly tweaked to promote an elitist agenda. Just as the downing of the Twin Towers has been used to curtail civil liberties, launch a series of foreign wars, and enhance the powers of the executive, so too, the financial crisis has been used to impose a repressive economic regime in which the real economy is deliberately strangled while the financial markets are flooded with liquidity. The combination of low interest rates and slow growth have produced the precise results that were sought by their authors. Stock prices have soared to new highs while the economy has stumbled along at barely 2 percent GDP. The policies that were designed to make the rich richer while working people struggled to scrape by, have done just that.

While the rise of economic insecurity has soured the public's mood towards Washington and Wall Street, most people still have no idea of the subtle ways in which the system is rigged against them. Fortunately, it's not that hard to explain as long as one ignores the rubbish one reads in the media. In essence, trillions of dollars has been pumped into the financial system while the real economy has been left to wither on the vine. Not only has the Fed increased its balance sheet by \$4 trillion which has inflated a gigantic bubble in financial assets, it has also encouraged Congress to keep a lid on fiscal spending in order to prevent stronger growth.

Stronger growth is the bugaboo that no one likes to talk about, mainly

because stronger growth puts upward pressure on wages which in turn boosts inflation. When inflation rises, the Fed is forced to raise rates which sends markets into a sharp nosedive precipitating humongous losses in stocks and bonds. The Fed tries to avoid this scenario at all cost, which is why the economy has been sputtering along at an anemic 2 percent for the last seven years. 2 percent is the “sweet spot” where the Fed can continue to provide cheap money at emergency rates to its crony friends on Wall Street, but doesn't have to expand its ballooning balance sheet by purchasing more toxic mortgage-backed securities or USTs. In other words, 2 percent is the Holy Grail of central banking, the elusive target that provides the perfect environment for transferring trillions of dollars to the investor class while the economy languishes in a permanent state of inertia.

The rigging of the system is actually a lot more interesting than it sounds. Take, for example, the European Central Bank's (ECB) announcement last year that it planned to expand its QE program to include corporate bonds. The ECB's explanation for the action was that it wanted to drive down the costs of borrowing so CEOs would hire more workers, expand operations and boost business investment. But the explanation was clearly a lie since the cost of borrowing was already at historic lows. So what was the ECB's real objective?

The goal was to lure hesitant CEOs into issuing billions of dollars in low-yielding corporate bonds so they could use the newly-borrowed money to buy back their own shares and push stock

prices even higher. This is just one example of how the central banks act as social engineers implementing policies that shape outcomes that directly benefit the people whose interests they serve, the 1 percent.

The Fed has been doing the same thing for the better part of the last decade but on a much broader scale. Keep in mind, companies in the S and P 500 spent roughly \$3 trillion since 2011 repurchasing their own shares. The combination of “light touch” regulation and easy money has fueled a frenzy of buying that has tripled stock values while diverting much-needed capital from other productive areas of investment like employee training, tools and equipment or research and development. As a result, many corporations have seen earnings, revenues and productivity shrivel even while their stock bingeing continues unabated.

And we're not talking small change here either. According to market analyst Wolf Richter “At the end of Q3, trailing 12-month buybacks ate up 66% of net income, about the same as a year ago, with 119 companies in the S and P 500 blowing more on buybacks than they generated in earnings.” In other words, many of these companies are so caught up in buyback hysteria that they're pumping every last nickel they make back into their own shares. More concerning, is the fact that corporations are piling on more debt than ever to juice prices and rake off rapidly-dwindling profits. According to the Financial Times “Global bond issuance is running at its fastest pace in nearly a decade”. Corporations have borrowed nearly \$5 trillion in the last year alone as they take advantage of generous central bank inducements designed to fatten the bottom line.

And all this madness is taking place under the watchful eye of our “primary market regulator”, the Fed, an institution that works tirelessly to create profitable outlets for investment for its core constituents regardless of the risks they may pose to the public. **CP**

The headlines ushering in 2017 seem to proclaim the demise of public space. According to The New York Times, “Social Isolation Is Killing Us”. The Australian online service news.com.au asks—in an article that makes one wonder if, working in online isolation at home, we are all going to end up like battery hens pecking away in our “little boxes made out of ticky-tacky” to fill someone else’s belly—“What if technology is going to kill the city as we know it?” Homicides increasingly occur in crowded public spaces. The Guardian calculates that 1,068 people were killed by the police in the USA in 2016, the vast majority of them Native American or Black, and mainly in public space. And Reuters shrills, “European cities ramp up security for New Year after Berlin attack”. Terror hysteria becomes police propaganda and the biddable, parroting media seems perfectly indifferent to other factors like the grim effects of alienation in a society run by cruel, grasping people.

Less dramatically perhaps, public space was also undermined when libraries, markets and social and sexual life in general succumbed to online encyclopedias, email, eBay, Amazon, sex chat rooms, and people taking lonely selfies or, oblivious to the setting, lost in solitary smartphone jabber. State power has gradually changed the spirit of public space as a locus of socialization, free expression and democracy by imposing its authoritarian standardized design bristling with CCTV cameras, and pushing for inhospitable megamalls, corporate and banking enclaves, gentrification, and commodification of everything. The more tolerant days of hanging around eating, drinking, smoking or doing nothing, of vagrants, busking, performances, begging, prostitution, unlicensed vending, and graffiti spraying are almost gone. Everyone is suspect. Identities are challenged, vilified and criminalized. Racial profiling rules. The apparently simple concept of “public space” must be revisited

EUROZONE NOTES

Public Space: An Old Front for New Battles

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

because, as David Harvey points out, “public” is twisted to mean state regulation and monitoring so it no longer suggests something that is free and open for all kinds of things to happen. His alternative suggestion of “urban common” is closer to the conception of public space as *res publica*, the republic, the commonwealth (originally, the political community founded for the common good).

In Europe, the virtues and contradictions of the city are concentrated in public space. Combining the three principles of equality of access, freedom of expression and pluralism, this is one of the few milieus where human rights can be demanded and exercised. And now public space itself must be reclaimed as a right. Unlike megalopolises in other parts of the world, where social life is shattered by fragmentation, sprawl, ghettos and privatization of public space, the European city has a dense structure accommodating a variety of uses and populations. The compact city is less harmful to the surrounding territory than the sprawling city with its exponentially increasing need for cars and insatiable consumption of natural and energy resources. The synchrony of past and present is another attribute of Europe’s urban spaces because the cities, many of them millenarian, are palimpsests resulting from a more or less harmonious juxtaposition and overlapping of historical layers. This heterogeneous city can nurture the coexistence of different social and

cultural strata in its public spaces. The menacing, homogenous design of the brave-new-world city does not tolerate difference. Peaceful togetherness of strangers in cities requires a permanent exercise of democracy and respect for human rights. European cities are becoming more and more plural as globalization and burgeoning inequality and tyranny force huge numbers of people to migrate or flee. This expanding cultural diversity is a source of richness but also of conflict and xenophobia, which will only worsen if social coexistence is discouraged and presented as dangerous.

The definition of public space in the Barcelona Declaration for Habitat III is, “Public spaces are all places, including streets, publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive”. In other words, it is anti-neoliberal and anti-authoritarian. A concept and place of resistance. Around the world, names of public spaces have become synonymous with social change: Washington’s National Mall, Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, Cairo’s Tahrir Square, New York’s Zuccotti Park, Barcelona’s Plaça de Catalunya, Madrid’s Puerta del Sol, Syntagma Square in Athens, Pearl Roundabout in Manama, the parliament in Kuala Lumpur, HSBC Plaza in Hong Kong, the Medan Merdeka Park in Jakarta, and Gezi Park in Istanbul, to name a few.

Now we have a reckless sower of hate at the helm of this scuttled

planet. Public space came alive in many American cities after Trump's election as people began to organize in their various affected groups. New, once unlikely, alliances are being formed, one notable example being the approximately four thousand veterans who traveled to Standing Rock to join Native Americans in their stand against state violence (and, make no mistake, Standing Rock and threatened environments everywhere are the public space of humanity). Public/natural space has become both battleground and object to be fought for. If the "ceremony of innocence is drowned" and the "rough beast" is born, now is the time for savvy community politics spreading in organized networks, for work in neighborhoods, in the "rebel" (and not-so-rebel) cities, in small-scale local movements of broad vision supporting vulnerable and threatened people in their resistance against hatred and violence. Throughout history, public space has provided the venue for alliances in struggle.

With more than half the world's population living in urban areas, public space with its potential for social life and its function as a setting for demanding and protecting rights is ever more important. With origins in the ancient Greek agora, it has long been considered as inseparable from democracy, a forum for open, often heated debate in order to reach a reasoned understanding among citizens on matters pertaining to political institutions, the law and its enforcement. "Space", then, takes on the metaphorical sense of an open, interlinked, variable, political and social ensemble. And "public" suggests visibility as an ethical requirement of transparency and truth. What is public is exposed to everyone. Autocratic powers resort to deceit, secrecy and mind-numbing imagery (Trump's gold lift, Putin's golden doors, and megalomaniac monuments like Franco's Valley of the fallen near El Escorial).

Europe's municipalist movement (the "municipal assault", Cities of Change, Rebel Cities, Win Back the City, Refugees Welcome, for example) makes a clear connection between human rights and public space in advocating sustainable and inclusive urban planning, promoting equality, combatting discrimination, empowering communities and aiming to honor internationally agreed human rights and sustainable development objectives. Tourism, water management, and historical memory come under this rubric, which also extrapolates to problems of gentrification and struggles for the right to housing. As urban population density rises, municipalist planners will need to produce mixed, compact cities where public space is a key factor in combatting gentrification, spatial segregation and sprawl with its attendant assaults on the natural environment.

In many places, official, post-truth public space is subject to surveillance, "protected" by armed militarized police and, where possible, fully privatized or at least turned into POPS (privately owned public space). Yet this does not invalidate the fact that proximity and community engagement improve citizen security and allay the baneful public and private effects of alienation. Trump and Co might deny the Sixth Extinction that is now upon us but cities can work quietly to mitigate climate change and protect urban biodiversity, in particular through ecological continuities of public space providing access to rivers, seashores, hills, mountains, and rural areas in the city surrounds. Far from threatening fragile natural areas, access allows people to get to know them and defend them. If the interconnected planet is humanity's commons, the space of threatened species including our own, then public space extends to the land, sea, rivers and air, which must be protected from pipelines, contamination, privatizing greed, and all other depredations. It

means defending people in far-flung or ignored places like West Papua or Yemen, grizzly bears, wolves, sparrows (the population has declined by 64% in Europe), bees, vegetation and all life-forms.

To sum up, in its agora function, public space can promote freedom, gender equality, diversity of expression, transparency, pedagogy, critical engagement, participation and accountability. Indoor public spaces like schools, libraries, civic centers, and museums can play a major educational role by encouraging critical, well-informed citizenship. In terms of mobility, well-planned public space can remedy many noxious effects of global warming by reducing dependence on the private car and its consequences for health, equality, climate change, excessive energy use, urban sprawl and spatial segregation by offering pedestrian precincts, cycling lanes and public transport facilities. In the economic realm, public space opposes privatization, fosters sharing of common assets, and welcomes small-scale local producers, an aspect which would be greatly reinforced by another pro-commons measure that is highly compatible with public space and the activities it harbors, namely an unconditional universal basic income above the poverty line.

The biennial European Prize for Urban Public Space was founded in 2000 by the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCCB), working with six other European institutions in the field of architecture and urban planning. Among the outstanding projects in the 2016 award were entries exemplifying the large- and small-scale battleground aspects of public space. In the Catalan town of Caldes de Montbui, the restoration of ancient orchards around the town by means of resuscitating the old irrigation system of recycled thermal waters has breathed new life into communal agricultural activity and opened up a network of pathways joining the town

center with its natural surrounds. In Szczecin (Poland), a place where sixteen workers were killed in the 1970s has become Solidarity Square, which also forms the roof of an underground museum on the modern history of the battered city. The “Heavenly Hundred Garden” in Kiev has turned a recent battleground into a memorial for the victims of the EuroMaidan protests and now has a social and productive role as a community vegetable garden. In Belgium, a porch in a courtyard of the conflictive neighborhood of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, of “jihadist” fame, accommodates concerts and all kinds of gatherings of local residents. And on the periphery of Paris, the Colombes housing estate battles unemployment with a productive and ecological complex of community food gardens, an experimental micro-farm, a market, cooperative workshops and recycling spaces. The Prize Archive, easily accessible on the CCCB website, offers 318 interventions in which the anti-neoliberal, combative aspects of public space are clearly visible.

“Public” means of or concerning the people as a whole, and “space” is a free, available, unoccupied expanse which, when qualified by “public”, means that it is for the use of all people. We have to fight for open, friendly, democratic spaces. We must fight together in whatever public or communal spaces we have. **CP**

When Bill Clinton Put His Thumb on the Scale for Yeltsin “Boris? Good Enough!”

BY NICK ALEXANDROV

The veterinarian lives in a “region of rolling green hills, broad horizons and abysmal poverty,” where he chain-smokes “the cheapest brand of cigarettes,” unfiltered. His wife, a librarian by training, “works on a nearby cattle ranch” sometimes. “The Government does not care for simple people,” she laments. That’s why she backs the candidate who, if elected, might not herald a “return exactly to old times”—though “maybe something similar.” This is the north Caucasus, late spring, 1996, in Michael R. Gordon’s New York Times depiction.

In Russia’s presidential race that year, incumbent and eventual victor Boris Yeltsin “was floundering. Five candidates, led by Communist Gennadi Zyuganov”—the man the Caucasus couple liked—“were ahead of Yeltsin in some polls,” Andrew Felkay notes in Yeltsin’s Russia and the West. “The president was favored by only 6 percent of the electorate and was ‘trusted’ as a competent leader by an even smaller proportion,” he adds. “In the U.S.,” consultant Richard Dresner remarked, “you’d advise a pol with those kinds of numbers to get another occupation.”

Dresner was one of the “American ‘image-makers’” Yeltsin brought in “to help with the campaign.” The strategists got a quarter million dollars for four months’ work, “an unlimited budget for polling, focus groups and other research,” Felkay explains. Dresner had also been “gubernatorial campaign consultant to Bill Clinton,” but “denied any connections between the Russian campaign and the White House” despite this and other links, Gerald Sussman pointed out in *Monthly Review* (December 2006).

“For Clinton,” regardless, “what mattered most was keeping Yeltsin in power,” writes Nicolas Bouchet in *Democracy Promotion as US Foreign Policy*. “Indeed the West supported Yeltsin much more energetically in those elections than either the Russian political class or the public,” Lilia Shevtsova affirms in *Lonely Power*, stressing that Clinton “kept doing everything in his power to support Yeltsin.”

“Under pressure from the White House,” she continues, “the IMF decided in 1996...to loan Russia \$10.2 billion”—a move “designed to bolster Yeltsin’s chances,” Shevtsova and Angela Stent observed in *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1996). Michael Gordon concurred in the *New York Times*, calling the sum “a major election-year boost” for Yeltsin. And Boris Fyodorov, Russia’s finance minister from 1993-1994, allegedly “declared that no economic argument could be found to justify” the money, unless Washington “wanted to buy Yeltsin’s re-election.” So reported U.S. Lt. Gen William E. Odom, who further testified before the House Committee on International Relations that the loan “did...help buy” Yeltsin’s victory.

“At Clinton’s behest,” moreover, “the G8 held a summit on security issues in Moscow in early 1996,” Shevtsova reminds us. This was “not a regularly scheduled” meeting, but “was transparently a gambit to support Yeltsin’s campaign.” To the *New York Times* it appeared “primarily designed to burnish Boris Yeltsin’s prestige,” and Yeltsin himself called it “an inestimable moral support.”

So while Zyuganov “went into the campaign as the heavy favorite in virtually every poll,” “had a strong grassroots organization behind him,” and “was widely believed to be the favored candidate” two months before the vote, in the end his party’s “door-to-door campaign was obliterated by the heavily researched, well-financed, media-saturating, modern campaign waged by the Yeltsin team,” Sarah E. Mendelson summarized in *International Security* (Spring 2001).

The European Institute for the Media determined this “media-saturating” facet of Yeltsin’s operation “marred the fairness of the democratic process,” in part because “the media received and accepted specific instructions on how to cover the campaign.” And there were other problems. “The bias on the national television channels (a breach of the regulations), the pressure on editors and media outlets, the use of the administrative and financial levers”—all created a climate in which “voters were given less information of a professional and objective nature” than they’d received earlier

that decade, just after the USSR's collapse.

The 1996 contest, Shevtsova concludes, "marked the beginning of democracy's discrediting in the eyes of Russian public opinion," largely because Washington and its allies did "everything in [their] power to back their protégés in the Kremlin at the expense of free and fair elections." The fact that "the United States pushed an electoral procedure in which it believed the only acceptable outcome had to be Yeltsin" made the event, as Peter J. Stavrakis put it to the House Committee on International Relations, "deeply disturbing to many Russians who saw in the electoral process much of the sham aspects that were present in the Soviet era."

But U.S. goals went beyond warping Russian democracy. Washington's "whole policy was...aimed," at the time, "at the domestic transformation of Russia, both politically and economically,"

Thomas Graham, Chief Political Analyst at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow from 1994–1997, explained. "The U.S. assistance program was driven by the desire to support reformers whose agenda was consistent with U.S. objectives," the Government Accountability Office (GAO) elaborated.

Mendelson described the "virtual army of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the United States" swarming Russia in the early 1990s. "From fiscal year 1990 through December 31, 1994," the GAO reported, the U.S. government threw \$3.5 billion at Russian overhaul efforts, as "23 departments and independent agencies implemented 215 programs in the [former Soviet Union]." Julie Nelson and Irina Y. Kuzes, in *Radical Reform in Yeltsin's Russia*, break down the funding. For example, "the Washington, D.C., Sawyer/Miller Group received \$7 million to develop a television advertising campaign to promote privatization," and "an Arlington, Virginia, consulting firm, Haglar Bailly, received a \$20 million contract to 'help privatize Russian utilities and encourage them to install U.S.-made equipment[.]'"

Or consider the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID). It was Washington's "operator for its program of aid for economic reform and privatization in Russia," Shevtsova writes, with budgets of "\$57.7 million for Russian economic reform and \$20 million for legal reform." HIID even "drafted many of the Kremlin decrees" pushing for privatization, according to Janine Wedel (*Collision and Collusion*). In 2000, Shevtsova continues, "a U.S. court

found that economics professor and HIID adviser Andrei Schleifer and his assistant Jonathan Hay 'used their position and substantial influence on Russian officials... to achieve their own financial interests and the interests of their spouses.'" In other words, "they enriched themselves exactly as their Russian colleagues were doing."

With its vast corruption and sham elections, Yeltsin's Russia had "no real democracy," Dimitri K. Simes, President of the Center for the National Interest,

concluded. He emphasized that, "because of the Clinton Administration's embrace of the undemocratic Yeltsin regime and perceived U.S. support for radical and even brutal economic reforms of the 1990s that were rejected by the vast majority of the Russian people, the Russian public is not inclined to accept U.S. guidance on democracy today."

No wonder. "In the early 1990s, Russia's economic system collapsed," David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu explain in *The Body Economic*. Unemployment "jumped to 22 percent by 1998," while "one-quarter of the population were living in poverty" in 1995, as "men began to die at an increasing rate." Stuckler and Basu blame austerity measures, mass privatization—the Russian metamorphosis U.S. power promoted. "Economic genocide," Yeltsin's vice president charged.

How all this compares to claims Russian hacking undermined the U.S. election, I leave for the reader to decide. **CP**

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Yeltsin meets Clinton in 1994. Photo: White House.

When Will the “Slave-Labor Act” Bite The Dust?

Taft-Hartley and 70 Years of Decline for the American Labor Movement

BY ERIC LAURSEN

It's only been a couple of months since Donald J. Trump became president-elect, and already the literature on why and how he managed that feat could fill a small library. Some of the most convincing theories zero in on the Democrats' inability to win back working-class voters.

Some of us have problems with these arguments, because the word “white” is often and blatantly added to “working class.” Are millions of black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans not blue-collar workers as well? Don't they have the same concerns about disappearing manufacturing jobs, trade imbalances, stagnating wages, and disappearing benefits?

They do. And rather than fret over how to appeal specifically to the “white” working class, Democrats—if they still have any desire to be the party of working people—need to stop treating organized labor as a glorified voter-turnout operation. Instead, they need to focus on helping workers of all backgrounds to organize and create a revitalized labor movement.

They can start with the biggest piece of unfinished business on labor's docket: repealing the Slave-Labor Act. That's what union organizers, at the time, called the Taft-Hartley Act, the most damaging piece of labor legislation ever passed and the starting point of the labor movement's long decline in this country. If Democrats can't do it in the Paul Ryan Congress, perhaps they should consider making it an issue in 2018. If they prefer not to—well, we'll get to that shortly.

First, some history. Taft-Hartley, which will be 70 years old this year (June 23, incidentally), was one of the first bills taken up by the rabidly conservative Congress that was elected in 1946. Its more or less acknowledged purpose was to tilt the balance of power back in the direction of management by outlawing the most effective weapons in labor's arsenal. It did much more, locking the movement inside a legal straitjacket that hobbled its development and ushering it into a long period of decline.

Taft-Hartley banned jurisdictional strikes, which means a union can't strike to assign particular work to the employees it represents. Taft-Hartley outlawed secondary boycotts, in which union workers show solidarity by picketing, striking, or refusing to handle the goods of a business with which they have no primary dispute. It banned wildcat strikes, in which workers walk out without union leadership's authorization, support, or approval (the black “wild cat” is a much-loved symbol of the

Industrial Workers of the World). And it excluded supervisors from union contracts, even allowing employers to terminate them if they engage in organizing activities.

The list goes on. Taft-Hartley forces unions to give 80 days' notice to the employer and to state and federal mediation bodies before they can strike. It authorizes the president to intervene in strikes or potential strikes that could create a national emergency—which it left up to the president to define. It outlaws closed shops, where the employer can only hire union members. And it authorizes the states to pass right-to-work laws that prevent unions from negotiating contracts that require the employer to fire workers who refuse to join the union.

It's impossible to overstate the damage that the Slave-Labor Act has done to working people in the nearly three-quarters of a century since it passed. Thanks to Taft-Hartley, more than half the states are now right-to-work states. Thanks to Taft-Hartley, Ronald Reagan was able to break the air traffic controllers' union. Thanks to Taft-Hartley, whole industries have been downgraded to open shops, with corresponding sharp declines in wages—in many cases, as a prelude to being shipped to other, even lower-wage countries. Thanks in large part to Taft-Hartley, only 11.1 percent of American workers belong to unions now, down from 35 percent in the years just after the act was passed, and the number of strikes fell from 4,740 in 1937 to 381 major actions in 1970 to 11 in 2010.

The decline of union activism has eroded lawmakers' loyalty to Medicare, Social Security, and other income support programs—the social insurance edifice that was erected with the indispensable help of a powerful labor movement during the New Deal and Great Society eras. That leaves every working person, organized or not, in jeopardy.

A look at the details explains what happened. Barring wildcat strikes helped employers who'd rather negotiate with union bureaucrats than with local organizers with community ties and, possibly, a more radical perspective. Not surprisingly, the top levels of the labor movement have become more “professional” and removed from the grassroots in the decades since Taft-Hartley—one reason it was so hard for them to grasp the anger and despair that led many union members to vote for Trump, for example.

Contributing to this was the most blatantly political provision of Taft-Hartley, requiring that union officials file an affidavit declaring that they were not supporters of the Communist Party and had no involvement with any group seeking the “overthrow of the United States government by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means.” That provision was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1965, but by then it had achieved its objective: to purge the labor establishment of its radical elements.

Taft-Hartley gives bosses huge leverage to keep unions out. They can deliver anti-union messages to employees in their own workplaces by posting signs or requiring workers

to attend meetings and listen to anti-union arguments. They can petition the National Labor Relations Board to determine if the union actually represents more than half of employees. If a union election is held and the union loses, it can't hold another one until at least 12 months later—long enough for the organizing drive to lose momentum and the employer to undermine support. The 80-days' notice rule opens a window of opportunity to pressure workers to give up on striking—through intimidation and firings of union activists and by dragging unions into court on one pretext or another. Before Taft-Hartley, it was virtually impossible for unions to be sued.

Preventing supervisors from joining the union creates a cultural rift in the workplace that pits one group of employees against the rest. And while it remains illegal to threaten workers who engage in union activities, employers can generally find an excuse for terminating them—as the world's

the high-water mark of unionism in this country. Taft-Hartley was meant to ensure such a thing never happened again.

Where are the Democrats?

No wonder they called it the Slave-Labor Act. But if it's so terrible, why haven't the Democrats—the Party of Labor—repealed it during the many years in the last 70 that they've controlled Congress? President Truman vetoed it in 1947, but his veto was overridden—with strong Democratic support in the House—and he never revisited the issue. In fact, he went on to invoke Taft-Hartley 12 times to halt strikes. There were feeble efforts to revisit the law during the Carter and Clinton administrations, but promises never turned to action—particularly when these presidents were busy, say, deregulating airlines or ramming the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) through Congress. The possibility of repeal seems never to have come up for discussion in the Obama White

The decline of union activism has eroded lawmakers' loyalty to Medicare, Social Security, and other income support programs—the social insurance edifice that was erected with the indispensable help of a powerful labor movement during the New Deal and Great Society eras.

biggest retailer did in 2012, when it fired five employees for participating in the OUR Walmart organizing drive.

Even when a union is recognized and legally represents a group of employees, Taft-Hartley undermines its bargaining power. For instance, the union must bargain with the employer in “good faith”—meaning, effectively, that the boss can stretch the bargaining period out, to its own advantage. Taft-Hartley also imposes a convoluted bargaining process that limits the times when a union may call a strike or lockout—so that these tactics can be used only as a last resort. On top of that, any employee who engages in a strike during the bargaining period loses his or her status as an employee. As future Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox pointed out shortly after Taft-Hartley passed, this means the employer is

excused from continuing the bargaining which ordinarily offers the best hope of terminating a strike; and, so far as the strikers are concerned, he may employ labor spies, discriminate against union men, and engage in other acts of interference and coercion aimed at destroying the union.

Perhaps the most damaging stroke, however, is the ban on secondary boycotts, because it confines strikes within specific industries, making it far more difficult for labor to unsheathe its strongest natural weapon: the general strike. General strikes in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Toledo during the Great Depression put pressure on the Roosevelt administration to back the National Labor Relations Act and propelled

House. Meanwhile, new laws and regulations have further restricted union activity.

In the later years of the Taft-Hartley era, we've gotten used to center-right Democrats speaking patronizingly of union members, labor organizers, and blue-collar workers in general as overpaid dinosaurs, barriers to the progress of the New Economy, and “racist” and “deplorable” Trump voters. (Again, the fact that many working-class voters are not white and Midwestern doesn't make it into this picture.) In the age of “education reform,” unionized teachers come in for special condemnation as scapegoats for the country's lagging schools, and not just from Republicans.

Why the hostility? Part of the explanation is to be found in the lies Democratic politicians and their corporate patrons tell themselves: that a working class no longer exists as such; that digitalization and the “knowledge economy” have created a more efficient labor market that renders unions and collective bargaining obsolete; that an economy as large as the US can remain prosperous without a strong manufacturing base; that cheap underwear and smartphones made in Asia somehow balance out falling wages and a shredded safety net.

Since Democrats are supposed to be the tribunes of the working class, they make a better target for working-class anger than Republicans, which helps explain these voters' shift to Trump. But don't expect the Dem leadership to learn its lesson. Like its rival, the Democratic Party isn't a political

party in the traditional sense, and hasn't been for a long time. It's a quasi-institution of the State, directly and indirectly subsidized by government and the economic elite that profits from a political system run for its benefit.

Unionization of workers represents a challenge to the State, and the labor movement, even at its most sold-out, is a potential rival power center. Neither Washington nor Wall Street have forgotten the impact of the general strikes and wildcat strikes of 80 years ago, which is why Taft-Hartley was put in place and why Democratic politicians have been so reluctant to pursue its repeal or modification.

Which leaves American workers, many of whom are about to be slammed once again by their new president, to figure out what they're going to do next. Already, proposals bubbling up in the last Congress to expand Social Security for the first time in over 40 years, have been silenced; its defenders are now forced to defend it against a new drive by House Republicans to "reform" it out of existence. A similar fate may await Medicare and Medicaid. Obama's executive orders requiring federal contractors to report labor law violations, provide paid sick leave, and pay a \$10.10 minimum wage could be wiped off the books in a matter of months. Trump's nominee as Labor Secretary, fast-food magnate Andy Puzder, has fought unionization drives at his restaurants and firmly opposes minimum wage hikes.

Organized labor's 70-year decline has many causes, from the transformation of the workforce to automation to corporate globalization and the laws and treaties that facilitate it. Unions' own cultural blind spots, including the top-heavy nature of Big Labor itself and its failure to reach out to new groups of workers, bear much of the blame. But Taft-Hartley dictated not just the legal parameters but the culture in which the labor movement has evolved during these decades. Would Big Labor have become as bureaucratic and timid as it did without Taft-Hartley? Would the labor movement itself have become so fragmented? Would politicians and courts have dared to enact a long succession of anti-worker legislation, from NAFTA to right-to-work laws? Would so many union drives—like OUR Walmart several years ago—end in defeat and demoralization?

A legal edifice, augmented over the years but starting with Taft-Hartley, makes a vigorous labor movement next to illegal—which just underscores its latent power and the threat it poses to our political and economic elites. Don't expect the Democratic Party to defy its patrons and take up the abolition of the Slave-Labor Act. That being the case, perhaps the best tribute working people can pay on Taft-Hartley's seventieth birthday will be to ignore it. Really ignore it. **CP**

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The Flaw of Gravity Concentration Reaches Nineteenth-Century Heights, No One Cares

BY ROB LARSON

The nineteenth century railroad regulator Charles Francis Adams observed in his book *Chapters of Erie* that "Gravitation is the rule, and centralization the natural consequence, in society no less than in physics." The tendency of markets to become dominated by giant monopolies has long been recognized, but today's globalized, information network-centered marketplace has taken the perennial trend to new heights. Reporting on last year's \$4.4 trillion acquisition binge, the business world's media declared 2015 "the best year ever for mergers." The one percent's information-age corporations are reaching new heights of capital agglomeration, including our newest industries.

Consider a little-noticed report in the conservative *Wall Street Journal* titled "Giants Tighten Grip on Internet Economy," focusing on the major web corporations, which were represented in the art design as a gigantic flying saucer covered in corporate logos, apparently beaming people aboard. "[T]he Internet economy is powered by an infrastructure...controlled by a small handful of tech giants," it declared, and described Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon and Facebook as "established companies [that] dominate in essential services that both fuel and extract value from the rising digital economy."

The centrality of these firms to the functioning of the Internet means whole "ecosystems" of users are gradually built around these corporate nodes, so that "Anyone building a brand, for example, can't ignore Facebook's highly engaged daily audience of 1 billion. Anyone starting a business needs to make sure they can be found on Google. Anyone with goods to sell wants Amazon to carry them." And the same goes for mobile apps (dominated by Google and Apple's stores), music (Apple's iTunes services), and video (Google's Youtube).

The New York Times later ran its own business-section analysis of Silicon Valley's dominance over our information networks, calling giants like Google and Facebook the "undisputed rulers of the consumer technology industry," perhaps more innocuous-sounding. Even the *Times's* rather sympathetic technophile, Farhad Manjoo, called them the "Frightful Five" which "lord over all that happens in tech" and are "better insulated against surprising competition from upstarts." At turns rivals and partners, they are "inescapable," "central to just about everything we do with computers," and together they "form a gilded mesh blanketing the entire economy." Less floridly, they own the "platforms"—the basic

systems and network hubs increasingly relied on by the rest of the economy.

Bitatorship

It's not just the economy that relies on these platforms—it's society. Some network titans, like mega-retailer Amazon, operate in traditional industries, but Apple and Facebook are another story. These corporations own the major platforms for online music sharing and web-based social interaction, the latter taking up larger portions of the world's waking hours each year. These monopolies raise profound questions about how much influence corporatized avatar environments have on our day-to-day lives, and our connections with our fellow men and women. Face-to-face time lost ground to long-distance telephone conversations, which are now being replaced by Facebook "likes" as our human bonds become quantifiable metrics tracked for investor confidence.

Tech industry expert and net neutrality pioneer Tim Wu observes in *The Master Switch*:

[S]ocial-networking sites, Facebook first and foremost, stealthily aim to conquer by offering themselves as Web alternatives. Many forms of content that once stood independent on the Web—personal pages, fan pages, e-vites, and so on—are now created instead on Facebook...unlike Web pages, Facebook pages are Facebook's property, and are deliberately not linked to rest of the Web.

Facebook's giant market capitalization reflects the monopoly potential of such a platform, resilient despite the company's potentially serious stumble on video data reporting.

Microsoft's monopoly is better-known than its newer tech compatriots' due to its ongoing European Union competition inquiries and the aborted 2001 US antitrust suit against the company. That complaint alleged that Microsoft used its overwhelming dominance in commercial operating system software to crush competitors and entrench its network node-status. A lower court ruled to split the company in two—

echoing the halcyon days of antitrust—but a federal judge reversed the ruling on appeal and declared that Microsoft could remain intact if it removed the browser icon from the PC screen, and installed a compliance committee—made up of Microsoft board members.

Monitoring its own compliance hasn't worked out very well. In Europe—where the EU competition agency also ruled that Microsoft be allowed to police itself—a 2013 investigation revealed the company baldly broke its promise to include

an on-screen "ballot" of browsers for users to choose among and had gotten away with it for some time. The commissioner admitted in the *New York Times* that the compliance decision was perhaps a bit "naïve."

Google—whose search market share is 65 percent in the U.S. and a staggering 90 percent in Europe—has faced complaints from online retailers for prioritizing its own Google Product Search over other similar services. Google's search monopoly has an especially crucial role, one which Wu called "the Web's great switch" for exploring information, a hugely important position. Google's monopoly position is so strong in fact that Microsoft filed



Photo: ProducerMatthew CC BY-SA 3.0

its own antitrust complaint against the company in Europe. Microsoft, described in the press as "the swaggering giant of personal computer software," complains in the *Times* that "Google unfairly hinders the ability of search competitors—and Microsoft's Bing is almost the only one left—from examining and indexing information that Google controls, like its big video service YouTube." Meanwhile, Google's reputation for support of net neutrality and the open internet are also somewhat overblown, as it and the other online giants displayed a conspicuously muted tone in the battles leading up to the FCC's Title II neutrality ruling.

Amazon, for its part, is fast becoming the online Walmart. It clears a third of U.S. book sales with almost no brick and mortar stores, and its mammoth growth in overall retail sales, along with its enormous data cloud service, has made it a recognized titan along with the other "tech giants." *Businessweek*

journalist Brad Stone wrote in his book *The Everything Store* that the company “had an easy way to demonstrate its market power” to publishers. It would simply “shut off the recommendation algorithms for its books” and cripple the publishers who resisted its pricing or distribution strategies, especially “the smallest publishers, who would go out of business if it weren’t for the steady sales of their back catalogs on Amazon.”

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos called this “the Gazelle Project,” meaning “Amazon should approach these small publishers the way a cheetah would pursue a sickly gazelle.” According to Stone, the company’s “lawyers heard about the name and insisted it be changed to the less incendiary Small Publisher Program.” In its broader retail sales Amazon’s relies on the mere “threat of decreased promotion on the site.” This “Pay to Play” strategy (which Amazon’s lawyers renamed “Vendor Realignment”) only works because Amazon has network dominance.

Investment bankers quoted in the *Journal* suggest the tech monopolies will last, because “scale is rewarded” and entering these markets requires “a very high level of capital intensity.” Also crucial in the fast-evolving online landscape is how “the giants can spend more money than rivals to improve their services.” And the business press itself plays along, despite having highlighted their social power in their own coverage, focusing on the tech giants’ sunny stock futures and their ability to “extract extraordinary market value” rather than examining the ethical or political ramifications of this incredible monopoly power.

Simply put, major chunks of world commerce now depend on companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon—a situation that harkens back to previous market network monopolies, like the railroads. Indeed, the *WSJ* draws the point itself, directly: “Put another way, they own the digital equivalent of railroad lines just as the Web enters a new phase of growth.”

Off the Rails

Indeed, in anticipating the possible futures of this platform ownership, the previous era of network monopolization is instructive. Adams described his contemporary, railroad monopolist Cornelius Vanderbilt, as wanting “to make himself a dictator in modern civilization” by buying up railroad routes, since “trade now dominates the world, and railways dominate trade.” Railroads were the circulatory system of the industrial revolution, and the Gilded Age capitalists built them into empires.

The robber barons and their proxies also fought bitterly to undermine or corner one another’s monopolies. Rockefeller tried using his thundering oil income to buy up iron ore to force steel magnate Carnegie into paying him for it; Wall Street kingpin JP Morgan later maneuvered Carnegie into accepting a buy-out so he could more fully “Morganize” steel into the “rational” U.S. Steel monopoly, as he later did for other corporate titans from American Tobacco to the General

Electric.

The barons also fought by buying up railroads. When Morgan’s various railroad networks doubled their freight rates simultaneously in order to twist Carnegie’s arm, the major city of Pittsburgh’s very economic life was threatened until Carnegie’s giant fortune paid for a hastily-built new rail line to reach coastal networks. Carnegie himself had made similar moves to push back against smaller railroads in the past, as Matthew Josephson’s major history of *The Robber Barons* recounts.

And in a somehow-forgotten episode that could stand as the climax of the Gilded Age epoch of capitalism, the growth of Rockefeller’s encroaching Union Pacific-based southwestern rail network threatened the Eastern Seaboard-centered system owned by Morgan and his allies. The corsair had endeavored to Morganize the industry for years, buying up bankrupt rail lines in transactions that always created great wealth on Wall Street, and by the McKinley era was estimated to control as much as half of total U.S. rail mileage—a truly impressive level of network concentration.

But the Rockefeller-aligned network fought back and soon the two sprawling rail octopuses came into direct conflict over the important Northern Pacific line, held by Morgan allies. The two trust giants battled through proxies to buy a direct controlling interest in the line, and in the process unintentionally triggered an enormous crash in the stock market—the “Northern Pacific Panic.” Morgan kept control, Rockefeller’s proxies got board seats, but the collateral damage was enormous. In the aftermath Morgan famously told a journalist, “I owe the public nothing.”

And while conservative figures insisted state regulation of rail networks through the New Deal period was unnecessary and stifled the competition that must arise in free markets, after neoliberal deregulation the field went through the predictable merger binge, until as *Fortune* reported in 2011: “Since freight railroads were deregulated in 1980, the number of large, so-called Class I railroads has shrunk from 40 to seven. In truth, there are only four that matter...An estimated one-third of shippers have access to only one railroad.”

Anti-Trustworthy

Many observers—liberals and conservatives—say that all this talk about “economic power” and monopolies is overblown in the face of antitrust laws which prohibit any “restraint of trade.” For example, New America Foundation fellow Barry Lynn—who promotes a regulated capitalism—claims that antitrust law puts “checks on the autocratic power of the corporate managers and the labor bosses.” And indeed, in his book *Cornered* Lynn argues that U.S. antitrust and the EU competition laws “prove Adams wrong” about the gravitational principle of capitalism.

Yet antitrust law has been attacked aggressively over the last forty years. In the lead-up to Reagan’s inauguration busi-

ness reporters at the New York Times observed in 1981 that “...the Reagan Administration appears likely to aim at a more relaxed and flexible approach to antitrust policy,” with the new head of the program favoring “an antitrust policy based on efficiency considerations.” Later, the Obama administration promised a return to aggressive antitrust action, but has only blocked the very biggest horizontal tie-ups, like Comcast’s attempted purchase of Time Warner Cable, or AT&T’s pass at buying T-Mobile. The Journal attributed this reluctance to a policy that “Antitrust enforcers, once in office, also want to avoid unfairly penalizing companies that earned their dominance on the merits.”

This alleged merit-based dominance is difficult to square with the work of Harvard business professor Alfred Chandler, who detailed the classic monopolization incentives in books like *Scale and Scope*. According to Chandler, even in traditional manufacturing, without the added incentives of

phone companies. But the neutrality requirement—that the owners of the data pipes don’t get to charge for extra speed or throttle holdouts—doesn’t limit the development of the web itself into ecosystems built around privately-owned platforms.

These reforms, which regulate particular expressions of power, are valuable but limited in scope, and under constant assault by capital. Antitrust law arose partially as a concession to populist agitation against the great industrial and rail network trusts of the late eighteenth century, but it was recognized at the time to be a relatively small surrender of the most naked forms of monopoly, leaving untouched the fundamental foundations of the system.

As President Theodore Roosevelt—the great champion of trust-busting—once exclaimed to J.P. Morgan, “if you don’t let us do this, those who will come after us will rise and bring you to ruin!”

Simply put, major chunks of world commerce now depend on companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon—a situation that harkens back to previous market network monopolies like the railroads.

network structures,

Production units achieved much greater economies of scale...In many industries the throughput of plants of that scale was so high that a small number of them could meet the existing national and even global demand. The structure of these industries quickly became oligopolistic...In many instances the first company to build a plant of minimum efficient scale and to recruit the essential management team remained the leader in its industry for decades.

But enforced or not, the inherent limits of antitrust policy’s ability to fix the fundamental problem of market concentration are given by Chandler. He comments “the existence of the Sherman Act discouraged monopoly in industries where integration and concentration had already occurred. It helped to create oligopoly where monopoly existed and to prevent oligopoly from becoming monopoly.” In other words, antitrust (when it was enforced) prevented full monopolization but left giant networks of vertically-integrated firms in place to dominate the marketplace. And even this pattern has waned since the Clinton-era Microsoft suit, to the sole function of blocking the most outright monopolistic network mergers.

Other reformist steps, like the FCC’s Title II net neutrality ruling, are very important in limiting the power of the telecom networks that bring net access, run by the cable and

User Disillusion

Envisioning a more radical network agenda today would require moving well beyond antitrust legislation toward forms of public ownership and worker management of the crucial web platforms. This is easier said than done of course, not least because of the particularly thorny question of who should control these digital behemoths.

State control, without a radical, society-wide process of democratization, is an unpalatable option, in the especially sensitive information network sectors. While worker control would certainly bring major benefits, most of these tech giants employ relatively few workers, relying instead on user-generated content. From Facebook profiles to Google’s YouTube to Apple’s iTunes, content is in large part produced at no cost to the firm apart from maintenance of the platform by network managers and software engineers. Any project to lessen the power of tech monopolies would falter without major support from the great body of users, themselves organized for control.

And unlike the great rail networks, digital networks are global, meaning any successful effort to socialize them will require coordinated international action by both workers and users of the platforms. Even a successful democratization of one or more of these platforms within a particular country

will represent only a piecemeal victory under perennial sanction by the World Trade Organization or another body; one can readily imagine a capital strike in which the global architecture of a Facebook or Amazon refuses to recognize or articulate with a socialized portion of its system, with links not connecting, orders not taken, documents not intelligible out of ruling class indignation.

On the other hand, certain advantages exist. One materialized during the struggles for net neutrality—organizing was rather aided by the fact that individuals spend more and more time in online environments. Of course, the issue of web access arouses passion, and the time and effort required to transmit a complaint to the FCC is far less than that required to contribute to taking over ownership of major global online platforms. But the U.S. telecom industry did put up a strong fight against Title II and lost, not least due to the moral power and democratic weight of the four million public comments the agency received, the huge majority supporting net neutrality.

If AT&T's old phone network monopoly could be broken, if Title II can become law over the heads of Comcast and Verizon, if public broadband service can rise, then the possibility of great strides in democratizing the web platforms that have become central to our lives can't be ruled out. But for now the online landscape we inhabit daily is just as shaped by material forces as its predecessors. The "inescapable" presence of the Bit Tyrants is reflected in the fact that I wrote this essay on an Apple device, using Microsoft Word, employing numerous Google searches, and saving drafts Amazon's cloud. Irony loves company. **CP**

ROB LARSON is Professor of Economics at Tacoma Community College and author of *Bleakonomics* and the forthcoming *Capitalism vs. Freedom*.

Streets Without Joy

A World Beyond Trump

BY MATTHEW STEVENSON

Because I live in Switzerland, I didn't get the news of Donald Trump's election until close to sunrise, when CNN projected winners in states such as North Carolina and Ohio. I was at an election party in Geneva, and to get home I had to ride my bike across the city, then encased in its trademark autumn fog, in which the idea of a Trump presidency loomed like a dragon crawling out of the dark lagoon.

Somewhere on the hour long ride, I decided that the only way to break the election curse was to travel around the world. I had been studying airline schedules for months, but only in the aftermath of the voting did I decide to skip town.

I knew exactly where I wanted to go—Bahrain, Sri Lanka, the Plain of Jars (Laos), and Vietnam, to see, in particular, Dien Bien Phu, Khe Sanh, and My Lai. What linked the stops were the books on my reading table, if not the cautionary tales to Trump's foreign policies from their sad histories.

To connect the dots I decided to fly only on discount, one-way airlines. (In all, the trip cost less than \$1500. Asia has excellent \$20 hotels.) It meant most of my departure times would be around 3:00 a.m. and that to get to Dien Bien Phu I would need to ride buses across northern Laos for three days.

At least at the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain or in Jaffna, Sri Lanka (where the civil war ended in 2009), I could see the world as it is, not as I am told it looks by Trump, the Clintons, Anderson Cooper, or Secretary of State John Kerry.

I packed a carry-on backpack with some quick-drying camping clothes and filled my Kindle with books about the repression in Bahrain and memoirs of the wars in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

After some fits and starts through the Balkans and time spent among the remnants of the 1877 Russo-Turkish War (it explains much about Vladimir Putin's attitude toward Turkey), I landed at 3 a.m. in Bahrain, the unhappy isle off the Saudi coast where the U.S. Fifth Fleet and Shiite dissidents are both trying to win hearts and minds.

* * *

Nominally a country, Bahrain is a suburban corporate park with its own flag and cereal-box monarchy. ("Hurry, you, too, can be a king of a Gulf State...") My high-rise hotel had views of the glittering harbor and direct access to vacant lots heaped with garbage. Everything outside my window looked disposable.

The next morning, as I tried to get my bearings and find the Pearl Roundabout, I recalled the description of Hong Kong in the 1990s as "a borrowed place living on borrowed time."

My first mistake in Bahrain was to think I could get



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French troops during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Photo: US Army.

anywhere without a car. I tried walking and taking local buses, but the connections were tortuous. At least I caught a glimpse of Bahrain's underclass, the guest workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Philippines who are brought in as dollar-a-day men and women to turn the nuts and bolts on the Gulf miracle. Everyone else in Bahrain drives a late model SUV, parks in underground garages, and eats in five-star hotels. Anyone walking around Manama, the island's capital of glass-and-steel office towers, must either be a maid or someone muttering to themselves.

The Pearl Roundabout, in the city center, is one of the inconvenient truths of the Arab Spring. In February 2011, the otherwise nondescript traffic circle turned into Bahrain's Tiananmen Square, where families, including small children, gathered to protest, grill dinner, camp overnight, and listen to dissident speeches and songs protesting Bahrain's Sunni-led government (well, royal family) that ignores the rights of the country's Shiite majority (who for the most part live in shanty towns outside Manama).

During the violence, President Obama talked the talk about his support for the Arab Spring in Bahrain. He said:

Bahrain is a long-standing partner, and we are committed to its security. We recognize that Iran has tried to take advantage of the turmoil there, and that the Bahraini government has a legitimate interest in the rule of law. Nevertheless, we have insisted publicly and privately that mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain's citizens, and will not make legitimate calls for reform go away...

Across the region, those rights that we take for granted are being claimed with joy by those who are prying loose the grip of an iron fist...

For the American people, the scenes of upheaval in the region may be unsettling, but the forces driving it, are not

unfamiliar. Our own nation was founded through a rebellion against an empire...

It was a vintage Obama moment, full of soaring rhetoric and quotes from the Declaration of Independence—even though on the ground in Bahrain the United States and its Sunni allies in the region were acting more like the Warsaw Pact when it crushed the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 than as disciples of Thomas Jefferson.

On paper, Obama sounds like Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi; in action, he is closer to Leonid Brezhnev, which may explain why in late 2011 the U.S. sold the Saudis \$28 billion in new F-15 jet fighters and brokered another \$7 billion in weaponry to several Gulf states.

* * *

When I finally got to the Pearl Roundabout, it looked like an outtake of the Berlin Wall. The circle was closed to traffic, and razor wire and tanks made sure no one got the idea of a return engagement.

The concrete symbol at the center had been torn down, and the tents of the protesters had long ago been dragged away or burned. It's a corner of a foreign field that could well be Chernobyl or the green line in Beirut.

Two events marked the end of Bahrain's Arab Spring. First, the ruling Khalifa family cleared the roundabout in the same style and spirit as the Chinese Communists deployed troops in Tiananmen Square—with tanks spraying tear gas and bullets.

Protesters, including women and children, were beaten and shot, and leaders of the protest movement were rounded up and jailed, where many simply vanished.

Second, the royal house of Khalifa unleashed the dogs of war from Saudi Arabia—its protector and overlord—who

entered the island kingdom across the 16-mile causeway, their American weaponry deployed in long columns of armor.

The Saudis came as proxies for American interests, which include the Fifth Fleet moored in the harbor—the ships of the line that took up the white man’s burden from the departed British Empire somewhere east of Suez.

No one thinks much about the tears of Bahrain because it is largely a country in lockdown. Journalists are routinely denied entry, and dissidents are either jailed or deported.

In one of the few books published about the crackdown, journalist Toby Matthiesen writes in *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring That Wasn’t*:

The Gulf monarchies have weathered the first storm of the Arab Spring through a mix of repression, handouts of wealth, and the creation of the sectarian Gulf.

For the rest of my time in Bahrain, I toured, as best I could, the Shiite neighborhoods, which have the feel of segregated townships left over from apartheid in South Africa. A police presence, for example, guards the entrance to Diraz, a Soweto-like homeland on the outskirts of the capital.

In the World According to Obama, the riots in Diraz happened because “Iran tried to take advantage of

assuming he sometimes comes to work with a dagger in his belt. (The gold embroidery in the photograph, otherwise, was familiar.)

To get to Jaffna from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, I had to beg a ride on the overnight train, which was sold out. Nor did the *Night Mail* have any sleeping berths running that evening.

Thanks to a generous station manager who I befriended, I scored a vacant seat in an air conditioned car, but it meant sitting up all night on what felt like an Erie-Lackawanna day coach running express through the jungle.

The train arrived in Jaffna at 6:00 a.m., where all that greeted me was a monsoon rain and an “inconvenience” store next to the station (it sold very little and refused to telephone for a taxi).

The northern part of Sri Lanka interested me because it was on the beaches outside Jaffna that the Tamil Tigers (also known as LTTE) made their last stand in a civil war that lasted from 1983-2009, which claimed some 100,000 lives on both sides.

The Tamils are Hindu, and have brethren across southern India; the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, who live more in the south, are Buddhist. The Tamils wanted to divide the country in two,

On paper, Obama sounds like Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi; in action, he is closer to Leonid Brezhnev.

the turmoil,” but to anyone there on foot, as I was, the seeds of dissent appear to be homegrown monarchy, non-representation, poverty, and repression. The Iranian presence is just a monster on Obama’s bedroom wall, as it will be on Trump’s.

On my last day I went to the Salmaniya medical complex, where many of the dead and wounded were brought during the crackdown, turning the parking lot outside the hospital into another center of the protests. Now there were only parked cars out front and a few police on patrol. During the worst of the street fighting, the government put on trial doctors who had treated injured dissidents.

Some of the most harrowing scenes in the excellent documentary film *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark* were shot in the emergency room here, which is where the revolution came to die.

* * *

There are not a lot of discount airline flights from Manama to Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka. Instead I caught a connection to Colombo through Muscat, the capital of Oman, where the Sultan greets incoming passengers from a billboard that could well be Trump looming over the Atlantic City boardwalk,

with Tamil Eelam a separate country in the north and down each coast. Like the American civil war, the conflict was about secession, and axes were a popular weapon.

In the slaughter that came at war’s end, the Sri Lankan Army used artillery and air power to attack rebels and civilians indiscriminately, who were caught up in what had first been proclaimed a no-fire zone, but later became a Tamil noose.

As happened in Bahrain, the Obama administration paid lip service to the suffering in the civil war, but did little about it, except put the Tamil Tigers on the terrorist watch list. (I am sure that was a comfort to the civilians trapped between the combatants.) The President said:

So I urge the Tamil Tigers to lay down their arms and let civilians go. Their forced recruitment of civilians and their use of civilians as human shields is deplorable...

I’m also calling on the Sri Lankan government to take several steps to alleviate this humanitarian crisis. First, the government should stop the indiscriminate shelling that has taken hundreds of innocent lives, including several hospitals, and the government should live up to its commitment to not use heavy weapons in the conflict zone.

Alas, no one was listening to his homily. The President might well have been a Belgian nun, waving his arms at Hitler's tanks rolling into the Ardennes in 1940.

One of the problems with the so-called war on terror (a tactic, not a political creed) is that it forces the United States to ally itself with reactionary powers—in this case the Sri Lankan army—no matter how questionable their cause or ruthless their methods of repression.

* * *

I ate breakfast at an inn in Jaffna and through the owner managed to hire a car and driver to take me around the sites in the Sri Lankan civil war. Jaffna is less a regional city than a jungle town, but because it's on the north end of the island it was a strategic link for the Tamils to bring in supplies and weapons from India. One writer describes it this way: "Jaffna has always been more bridge than destination."

Over breakfast, the inn keeper told me about growing up in Jaffna during the civil war. He said that the Sri Lankan government had liberated Jaffna from the Tamil Tigers, but that the town was otherwise cut off from the rest of Sri Lanka.

North of Vavuniya, a town in the center of the country, was a no-go line of military checkpoints, where buses, trains, and cars from the south went no further.

Only after the war ended in 2009 did the north "open up." While I saw a few travelers here and there—some had come for Jaffna's beaches on nearby islands—the north still feels like a land of ghosts.

In his account of the fighting, Mark Stephen Meadows writes in *Tea Time with Terrorists: A Motorcycle Journey into the Heart of Sri Lanka's Civil War*:

Dark tales still surround of the town of Jaffna, as they surround Sri Lanka itself. The LTTE, outside the reach of Sri Lanka's government, does as it pleases. I've heard reports of the LTTE bleeding prisoners to death, sometimes after torture, refrigerating the blood and keeping it for battle-front transfusions, a darkly ironic reminder that Tamil and Sinhalese blood has been mixed for millennia.

Outside Jaffna is a landscape of palm trees, sand dunes, marshland, and churches and temples of many denominations. (Eight percent of the Sri Lankan population is Christian.) The driver took me to some of the ports that the Tamils used to import weapons from India, and in a slanting rain we drove along the forlorn beaches.

At one point we came upon a heavily armed Sri Lankan army patrol. The soldiers wore green berets and carried automatic weapons, and they gave Jaffna the air of Belfast during the Troubles.

The country has been at peace since 2009, but I have no doubt that violence will return to Sri Lanka. Yes, the civil war has ended, but few of the issues were settled, and the Tamils, watched in patrolled ghettos, are made to feel like outsiders on an island where they have lived for more than a thousand

years.

To make their case for independence, the Tamil Tigers deployed terrorists and invented (at least in the modern period) the idea of suicide bombers, who blew themselves up all over Sri Lanka.

The militant Tigers also brutalized the local Tamil population, which often found itself caught between the rebels and government soldiers, unsure which way to turn when fleeing the fighting.

The driver stopped so that I could inspect marshland where 300-400 Tamils were found in a mass grave—these were Jaffna residents rounded up by the army—and at a war memorial in the town of Elephant Pass, which became the Bastogne of the civil war.

On this narrow neck of land, Tamils and the army fought repeatedly to control the strategic pass, which is the gateway to Jaffna and the far north. At one point, a Sri Lankan corporal fought off the Tamils with a construction tractor, the remains of which form a monument to his heroism.

Because the government won the war, the Tamils are remembered for their prison camps and devices of torture. The army gets the soaring monuments, with the inspiring inscriptions.

* * *

To see where the Tigers made their last stand, I changed from the taxi to a local bus, which drove straight through the locations of the last resistance pockets, where the Sri Lankan army crushed the rebels with artillery and aerial bombing. The Tamil leaders were killed in a swamp, now as notorious as Hitler's bunker. An army memorial marks the spot.

I rode buses and walked through the Tamil heartland, charmed that little girls wear elegant print dresses to go out with their mother or grandmother, but it distressed me that so much of the north is an extended military base housing an army of occupation.

Down a dirt road near a beach, I found what is billed as a war museum, but is actually a rusting collection of submarines and fishing boats—the Sea Tiger navy run aground, to make the point that the terrorists were trying to develop a capacity for underwater suicide bombings.

In the humid heat, a lone soldier on duty sold me an orange soda, and I took pictures of rusting boat hulls—the tombstones of either terror or liberation, depending on your point of view. Meadows writes about the island's combustibility:

The heat of culture fetish is hot here in Sri Lanka. The island is an ideological bonfire where race, class, caste, ethnicity, history, culture, and politics act as cinders, heating the others they are piled upon. The island's ideological embers emit a heat that has been slowly rising, incinerating the population that walks and works upon the shores and farms.

I walked back to my bus stop thinking how far the passions

of northern Sri Lanka are from Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida—soon to become another fortified beachhead—although they might be closer than he realizes.

* * *

I needed three flights and three bus rides (it took four days and nights of travel) to get from Colombo to Dien Bien Phu, which is in northern Vietnam just across from the Laotian border.

I decided to get there on the bus so that I could see the Plain of Jars (where Americans dropped more bombs than they did on the German Ruhr in World War II) and to read a lengthy history, Roger Warner's *Shooting at the Moon*, about the CIA's proxy war in Laos (1955-75). He quotes an activist who was outraged that the Americans could drop so many bombs on Laos:

Never this century has there been so much bombing for so long in such secrecy by such a great power against so weak a people. Nine years of bombing, two million tons of bombs, whole rural societies wiped off the map, hundreds of thousands of peasants treated like herds of animals in a Clockwork Orange fantasy of an aerial African hunting society.

I confess that the bus rides, from Vientiane to the border at Tay Trang were endless, but they imprinted on my mind a killing zone of the American imperium—perhaps coming soon to a theater near you?

* * *

As a place to brood on the fate of colonial dreams, Dien Bien Phu is hard to beat.

There in winter-spring 1954, the French landed a reinforced division of Legionnaire paratroops (about 20,000 men) and artillery, and hoped to engage the North Vietnamese Army of General Vo Nguyen Giap in a set-piece battle that would wipe out the resistance to the French colonial restoration.

Instead, the French parachuted into an Alamo of their own making, and on May 7, 1954, after about 55 days of bitter fighting, they surrendered Dien Bien Phu.

Some 8,000 paratroops were marched into captivity. Less than half survived the jungle walk or the tiger cages of their imprisonment. Jean Lartéguy writes in *The Centurions*, his superb novel about the battle and its aftermath:

Everyone thought Dien Bien Phu was impregnable. . . the captains, the colonels, the generals, the ministers, the Americans, the pilots and even the sailors who knew nothing about it. Everyone, do you realize? No one doubted it for a minute.

Dien Bien Phu is now an overgrown town that has been built over the 1954 battlefield, although the hills of the French fire bases remain (those that were named after the mistresses of French generals).

I rented a bicycle from my hotel and spent a long day—in humid sunshine—climbing among the tangled ruins on hills once called Elaine, Dominique, Beatrice, Isabelle, and Gabrielle.

The French had thought they could construct Verdun in the jungle to prove to General Giap that his army "shall not pass." Instead the French entrenched their airborne army in the bottom of a broad valley, where the distant high ground belonged to the long guns of Giap's artillerymen. With the fall of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, so went French Indochina (divided at the Geneva Conference that followed the defeat).

Another consequence of the battle was that the splendid little war in Vietnam became an American possession. President Dwight Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, cancelled the elections scheduled for 1956, partitioned Vietnam along the 17th parallel, and embarked on a proxy war in the jungle and rice paddies that would last until 1975.

As Graham Greene asks in his Vietnam novel, *The Quiet American*: "Do you think they know they are fighting for Democracy?"

* * *

From Dien Bien Phu, I needed two nights, on a bus and a train called the Reunification Express, to get to Khe Sanh, the Marine Corps combat base hard up against the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in South Vietnam that in winter-spring 1968 threatened to become the American Dien Bien Phu.

The siege of the Marine base in the Annamite Range ended, at least on paper, as a U.S. victory, sparing American watchers of the evening news the spectacle of marines getting marched away into the jungle as prisoners.

A few months later, however, the U.S. commander, General William Westmorland, withdrew his forces from Khe Sanh, which became another casualty in the 1968 Tet offensive, which effectively won the war for the North.

Much of the heavy fighting in the Vietnam War was to keep open Route 9 that runs from Dong Ha and the DMZ west to Khe Sanh. If you ever want to ride on a highway of lost illusions not named Route 66, might I suggest the road to Khe Sanh.

I went with a guide and a car, and we started out at what is called the McNamara Line, a folly comparable to that of Maginot's in France, except this one—named for Kennedy's and Johnson's Secretary of Defense—was built with defoliants, which cleared a swath through the DMZ jungle, across which North Vietnamese soldiers were dared to tread.

McNamara's *cordon sanitaire* cost millions of dollars to build—fire bases were aligned along the cut through the jungle forest—but it did nothing to stop the flow of men and arms infiltrating South Vietnam from the North.

Instead, the North Vietnamese army went the long way around through Laos, on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which



Destroyed Pearl Roundabout, Sri Lanka.

brushed close enough to Khe Sanh and its Marine base for Giap to attack it repeatedly in 1967 and 1968.

During the worst of the fighting around Khe Sanh, the marines at the combat base were cut off from their supply lines and, like the French at Dien Bien Phu, had to be sustained by parachuted supplies and helicopters.

The marines held on to their footprint in the Annamite hills (an undulating sea of jungle and sharp peaks) with the same determination they showed at Tarawa and Iwo Jima. But it was all for nought after Westmorland abandoned the “bloody patch of ground” in summer 1968. As Rudyard Kipling writes in “The White Man’s Burden”:

Take up the White Man’s burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought.

The American army in Vietnam, at least that seen from Route 9, had brave infantrymen but incompetent generals and political leaders. President Lyndon Johnson personally became so obsessed with the defense of Khe Sanh that he had the CIA construct a relief model of the combat base in the White House. Every day during the long siege Johnson would meet with his advisors and make suggestions for holding the line—the commander-in-chief reduced to the rank of a

brevet colonel.

The folly of the Vietnam War was that no foreign army, even one with 550,000 men in the field, was ever going to win in a country the size of California and against an enemy that cared little about casualties and that could fade away into the jungle or local population.

Westmorland thought he was the military heir of General U.S. Grant, and that he could fight a war of attrition against a country of 19 million people, most of whom were involved in the war effort.

Instead it was Giap who assumed Grant’s inheritance, throwing 10,000 casualties against the rock piles of Khe Sanh (as if it were Cold Harbor), and it was Westmorland, playing the role of Robert E. Lee, who was forced to husband his resources and withdraw into Richmond.

* * *

To get from Khe Sanh to the hamlet of My Lai, which is outside Quang Ngai, I used taxis, trains, and buses, and still it took several days of travel through South Vietnam’s flooded rice paddies and over lonely mountain passes to get to the village associated with an American massacre.

Part of the reason it took me so long to get there is that, on the way, I wanted to find the place where the French-American scholar and writer, Bernard Fall, was killed by a land mine in 1967. In a chilling, Shakespearean irony, he died in the place that years before had established his reputation as a Vietnam expert.

Before the Americans had even taken up the white man's burden in South Vietnam, Fall had written several books, including one entitled *Street Without Joy* (published in 1961), about the reasons for the French defeat in Indochina.

Few among the best and the brightest of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations took Fall's writing to heart—any more than Donald Trump will spend his evenings in the White House reading Robert Fisk's books about Lebanon and the Middle East.

North of Hué, the *Street Without Joy* refers both to a narrow road through the wetlands and an area where in the 1950s French paratroops suffered many casualties fighting against Vietminh irregulars.

Fall writes: "The principal source of trouble was a string of heavily-fortified villages along a line of sand dunes and salt marshes stretching from Hue to Quang-Tri. . . . This inspired the French soldiers with that kind of black humor proper to all soldiers to christen that stretch of Road 1 'la rue sans joie' or in English, 'Street Without Joy.'"

For Fall, the area was symbolic of French (and later American) arrogance and the difficulties that any army would face fighting a conventional war against guerrillas in Vietnam.

After a long search, using military maps and Internet posts from marines who were with Fall when he died, I found the location of his death (well, close to it, I am sure). The rice paddies were flooded, giving the long horizon the look of a Dutch landscape painting, albeit one with Asian accents.

We stopped the car in a ditch. None of the villagers could fathom what I was searching for up and down the roadside. But it did occur to me that this would be an ideal place for a memorial marker—to the courageous Fall and those who ignored his prescient warnings.

* * *

Although my round-the-world travel continued to Saigon and New York, in effect the last stop was in My Lai, several hours by car south from Nam O Beach in Da Nang, where the marines waded ashore in 1965 to find school girls with garlands and press photographers, not Viet Cong pillboxes.

My Lai (the hamlet goes by many names—this is the one is that used in American history) is a village in the suburbs of Quang Ngai. When the battalion of Lieutenant William Calley, Jr., swept through the area on March 16, 1968, the soldiers of C Company were told that anyone left in the village was Viet Cong.

The army's side of the story sounds like this:

The Army claimed 128 Viet Cong were killed. Many civilians also were killed in the operation. The area was a free fire zone from which all non-Viet Cong residents had been urged, by leaflet, to flee. Such zones are common throughout Vietnam. One man who took part in the mission with

Calley said that in the earlier attacks "we were really shot up."

"Every time we got hit it was from the rear," he said. "So the third time in there the order came down to go in and make sure no one was behind."

Calley's men slaughtered some 500 civilians, including many old men, women and children, threw their bodies into a nearby canal, and torched their hooches with Zippo lighters. Many women were raped before being killed.

The foundations of the burned huts remain at My Lai, and there is an adjoining museum that explains how the story was uncovered after the massacre.

Left to their own devices, the army brass above Calley and his company commander, Captain Ernie Medina, tried to cover up the massacre with press releases about the "victory" over the Viet Cong, decorations to the men involved, and threats against anyone who thought of speaking out. (Calley, himself, was promised a Silver and Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam.)

The story broke because of a brave helicopter pilot, Hugh Thompson, Jr., who saw what was happening and tried to stop it, and because the pictures of an army photographer—of dead women and children in a trench—were at variance with the proclamations of a victory comparable to that of Yorktown.

Describing what he saw from the air, Thompson said in a witness statement: "Everywhere we'd look, we'd see bodies. These were infants, two-, three-, four-, five-year-olds, women, very old men, no draft-age people whatsoever."

One of Calley's men later testified:

I walked up and saw these guys doing strange things. They were doing it three ways. One: They were setting fire to the hooches and huts and waiting for people to come out and then shooting them up. Two: They were going into the hooches and shooting them up. Three: They were gathering people in groups and shooting them.

An army whistleblower, Ron Ridenhour, pieced together the story from men who were there and wrote to 30 congressmen and senators.

The following year, journalist Seymour Hersh interviewed witnesses and put the story out on the wires of the *Dispatch News Service*, which forced the hand of the army, back at Fort Benning, to continue the court martial of Lt. Calley for war crimes. Many others played a role in the massacre, but they were not put on trial.

Calley was convicted but President Nixon commuted his sentence, believing that Calley and his men had followed orders and done their job against a wily foe (which used women and children in the fight, as later would the Tamil Tigers).

In 2015 Hersh went back to My Lai and said in an interview:

It was hard to see the ditch. It was hard to see how so many American boys could do so much and how it could be so thoroughly covered up by the government, not only up until the time I wrote about it, but even afterwards. There were investigations that couldn't cope with the reality...

My Lai remains the River Styx of the Vietnam War, which divides that underworld between those who see the war as one long war crime and, on the other bank, those who see glory in how America fought a holy war against evil in Southeast Asia.

During the Trump presidency, expect to be back on the far side of the river.

* * *

No sooner had I flown on China Airlines from Saigon to New York than I was reunited with the 24/7 obsession with the president-elect and what I took to be his war cabinet (to launch air strikes against both ISIS and the voting rights act). They looked chosen to do battle with history, at least the remark by John Quincy Adams that "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy."

The best part of my trip was that in about a month on the road, I only heard the name Trump mentioned twice. Once was in a Laotian restaurant, where a blonde American collage student was trying to explain Donald to a group of baffled Lao. She mentioned Trump Tower, Atlantic City, reality television, and Twitter, but all of them looked blank, reminding me of the scene in *Airplane!* in which Elaine reviews food storage options to a group of African natives. ("Also, Tupperware products are ideal for storing leftovers to help stretch your food dollar...")

In New York, a few friends asked about Jaffna, Bahrain or Dien Bien Phu, but mostly they were distracted with Christmas or retweeting Trump. After I would mumble a few words about the Tamil Tigers or Colonel de Castries (Giap's men liberated his bathtub when the French garrison fell), the conversation would switch to which billionaire had been appointed to what office on that day. Jaffna, the Plain of Jars, and Gabrielle were over the horizon, and I was back in the world of the flat-earth society. **CP**

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Donald Trump and the Triumph of White Identity Politics

Why He Won

BY ERIC DRAITSER

The renowned historiographer E.H. Carr famously compared the historian with his facts to the fishmonger with fish on the slab; the historian collects the facts, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him. Naturally, the historian will add spices and other ingredients to draw out the precise flavor needed to make an average meal into a palette-pleasing feast for the senses. But, in doing so, there is the ever-present danger that the spices, the tantalizing aroma, and the aesthetically pleasing presentation are merely an attempt to mask the fact that the fish has long since turned rotten.

And when it comes to the course of U.S. politics, there is the distinct stench of putrefaction. And, while America's putrescent corpus decays further, the unmistakable rasp of circling vultures becomes inescapable, the smell overwhelming.

Enter: Donald Trump—the vulture made flesh. And, as the new President circles high above his prey, awaiting the moment that he and his Wall Street-Pentagon flock can begin their feast, it remains for the rest of us to consider just what we've lived through, and how the history of this low-water mark will be written.

A distinct narrative has already emerged from various corners of the media and blogosphere: Trump's victory was due to discontent with neoliberalism and the decades of economic neglect and exploitation of the white working class. And, of course, this makes sense and is undoubtedly a significant factor. However, is it entirely true? Was Trump's path to the Oval Office truly paved by the precarious economic existence of millions of blue collar white Americans?

But in answering that question, we're confronted with another, even more complex question: how is economic disaffection among White America actually expressed? And do those expressing that rage have any cognizance of the root causes of their socio-political outlook?

By examining the available data, it becomes clear that while seething anger from economic hardship brought on by neoliberalism may be an aspect underlying much of the core of Trumpism, it is not the dominant factor. Rather, Trump's win should rightly be understood as the triumph of white identity politics. And the data supports this conclusion.

Diagnosing the Trumpen Proletariat

A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst entitled *Explaining White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering*

Role of Racism and Sexism found that “while economic dissatisfaction was part of the story, racism and sexism were much more important and can explain about two-thirds of the education gap among whites in the 2016 presidential vote.” The analysis used data from a national survey conducted during the final week of October (just days before the election), and concluded that the negative effects of neoliberalism and the rule of Wall Street were not the single most important factor in the victory for Trump. Rather it was “whiteness” and misogyny which played a pivotal role.

It must be stated that the Democratic Party has attempted to explain away its stunning collapse in the face of perhaps the weakest Republican candidate in generations by attributing it entirely to racism and misogyny, thereby absolving itself of any blame. This is, of course, laughable. Still, the question of whiteness looms large.

Scholars at the Universities of Michigan and Texas recently published a key study entitled *The Changing Norms of Racial Political Rhetoric and the End of Racial Priming* which, among other things, concluded that overtly racialized political rhetoric has become normalized, that it is no longer taboo, and that the election of Barack Obama played a significant role in this process. While undoubtedly true, the researchers highlighted a far more important, and too often overlooked, engine of the Trump Train—“white oppression.”

The researchers noted that:

Whites’ perceptions of their group’s racial distinctiveness and disadvantage may be on the rise...[Studies have found] a rise in White identity over the last several election cycles, and especially since the election of the nation’s first Black president in 2008. Concerns about demographic shifts and economic stagnation may have led many Whites to increasingly think that their racial group is under external threat, and these pressures increase identification (Knowles & Peng 2005). These increases in entativity [sic]—the perception among group members that they belong to a coherent and unified collective—boosts the acceptability of explicit expressions of prejudice and anger toward outgroups (Effron & Knowles 2015).

While it is typical liberal media swill to portray all anger and resentment at Obama and his disastrous policies as a racist reaction against the first Black president, there is still that underlying social illness of white supremacy which undeniably does fuel a good deal of the anger. And that rage had its political expression in Donald Trump who deftly employed racist dog-whistles throughout his campaign. From describing Mexicans as rapists and drug dealers to calling for a ban on Muslims, Trump managed to capitalize on the increased entativity of White America which, perhaps for the first time since George Wallace, had a political expression, an embodiment in one candidate.

None of this is to say that Hillary Clinton didn’t have plenty of white people supporting her, nor that Trump didn’t

have support from non-white communities. But, taken in toto, it was the angry white vote which sealed the presidency for Trump.

As the researchers from Michigan and Texas (Valentino, Neuner, and Vandenbroek) implied, it was the perception of a coherent and unified collective which truly unified the white working class around Trump. It was less his pandering to working class issues than his ability to both overtly and covertly employ racist overtones.

Another study, this one conducted by researchers from UC Santa Barbara and Stanford University (Major, Blodorn, Blascovich), found that personal identification with whiteness was directly related to the perception of oppression and future destruction of white people. Those respondents who were told that nonwhite groups will outnumber white people in the next three decades were more likely to support Trump.

Again, this conclusion illustrates the fact that a significant proportion of Trump’s support came from a fear of a loss of identity, a loss of dominance which translates into a loss of culture, morality, and greatness. Hence the need to recapture that 1950s feeling of white privilege or, put in the parlance of political sloganeering, the need to make America great again.

But let us not dismiss out of hand the claim that Trump’s victory was primarily due to his support from the working class, and that his candidacy fundamentally altered the political identification of class. A useful method for interrogating this question is to examine the relative wealth and financial security of the Trumpistas.

According to an analysis conducted by the Urban Institute:

Among the 55 counties with residents with the highest average credit scores (720 and above), Hillary Clinton won just four of them: Falls Church, Virginia (with an average credit score of 729); San Juan County, Washington (722); Cook County, Minnesota (721); and Washington County, Minnesota (720). High credit scores are associated with long, successful credit histories and bills paid on time and are implicit markers of financial security and stability over a lifetime. High credit scores are also more often held by white consumers.

So, if Trump represented an upsurge in poor and working class political power, that was news to the tens of millions of affluent, employed, financially stable white people who voted for him. In fact, according to the data, the more financially secure the county, and the higher its average credit score and median income, the more likely it was to vote for Trump. Naturally, this is in large part due to racial inequalities that persist in the US as Blacks and Hispanics tend to have lower credit scores, less access to credit, lower median incomes, etc.

If anything, the question of class-based support has not been answered. Both Trump and Clinton captured rich people and poor people in their base. The difference is the overwhelming white support for Trump.

And this is borne out by what might be the most

comprehensive demographic study on the Trumpen Proletariat yet. Gallup's Jonathan Rothwell conducted an in-depth analysis which revealed something profound: Trump's supporters are richer, not poorer, than average. Moreover, he concluded that the overriding factor determining support for Trump was not economics (NAFTA, Chinese competition, etc.) but rather segregation. Specifically, Rothwell found that the core of Trump's support came from people living in communities mostly or entirely unaffected by immigration.

Consider that for a moment. White people living in all white communities thinking that they are under assault from immigrants, Muslims and other minorities. It is, once again, that entitativity: the feeling that white people form a cohesive and singular group that is increasingly oppressed. It is not immigrants taking their jobs, it's the idea of immigrants taking their jobs. It's not Muslims moving in next door, it's the possibility that it might happen.

It's not so much that, like the angry citizens of South Park proclaimed: "Dey took er jerbs!!!" Rather it's that they're over there down the road, and soon they'll be here. This form of racism and white supremacy is manifested in the mind of the white racist as a lamentation for the despoiling of a once great white hope. America is under attack because whiteness is under attack. And who better to blame than the non-white?

Trump, Brexit, and the Politics of 'White Genocide'

Perhaps one of the most effective levers for mobilizing the white racist vote is the meme that has been popularized by fascists—be they of the hooded klansman or the Alt-Right variety—of 'white genocide'. This idea is multiform as it can take any number of iterations. For some white supremacists, 'white genocide' is a conspiracy theory that refers to the literal extermination of whites through immigration, miscegenation, abortion, and other means. However, it can also be used in a broader and more loosely defined sense as simply the process by which non-whites integrate into, and alter the character of, white European and Anglo-American society.

Recently, the well-known leftist academic George Ciccariello-Maher became the victim of an online smear campaign waged by white nationalists and their supremacist allies after he tweeted a satirical comment which read "All I want for Christmas is white genocide." The tweet, which was intended as a humorous jab at the lunacy of the very notion of white genocide, instead created a media firestorm after hundreds of social media users issued threats against Ciccariello-Maher, his family, and his employer Drexel University.

While it may seem a minor social media hullabaloo, the incident actually cuts to the very core of Trumpism: white identity. For it is only in opposition to the corrupting forces of multiculturalism and diversity that the white identity is constructed. There is relatively little that unites the Irish-Catholic

in New York City with the rural Baptist in the South or the Methodist in the Midwest, except for their whiteness, the feeling that they are on the same side in a struggle for survival. Put another way, it is only through the shared delusion of white oppression that something akin to white entitativity—White America as a distinct group—is even possible.

Of course, this phenomenon is not relegated solely to the U.S. In Britain, 2016 saw the Brexit referendum which many interpreted not as a vote on membership in the European Union, but rather as a referendum on immigration. Indeed, according to The Migration Observatory at Oxford University, at least 77 percent of Britons believe immigration levels should be reduced, with roughly 45 percent of respondents ranking immigration/race relations at the top of the list of important issues—this was up from near zero percent 20 years ago.

In Britain, just as in the US, it is whiteness that is under assault, and it's the sense of loss of dominance and control that is driving so much of the white anger. And in Britain, just as in the US, that sense of loss of power is manifested in the slogans attached the movement. Where for Trump it was "Make America Great Again" for Nigel Farage and the Brexit supporters it was "Take Back Control."

With both slogans there is the obvious reactionary quality, the sense that the past was glorious and that if only it could be recaptured things would go back to the way they were. And while both slogans are ostensibly positive, the subtext is clearly one of racism and jingoism. For white Britons, "control" was embodied by the British Empire with its dominion over so much of the world. To "take back control" is to recapture the lost glory, to rekindle the flame. Similarly in the US, making America great again is not a far cry from saying "Make America White Again" as Trumpistas reminisce about the good old days when men were men and 'Coloreds' entered through the rear.

Once again these interrelated campaigns are rooted in white identity masked as patriotism. For Trumpistas, America is, by its very definition, white, and any attempts to make it anything else are seen as an existential threat. For Brexiters, national identity, as distinct from that of continental Europe and the EU, was the crux of the issue. But when one probes what exactly that national identity is, it becomes clear that the rocky island off the northwestern coast of Europe has its island status rooted in its self-conception: Britain, the island standing against the human tide.

As Dr. Tim Haughton, Head of the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham incisively noted, "'Take back control' effectively combined not just a sense of a positive future albeit never defined or elaborated, but also suggested a sense of rightful ownership."

Precisely. It is the sense of ownership that is really at issue on both sides of the Atlantic. For Trump and Brexit

supporters, it is the white Anglo-European who ‘owns’ the country, and all the brown and black skinned people are mere infiltrators whose very presence taints and despoils the pristine nation.

This very same phenomenon is replaying itself over and over all across Europe. Perhaps the most ominous such development is the steady rise of Marine Le Pen and the National Front in France. According to many political experts, including French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, Le Pen will likely go to a runoff in the May 2017 presidential election where she could prove to be the culmination of the same process that brought us Brexit and Trump. And with Le Pen, whose fascist pedigree is well known both inside and outside France, the notion of white identity as the basis for a political movement will become a hard, inescapable reality.

Similarly, in Russia the fascist philosopher-cum-political operator Alexander Dugin has become a mainstream figure as he promotes his brand of fascism in Russia and throughout Europe and the U.S. Using powerful state-sponsored media platforms such as RT and Sputnik, Dugin has propagated his so-called “Eurasianist” vision throughout the West. In Dugin’s worldview, it is liberalism and multiculturalism that have corrupted contemporary life with their slavish devotion to modernity and secular liberal values, and only a reconstituted Russian Empire that would fuse together much of Northern Eurasia (with China noticeably absent) into one “civilizational” unit can provide a viable future.

A fundamental feature of Dugin’s Eurasianist vision is the fact that it is racially segregated. According to Duginists, there is a natural order to the world wherein Blacks stay in Africa, Arabs in the Middle East and so on in what amounts to a form of global apartheid. Duginism appropriates left wing economic and political ideas such as anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism within a fascist socio-cultural framework. And, at the core of that ideology is white supremacy and white identity.

Trump, Farage, Le Pen, and Dugin all appeal to a sense of loss of identity. In fact, it’s undeniably their most effective position. But it must be clarified, and shouted from the mountaintops, that it is not simply a loss of national identity as many movement supporters, and political analysts alike, would have you believe. Rather, it is the loss of a white national identity that is at the root.

And so Trump, like his British and European analogues, has ridden a wave of momentum of white identity politics masquerading as pro-working class, pro-social safety net, anti-free trade, etc. But these are mere political chimeras, designed more for their reality TV appeal than ideological substance. In effect, Trump’s appeal was to the white working class on racial lines; his purported position on the social safety net programs mere political posturing whose subtext was really that it’s not going to be lazy blacks and “illegals” who will get their government benefits, it will be hard

working whites.

It is almost painful, and certainly embarrassing, to have to explain that this has become the political reality in 2016, but it has. The rising tide of fascism under its many guises is unifying behind the concept of white supremacy or, as Alt-Right svengali Richard Spencer has called it, “racialism.” And, in the US, Donald Trump has managed to transform white identity into a political framework in a way that very few had thought possible.

So we must return to the question of the historian as fishmonger and chef. Yes, it’s true that the ingredients have been collected, the water brought to a boil, the apron and hat impeccably clean. And yet, there is that stench, that overwhelming, vomit-inducing putrid odor. So, what to do? Mask it with fancy spices, a good white wine, and some pungent herbs? Certainly it seems that’s what the lazy and inept chef might do.

Are our analysts and historians equally lazy? Will they mask the stench of racism, xenophobia and white supremacy behind wave after wave of sweet-smelling, but ultimately inauthentic, narratives of anti-neoliberal reaction and working class resurgence? Or will they instead write the real history of this moment, in all its complexity?

If it is to be the latter, then we must demand that the history of this moment be the documentation of a radical rightward shift in U.S. politics. Not because a right-wing Republican is in office, but because the far right has captured political, social, and cultural legitimacy. And white identity politics has been their vehicle.

Naturally, the Mussolini of Midtown will come and go with the structures of oppression and power intact, and indeed expanded in both scope and scale. But the movement that has congealed around him will live on long after he’s ridden into the gold-encrusted sunset of his dreams. So too will the now fully formed socio-political concept of white identity.

This new chapter of struggle is much bigger than Trump, though he is undoubtedly the largest and orangest head on the hydra. This is now one of the defining political struggles of our lifetime.

And as our fishmonger-historian sits down to write the history of this period, what will he say? Will he record the story of the History of the Decline and Fall of the American Empire with The Donald as our Nero, tweeting while it all burns? Or will this be a story of redemption as millions of people from around the world came together to defend the oppressed, the marginalized, the exploited, and smash incipient fascism?

I suppose it will be up to us, the actors in this tragicomedy, to determine that. **CP**

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Twenty-first Century Almshouses

America's Homeless Children

BY RICHARD SCHWEID

Almost three million children in the U.S. will experience homelessness during 2017. They will sleep with their families in cars parked on out-of-the-way streets, in cheap motel rooms, or doubled and tripled up in the homes of relatives or friends. Many will be forced to find shelter in modern-day almshouses. This appalling fact did not even merit a mention from either candidate in the recent presidential election.

Most Americans think of almshouses as historical oddities from past centuries, but today every city in the United States has one, and they are full of mothers and children with nowhere else to go. Nowadays, congregate housing for the desperately poor goes by the name of “emergency shelter”, rather than “almshouse”, but it doesn’t take much observation to conclude that the two are basically one and the same. Today, homeless adults and children are warehoused together in dubious conditions, just as they were three hundred years ago when almshouses first began to appear in numbers. Studies consistently show that the children in these shelters are at greater risk of physical and mental illnesses than their housed peers.

It is true that conditions in our twenty-first century almshouses are better than they were in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century congregate housing for the poor. In 2017’s emergency family shelters, children will not be in danger of dying from croup, or consumption, or of being taken from their families and apprenticed to work for strangers; the modern shelters have flush toilets, shower facilities, hot running water, and electricity. Today’s almshouses are a step up from those in Colonial America. But, it is an awfully small step considering that nearly three hundred years have passed.

Just ask Cherelle Gibson (name changed at her request). I did, and she told me that the night before we spoke she had not slept well at the Family Life Center, Nashville, Tennessee’s largest emergency shelter for homeless families. It was her third week in residence there with her three children. “We’re in a dormitory with seven other families. There’s at least two kids in each family. There’s bunk beds and cribs. There must be twenty-five or thirty of us.

“Most of the time we sleep all right, but sometimes it’s hard to sleep. I didn’t sleep too good last night. Every now and then you’ll have a baby crying whose mom won’t get up and leave the room, she’ll just lie there, like, ‘I’m not getting up, I don’t feel like it’, and her and the kid will stay in the room. That’s what happened last night, and I didn’t get much sleep.”

The need for emergency family shelters like the Family Life Center is growing annually in many cities. In 2003,

more than a million children experienced homelessness at some time during the year in the United States. By 2015, the number was put at 2.5 million, and that is generally conceded to be an under-count. On a given night in January 2015, more than 190,000 people in homeless families were in emergency shelters, according to the National Alliance To End Homelessness. Many of the nation’s shelters are completely full, unable to satisfy demand.

Who are all these homeless families? Fifty years ago, the word “homeless” signified dysfunctional individuals—mostly men—who drank heavily and slept rough. Now, it is more likely to mean a young single mother with small children and a minimum-wage job. In 1980, families with children made up only one percent of the nation’s homeless, and by 2014 that number was thirty-seven percent of the total and rising, according to the National Center on Family Homelessness.

Cherelle Gibson’s partner served in the military, and she followed him from Cleveland, Ohio to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. After he was sent overseas, she found herself in Nashville with a new minimum-wage warehouse job, but she could not find a place she could afford to rent in boomtown Nashville for herself and her three children. She turned to the Family Life Center. It was the first time she had ever brought her family to a shelter.

Cherelle had been living on her own, and independent, since she was eighteen. She was a short, attractive, thirty-four-year-old African-American with a round face, and lively dark eyes who looked younger than her age. Although she was grateful for a clean place to stay, she didn’t like having to live by someone else’s rules. “They start serving supper at five, and you have to have your plate by 5:45, or you don’t eat. I get back from work at five-thirty, so I have to scramble to get us all fed,” she told me. “At six-thirty they have roll call and announcements in the chapel, and at seven you have an hour of religion. So I have between five-thirty and six-thirty to eat and shower and get to chapel. It’s really rush, rush, rush.”

Like Cherelle, the vast majority of families experience homelessness for economic reasons. They simply cannot afford market-value rents. Studies indicate that many homeless families given a minimum of rental assistance to get back in housing are likely to stay housed, and be able to assume the rent after the subsidies run out. This strategy has been used to successfully reduce the numbers of homeless families in places as different as Trenton, New Jersey and Fairfax, Virginia.

The strategy of rapidly rehousing homeless families can be effective in keeping them out of shelters, but it requires a stock of affordable rentals, which is often in short supply. Try finding a two-bedroom apartment in Boston or New York or Nashville that is affordable on a minimum-wage salary, even if you don’t need to pay for daycare. In 2014, a person who spent the federally recommended thirty percent of her



Homeless mother and children, Fernand Pelez, 1883.

income on rent had to earn \$18.92 an hour to pay fair market rental on a two-bedroom apartment in any city in the United States, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, an increase of fifty-two percent since 2000.

In July 2008, to address the national shortage of affordable housing Congress passed the Housing and Economic Recovery Act. Among its provisions was the establishment of a National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) to create affordable housing, which was to receive its funding from a tiny fraction of the mortgage loans financed by federal lenders, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The legislation was passed amidst the Great Recession and the meltdown of the housing market, so the funding provision was suspended. The two lending entities shortly returned to profitability, but funding remained suspended.

New business activity for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in 2012 was approximately \$1.4 trillion, according to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Under the legislation, approximately \$382 million of that amount would have gone to the NHTF that year. Congress declined to lift the funding suspension. Conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation urged Congress to “keep the housing spigot turned off,” and legislative efforts were made each session to eliminate the Fund.

Nevertheless, in December 2014, the suspension was finally lifted, and money began flowing into the Trust Fund, with the first distribution of block grants to the states scheduled for 2016. The states will then award it locally, with at least eighty percent of the money dedicated to rental housing for extremely poor people. It can be used to build new housing,

renovate old housing, or subsidize rentals. A number of other proposals have been put forth to generate monies for the NHTF with little or no cost to the taxpayer.

However, it’s a pretty good bet that the Trump administration, guided by the new Department of Housing and Urban Development secretary Ben Carson, will do all it can to eliminate the NHTF, and make sure none of the other proposed programs ever come online. In February 2016, Tea Party darling Carson told a South Carolina town hall meeting: “My stance is that we the people have the responsibility to take care of the indigent in our society. It’s not the government’s job.”

Millions of children in our country are unnecessarily suffering hardships and levels of toxic stress that should not be borne by kids. Children in the United States should not have to live in almshouses, or motel rooms, or their cars. Some few of these children, through hard work, focus, and good luck, will grow up to pull themselves out of deep poverty, while most will never have an opportunity to do so. In towns and cities across the nation, various studies are commissioned, ten-year plans to end family homelessness drawn up, and municipal committees formed to implement the plans. All the while a huge pool of desperately poor families, unmatched since the Great Depression grows ever larger, a vast floodtide of people adrift with nothing to which they can hold, sliding toward the bottom and taking their children with them. **CP**

RICHARD SCHWEID’s latest book is *Invisible Nation: Homeless Families in America*.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Get the Frack Out of Pennsylvania

BY LEE BALLINGER

“Accidents of geology, larger than history, older than scripture: continents colliding, seas encroaching and receding, peat bogs incubating their treasures like a vast subterranean kiln. In the time before recorded time, Pennsylvania was booby-trapped.”—from Jennifer Haigh’s novel *Heat and Light*

At the conclusion of Sydney Pollack’s 1975 classic thriller *Three Days of the Condor*, a CIA honcho played by Cliff Robertson lectures a CIA whistleblower played by Robert Redford, telling him that when it gets cold and dark the American people will want the government to get them heat and light by any means necessary. Now that we are living in that future, it’s obvious the American people have not given carte blanche to the government. Instead, there is fierce debate over how we should obtain our energy.

That debate is a big part of Jennifer Haigh’s fifth novel, *Heat and Light* (Ecco), an epic tale of both smalltown American life and the devastation caused by fracking. On page four, Haigh unveils the spirit of what’s to come in a trio of quick rimshots.

* “More than most places, Pennsylvania is what lies beneath.”

* A wooden tower that crowned the state’s first oil rig: “The tower resembled a hangman’s gallows.”

* The inherent violence of the men who control the oil and gas industry: “Before he shot the president, John

Wilkes Booth came to Petrolia and drilled a duster.”

Haigh sets her story in the town of Bakerton, which is a fictional place but one she knows like the back of her hand. She grew up in the western Pennsylvania town of Barnesboro, a coal town northeast of Pittsburgh. Haigh has seen much of what she describes—the good life of a semi-suburbia powered by union jobs and steady work and then the empty pot at the end of that rainbow—the closing of the mines, widespread unemployment, and a ravaged tax base.

Her literary inventions ring true—a meth epidemic, a new prison that saw five hundred people line up for sixty jobs and is already twenty per cent over capacity, a palpable sense of doom (“the foregone conclusion that every worthwhile thing has already happened.”) A stunning variety of characters, from prison guard to the CEO of Dark Elephant Energy, from barfly to farmer to adulterous pastor, are introduced, fully fleshed out and then seamlessly connected, giving the reader a tangible feeling of actually living in Bakerton.

The imperfect ways of dealing with local life—church, bars, watching television, sex, drugs, and rock & roll are presented with an empathetic skepticism. Each may offer temporary relief but no escape from the reality of being boxed in.

Rural Pennsylvania doesn’t fascinate the world, not generally. But cyclically, periodically, its innards are of interest. Bore it, strip it, set it on fire. A burnt offering to the collective need.

Fracking is the latest in a long line of Pennsylvania abuses of nature and people—coal, oil, steel, mushroom farming, Three Mile Island (“Of the six thousand indicators on the

control panel, seven hundred fifty are alarms”). Haigh presents fracking as unwanted in-laws, always underfoot, always causing problems—the visceral, constant attack of the noise of the rigs, the stealthy encroachments of poisoned water, the choices that emerge—turning your land over to the tender mercies of the fossil fuel industry, risking your life on a drill rig to feed your family, a restaurant refusing to buy milk from a farm whose land is being fracked.

There are no soft jobs on a drill rig. A mud motor weighs six hundred pounds. The hoisting system uses steel rope. The men yank and drag and push and pull. Twelve hours a day they hump and heave. Some work injured, numbed by painkillers. After twelve hours they’d rather sleep than drink or eat or talk to their families. With a few youthful exceptions, they would rather sleep than fuck.

Heat and Light is notable for the way it casts the rig workers who actually do the fracking, all from out of town, as victims right along with the locals.

The easiest way to kill yourself is simply missing a step,” Haigh writes. “He has seen up close what a three-story fall can do to a body. He’d do anything to wipe that picture from his mind.....It’s a truth most people never have to learn, that the human body is simply a bag of blood.

With all the problems fracking creates in *Heat and Light*, a local movement against it inevitably emerges and Haigh uses the device of an activist professor to get across basic facts:

A million gallons of water pumped into the ground at unimaginably high pressure...Fracking fluid isn’t just water. It’s mixed with sand and

whatever chemical cocktail they think is going to work.

Yet that same professor also puts limits on thinking about what's possible, admitting defeat by saying "Our role is to raise questions, Cassandra sounding the alarm. That's all we can do."

Actually, we can do a lot more than raise questions, as the battle over oil and water at Standing Rock has shown. Dave Archambault II, tribal chief of the Standing Rock Sioux, described one of the obstacles to getting to that point in a recent interview with Wesley Elliot: "It's really hard to not think about yourself, because you're struggling, you're trying to survive for yourself. It creates individual interest."

It's individual interest that drives much of what takes place in *Heat and Light*—the stress over who gets a job, how much someone gets for their drilling rights, the confusion and prejudice that surfaces in a town that's disintegrating.

Archambault explains the mindset necessary to overcome that: "You have to say I'm not worried about myself any more, I'm worried about what's going to happen in a hundred years, and what I do today, can that make a difference for those children and their children who aren't even born yet, and are they going to have a world to live on."

The defense of water at Standing Rock shows that those fine sentiments are far from abstract and, as it turns out, that mindset is alive and well in *Heat and Light* country, but not in the form of fiction. For instance, there's Grant Township (population 700), in Indiana County, Pennsylvania, which has been fighting for the past three years to prevent the use of injection wells in the township. Such wells, which pump fracking wastewater into the ground, corrupt the local water table while spreading cancer-causing chemicals (by federal law, fracking companies do not have to reveal what chemicals they use). Injection wells have also been linked to earthquakes in several states.

We're tired of being told by corporations and our so-called environmental regulatory agencies that we can't stop this injection well!" says township supervisor Stacy Long. "We're being threatened by a corporation with a history of permit violations, and that corporation wants to dump toxic frack wastewater into our Township.

The corporation in question, Pennsylvania General Energy Company (PGE), sued Grant Township in 2014 to overturn a law that banned the use of injection wells. In the lawsuit, PGE

How do we embrace a vision that goes beyond ourselves? How can we be more than victims?

claims it has a right to inject fracking wastewater within the Township and argues that the local Community Bill of Rights ordinance is unconstitutional because it violates the corporate "person's" civil rights sanctified by the Supreme Court in its 2010 *Citizens United* decision.

In October 2015, a judge invalidated parts of the local law, saying that the Township went beyond its authority in banning injection wells. In November 2015, residents responded by voting to change the form of local government by adopting a Home Rule Charter. The ban on injection wells was reinstated; the PGE suit against Grant Township is still ongoing.

In May 2016, Grant Township supervisors passed a first-in-the-nation law which says that if the courts fail to protect the community, the people have the right to enforce their Charter

through nonviolent direct action. The ordinance also prohibits "any private or public actor from bringing criminal charges or filing any civil or other criminal action against those participating in nonviolent direct action."

Grant Township isn't just fighting back, it's struggling to work out a vision of a different future, one that isn't about a maze of regulations which may at best possibly reduce harm, but a future under a banner of "do no harm at all."

Chad Nicholson, Pennsylvania organizer for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, described to me the questions being raised in Grant Township as "Do we have to put another energy system in place? What would a sustainable energy system look like? What if we put our tax dollars into something new?"

Grant Township is not alone. Over the past ten years, over two hundred communities in ten states have enacted laws which allow localities to make their own decisions in the face of corporate plunderers. The pushback to such laws from the energy industry often comes in the form of new state laws--in some cases written by the corporations themselves--which block any move to prevent oil and gas extraction. Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, currently running for governor, unilaterally removed anti-fracking citizen-sponsored initiatives that were already on county ballots in 2015 and then did it again in 2016 with the approval of the Ohio Supreme Court.

When asked what the movement for community rights will look like in five years, Nicholson replied that it will likely expand beyond environmental concerns to issues such as police accountability and the right of communities to define themselves as immigrant sanctuaries.

As we move into 2017, the Home Rule charter in Grant Township is still the law of the land there. "The stakes are high," Chad Nicholson says, noting that "there is the possibility of lawsuits

against individual elected officials. The Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas Association has threatened to have criminal charges filed if they can find district attorneys who will do it.” Finding compliant DAs will probably not prove difficult. Pennsylvania and New York have already allowed their Attorneys General to assist corporations in suing local communities which disobey laws which get in the way of corporations.

This is war and, as Grant Township Supervisor Jon Perry says:

Sides need to be picked. Should a polluting corporation have the right to inject toxic waste, or should a community have the right to protect itself?

Picking sides gives us a chance to find a solid place to stand, regroup, and keep our heads above the rising waters that threaten to engulf us. As Ron Rash, professor of Appalachian cultural studies at Western Carolina University, writes in a November 18 *New York Times* op-ed piece:

In a year dominated by political frenzy, the water crisis in Flint, Mich., was one of the few stories to grab the headlines away from the presidential race. A handwritten warning posted above a drinking fountain became a national disgrace.

Yet how many Americans know or care that a similar ‘do not drink the water’ warning is above every drinking fountain in the Knott County Opportunity Center in Kentucky, which houses a community college, a Head Start program and the county library—and that the warning has been necessary for a decade?

Rash then connects the dots: “...At a time of such national divisiveness, Americans can find common ground in demanding safe drinking water for all of our citizens. The warning signs remain posted in the rural, almost totally white Kentucky city of

Hindman, but the signs also remain up in the largely black Michigan city of Flint. Hindman and Flint are united in their misery. Perhaps safe drinking water can be one of the first issues around which we can begin to reunify our fragmented nation.”

This provides one answer to the questions raised by Jennifer Haigh and Dave Archambault II: How do we embrace a vision that goes beyond ourselves? How can we be more than victims? What can we do? It turns out that there’s a lot. For more information, just Google “Standing Rock” or check out the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund at celdf.org. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER’S new book, *Love and War: My First Thirty Years of Writing*, is available as a free download at loveandwarbook.com. You can listen to his podcast on YouTube at Love and War Podcast.

Seeing John Berger

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

When I was told that John Berger had died, an image flashed in my mind of a painting on a vast canvas I had stood captivated before a few years ago in the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. A crowd is gathered before a small grave in the jaundiced light of a winter afternoon. The people huddle together in grief, as if braced against a chill wind. The ground is hard, stony. A dog, perhaps the deceased peasant’s, stands at the edge of the pit, mournful eyes trained on the viewer. The white cliffs of the Jura breach the hazy horizon, marking the place, fixing the point-of-view as finitely as any Google map.

The painting, of course, is Gustave Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans*. Though Courbet spent six months executing the painting, the scene feels immediate. It also seems as if it took a lifetime to conceive. A death which reveals the life

of a poor village, a community knit together across decades of work, joy and tragedy. It is easy to imagine Berger’s body being lowered into such a hand-dug grave, attended by such people and animals, in the weak winter light of rural France.

John Berger wrote the way Courbet painted, only quicker. His writing is direct, naturalistic, as vivid as a conversation between friends or lovers. Berger didn’t explain or explicate the meaning of paintings or photographs. He described his own response to them, a response we related to because we trusted the experience of the voice speaking to us. We trusted Berger’s experience as a living being, a being who had lived and reflected endlessly on the experience of life. Berger didn’t demand that we see art the way he did, but through the lens of our own lives, a lens that he helped to focus.

I met John Berger in 2001 through my old pal Saul Landau. As usual with Saul, our rendezvous spot was an old bar on the edge of Chinatown. The first thing I noticed about Berger were his hands, riven with scars and callouses, nails cracked and embedded with dirt, fingers permanently stained by the ink of fountain pens. These were hands that had worked the ground and the page. Hands as comfortable rooting for truffles as they were assessing sculpted marble, hands that had castrated hogs and penned villanelles.

Our lunch talk ranged widely, from the situation in Gaza to melting glaciers, from the photos of Robert Capa to the paintings of Francis Bacon. I made a deprecating remark about the paucity of interesting art in a city as wealthy and self-consciously aesthete as San Francisco. Rising from his stool, Berger shot back tartly: “Nonsense, Jeffrey, fresh art is all around you, but apparently you still don’t know where to look. Let’s go see.” He drained his Anchor Steam Ale, slammed the mug on the table and ventured off into the fog, striding toward the Tenderloin, eyes scanning every wall. **CP**

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BERNIE & THE SANDERNISTAS Field Notes From a Failed Revolution JEFFREY ST. CLAIR



“A brilliant exposition of how Bernie led his Sandernistas up a garden path to nowhere. A blistering, infuriating, and totally engrossing read.”

**— Andrew Cockburn,
author *Kill Chain***

Bernie Sanders promised a Revolution, a promise that was seized upon with an almost religious fervor by a new generation of political activists, a generation raised with smart phones and terror alerts, a generation burdened by debt and facing dim economic prospects. Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of the political journal CounterPunch, called Bernie's raucous band of followers The Sandernistas, as they pitched themselves for battle against one of the most brutal political operations of the modern era, the Clinton machine. Ridiculed by the media and dismissed as a nuisance by the political establishment, the Sanders campaign shocked Clinton in a state after state, exposing the deep structural fissures in the American electorate. Ultimately the Sanders campaign faltered, undone by the missteps of its leader and by sabotage from the elites of the Democratic Party. By the time the Senator gave his humiliating concession speech at the convention in Philadelphia, even his most ardent supporters jeered him in disgust and walked out, taking their protests back to the streets. This turbulent year of mass revolt and defeat is recounted here, as it happened, by one of America's fiercest and most acerbic journalists.

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