

# CounterPunch

RENDERING UNTO AIPAC: A BRIEF TOUR THROUGH THE ISRAELI LOBBY BY JEFF BLANKFORT

THE JURY IS OUT: CLASS POLITICS AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BY LEE BALLINGER

THE EYES OF MOTOROLA BY DARWIN BOND-GRAHAM

RACE, PRIVILEGE AND ADOPTION BY RUTH FOWLER

MINIMUM RAGE BY KRISTIN KOLB



# CounterPunch

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**COVER IMAGE:**  
**The Hand of AIPAC**  
**(After Georges de La Tour)**  
**by Nick Roney.**

In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Voce Cockburni

Thanks for the reprint of Alexander Cockburn's piece on the Twin Towers. It reminded me of how much I miss his voice.

*Kirk Hill*

## On Israel and Zionism

I studied at the American University of Beirut in the late 1950's and had as friends and roommates Palestinian kids who still remembered their family's dispossession of house and grounds. None of them ever expressed a hatred of Jews, something I was very wary of because I survived the war occupation of Holland with personal loss. They did however condemn the occupation of Palestine and rightly saw the policies of the US and Europe as neo-colonialist. Almost all without exception were superb students and one of my closest Palestinian friends wound up as a nuclear physicist in London.

When I visited Israel in 1968 I was appalled at the hatred and revulsion shown by Israelis of the Arabs, calling them dirty (and that while orthodox Jews smelled in the summer heat, while the Moslem Arabs bathed and cleaned themselves before every prayer) and how one could not trust any Arab (and that while I never encountered more honest people than my fellow students, while I was ripped off several times in Tel Aviv).

I hope to read Max Blumenthal's book (based

on Joshua Frank's interview) because I strongly feel that very tragically Zionists have learned from and adopted Nazi methods to establish and justify a pure Jewish homeland, Eretz Israel. Nothing good can ever come from their self-created ghetto.

*In solidarity,  
Gui Rochat*

## Stop the Madness

I just read Ralph Nader's terrific piece on Fukushima. It had me a little worried for awhile, especially since the US has so many aging reactors in vulnerable locations. But then I relaxed, confident that Obama will stop this nuclear madness in his third term.

*Michael Leonardi  
Toledo, Ohio*

## The Center Cannot Hold

In his article "When Iraq Unravels", Mr. Levine says "That Iraq would be torn asunder was not quite so clear." For a man in his position, Mr. Levine should feel embarrassed making such a naive statement. You don't need to be an expert to know that Iraq was an artificial country created to be a Sunni dominated counterweight to Iran, and Iraq's Sunnis were just a minority population. The only way to hold such a country together is with some kind of authoritarian regime, and that's how it was for about 85 years after WWI. I have no love for Saddam Hussein, but our great foreign policy experts and journalists should have at least

considered it probable, if not a certainty, that Iraq would fly apart if the central authority in Baghdad was destroyed. It's their job to know these things. Unfortunately, I'm sure their main concern was expanding the American Empire.

*Sincerely,  
Louis Radovich*

## Hey, Joe

Dear CounterPunch, I wrote this letter to old Joe Scarborough the other day. But he never wrote me back. Perhaps you can find a way to bring this to his attention.

"Dear Mr. Scarborough: Yes of course President Eisenhower gave us the Eisenhower Highways. You were marveling this morning at this amazing Republican president who just did a wonderful thing for our country by giving us a fabulous contribution to our infrastructure. You failed to mention, however, where he got the funds for this project. He took money from Social Security. Of course he was a Republican, and as a Republican could hardly stand to see money given back to the "great unwashed." You know how awful it is to know that the "entitlement" programs give money to John Q. Citizen, a bum you wouldn't even invite to a cocktail party.

Your program gets here very, very early; and I don't see much of it what with getting the dog taken care of,

and making sue my daughter remembers to take her lunch, and of course going to a local channel because I'm wondering just how bad the weather is going to be. Still every time I happen to surf your direction, you are pontificating on something that sort of slides diagonally by the truth. Is your entire program that way or am I just lucky?" Most sincerely,  
Prudence Kuhn  
Ogden, Utah

## Hit Me One More Time

One of the things I admire most about CounterPunch is that you're not always harassing your readers for money. Some progressive media outlets seem to be pleading for money once a month. It gets so tiresome. That said, I think you guys are too uptight about raising funds. It can't be easy to keep your operation running on only one fundraiser a year? Especially when you don't sell ads. And I can't imagine you get much foundation support given some of your, well, opinions. So loosen up and hit us up more than once. We can take it. By the way, I really liked Kristin Kolb's last few columns. She and Wypijewski write circles around most of the boys. Keep it up girls!

*Katerina Martin  
Fallon, Nevada*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# Cry Me a River

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

A couple of weeks before Thanksgiving Mike Roselle decided he'd had enough. Enough of the toxic dust in the air. Enough of the constant blasting that rattles his small house. Enough of the poisoned well-water. Enough of the chopped mountains and buried streams. Enough of the forests, playgrounds and cemeteries plowed under for one more suppurating coal mine. Enough of seeing his friends sicken and die in the West Virginia county that has the highest mortality rate in the US.

That November morning Roselle, the John Brown of the environmental movement, took a drive with his friend James McGuinnis up roads wash-boarded by the ceaseless transit of coal trucks to Kayford Mountain. What used to be a mountain, anyway. Much of that ancient Appalachian hump has been stripped, blasted and gouged away by the barbarous mining method called Mountaintop Removal. Roselle's mission was straightforward. He aimed to collect some of the dust, the pulverized guts of the mountain, that showers down on the nearby towns and villages, streams and lakes, day after day, like deadly splinters from the sky.

Roselle scooped up a few pounds of that lethal dirt in a couple of Mason jars. He wanted to have the debris tested. He wanted to know what toxins it contained. Lead? Arsenic? Mercury? Who really knows. The mining companies aren't saying. Neither is the EPA.

Roselle got it into his head to take the mining dust to the one person in the state who might be able to give him some answers, to assure the folks who live under the desolated shadow of Kayford Mountain that there was no cause for alarm, the man who was charged with protecting the citizens of West Virginia from harm, the Solon of

the Monongahela, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin. On Thanksgiving morning, Roselle went to Charleston with his jar of dust. He walked right up to the Governor's mansion and rang the doorbell.

Earl Ray is what you might call a life-long politician. A Democrat, Tomblin was elected to the West Virginia senate fresh out of college in 1974. He has held public office ever since. Across those four decades, Earl Ray has been a dutiful servant of Big Coal. Every time a waste dam breached, or an explosion of coal gases maimed and killed some miners, Tomblin would be there to offer his comfort. Consolation to the afflicted coal executives, that is. His administration has repeatedly sued the EPA on behalf of coal companies, citing its "ideologically driven, job-killing agenda." And he has assured the mountain people of West Virginia that the coal dust fog that shrouds their communities is safe to breathe, eat or drink.

Then Mike Roselle showed up on Tomblin's doorstep to make the governor prove it. Roselle had slipped a note inside the jar asking the governor to test the dust and report back to him on what it contained. But a few seconds after he pressed the doorbell, Roselle was surrounded by a dozen State Police officers, guns drawn. Roselle was swiftly arrested. He was not told why, apparently because the cops couldn't find a section of the state code that Roselle had transgressed.

As they drove him to jail, the cops simply said they "had orders to bring him in." But orders from whom? Over course of the next six days Roselle was kept jailed without charges, including three days inside the Hole. Why? Because Roselle had refused food until they could inform him of the charges

against him. Then, suddenly, he was released on a mere signature bond.

A few weeks after Roselle walked out of jail, a storage tank at a chemical "farm" owned by Freedom Industries ruptured and a stream of a licorice-smelling crude began pouring onto the ground and into the nearby Elk River, the primary drinking water source for Charleston. The chemical that contaminated Charleston's water supply, forcing 300,000 to go without drinking water, was a compound called MCHM (4-methylcyclohexylmethanol), used in the processing of coal. Freedom Industries detected the leak early in the morning of January 9th, but never alerted state authorities. Hours passed before any attempt was made to stem its flow. In that time, more than 300 people were sickened by the fouled water.

As for Governor Tomblin, he took pains to reassure everyone the spill had absolutely nothing to do with the coal industry. "This was not a coal company incident. This was a chemical company incident. As far as I know there was no coal company within miles." Apparently, Tomblin was unaware of the fact that nearly all of Freedom Industries' contracts were with the state's coal industry and that one of the company's top executives, J. Clifford Forrest, is also the president of Rosebud Mining, a Pennsylvania coal company, which was recently sued for illegally giving advance warnings to mine managers of impending safety inspections by regulators.

On the afternoon of the Elk River spill, state legislators were meant to convene in the capitol building for a special session geared at passing a resolution denouncing the "war on coal." But the statehouse was evacuated before the great debate could take place, with lawmakers scrambling out the exits, coats over their heads, in a vain attempt to shield their lungs from the sickly-sweet smell of MCHM.

And to this day no one in West Virginia is quite sure whatever happened to Mike Roselle's jar of dust. **CP**





## DIAMONDS AND RUST

# High and Low in Scottsdale

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

Every winter the PGA Tour's biggest party rolls into the desert in Scottsdale, Arizona. Under normal rules of the universe, Scottsdale wouldn't support grassy lawns, let alone golf, let alone a tournament that draws the largest audiences in the world – about a half-million people. Many are tourists, and so, in addition to trekking over a publicly subsidized golf complex that has lost more than \$25 million across 25 years, they stay in hotels, hence generating laundry, taking showers, leaving trash, flushing toilets. Water, more water and refuse: welcome to the Waste Management Phoenix Open.

Here is the perfect marriage of late American industry, pastime and aesthetic, just one big mess gussied up in the language of progress and taste. It couldn't have found a more apt home than Scottsdale, a town too pretentious to be simply absurd.

Unlike Las Vegas, where the canals are under trompe l'oeil skies and gondoliers steer fun-seekers in air-conditioned comfort, Scottsdale grew up in a place with a tradition of water. That was ages before it was Scottsdale, though, before even one white man set foot on the land, when the ancient farmers of the Hohokam civilization built a spectacular network of irrigation canals from about 300 BC until they were done in, probably by drought, around 1450.

Boosters of Scottsdale don't think much about the Hohokam; don't think much about history either except as a bit of architectural filigree. Fred Unger, the developer of the downtown "waterfront," opposite luxury condos and office towers, spent ten years gazing at pictures on his office wall of Venetian canals, Parisian cafes and Rodeo Drive boutiques before buying up land behind the town's already flourishing art galler-

ies and realizing his dream for a district of specialty shops, restaurants and clubs that have made Scottsdale's canal-side the in-place for in-people. Designer clothes, designer brides' wear, designer cupcakes, facelifts and spa treatments, are all here amid a panoply of establishments where revelers spend more getting fat, getting drunk, getting high, being beautiful. Enthusiasts for Unger's creation tend to speak allusively: *It's like a little piece of Boston, a little piece of Portland, a little piece of Tribeca or Europe right here in Arizona!*

"Excess" is too sedate a word to capture the essence of the place, whose calling card for tourists and would-be residents might as well bear three W's: for whiteness (90 percent), wealth (median family income \$92,289) and weather (average high, 86.3 degrees). Decades before Fred Unger developed his retail Riviera, Scottsdale abandoned its orange grove past and set its course on an economic strategy based on consumption-as-pastime. The result, more five-star hotel/resorts than anywhere but New York and Las Vegas, a portfolio of corporate HQs peddling low-brow indulgence (P.F. Chang's) to marketable violence (Taser), and several mall wars out of which emerged the town's jewel, Scottsdale Fashion Square.

Anchored by Nordstrom's, Neiman Marcus, Dillard's, this 2 million square foot "shopping experience" is one of America's most profitable malls. It's Fifth Avenue meets Galleria: Barney's and Lucky Brand; Kate Spade and Forever 21; Prada and Steve Madden; Bulgari and H&M; Cartier and GUESS. About eight years ago the town's planners decided that housing for workers would be too expensive to develop, so many of the poor sods who serve have long commutes. At least they can shop

on their breaks; this is what democracy looks like.

Meanwhile, the smell of earth and chlorine – bulldozers and swimming pools – suffuses the residential areas prepared for the well healed, as on the fringes or miles away the population of workers who serve them live on the grind. In a Tempe Waffle House I overheard a couple talking about a fellow named Herman, said to have been the top drug dealer in Scottsdale. They didn't say what he was moving; anything's possible. In 2003, earlyish in the luxury boom, a DEA sting yielded almost 3,000 Ecstasy pills, five pounds each of pot and crack, twelve pounds of cocaine, two pounds of meth and 1.5 ounces of heroin.

At Waffle House the woman said she thought people change every five years. Her boyfriend said people don't change; only small things around the edges alter their core selves. Take Herman and his girlfriend, Kelly. In the good days Herman would leave the house with \$3,000 in product and return home with \$18,000 in his pocket. He and Kelly lived large and fast, driving crotch rockets, wearing rocks, doing it up in the clubs. They were skinny and selfish, and as the woman scowled, her boyfriend said, "Hey, that's just how it was, like a movie but ordinary."

Herman and Kelly were on top, thinking life would never change; then it did, but they didn't. Herman split the scene; maybe he went to jail. Kelly got a job at O'Reilly's Auto Parts and started taking in children "for the welfare money" – 'garbage kids,' the man telling the story called them. Kelly fostered one, then another and another – maybe some she adopted. The kids grew up skinny and selfish and fast, too. Herman came round years later, observed them and disapproved. They were everything he had been, and he hated them. He didn't think much of Kelly either, who lost her job at the auto parts shop, lost her looks, had a stroke and is now bitter and alone.

"That's sad," the girlfriend said. "It's life," said her man. **CP**



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## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# The American Way of War

BY CHRIS FLOYD

A recent *New York Times* story featured U.S. Marines telling of their anguish at seeing Fallujah—the Iraqi city they had decimated with such Guernica-like fury in 2004—fall into the hands of al-Qaeda militants. They were stunned at this development; why, it was almost as if the whole enterprise of launching an unprovoked war of aggression that left upwards of a million innocent people dead had all been in vain or something!

In particular, they felt the honor of their noble triumph in Fallujah—where they choked the city in an iron ring, bombarded it for weeks, targeted its medical centers, declared it a “free-fire zone” then attacked it with thousands of troops and chemical weapons—had now been besmirched. The *Times* declared that this display of martial valor had been an “iconic moment” of the war. And now look! The fumigation didn’t work; the bugs were reemerging from the floorboards! Is there no justice in this world?

One feels the warriors’ pain, of course—so much worse than the trifling troubles of the attack’s survivors, left with their piddling grief for the multitudes of innocent dead and the epidemic of birth defects arising from the conquering heroes’ chemical weapons. But I don’t think Fallujah was the war’s most iconic moment. I believe that defining moment arose elsewhere—in the very first days of the invasion. Indeed, it was not only an emblem of the Iraq War; it embodied the very ethos of the American Way, going back many decades—yea, centuries.

Cast your mind back to the glorious dawn of the invasion, when kill-ratios were as high as an elephant’s eye and collateral damage was no BFD. Nine days in, the *Times* published a

report from the front. There, Sgt. Eric Schruppf related his sharpshooting exploits on the road to Baghdad, gunning down fleeing Iraqi soldiers “mixed in” with the hordes of civilians also fleeing the American onslaught. Sometimes, said Sgt. Schruppf, a few of those sadsack civilians would get popped by the hot lead of the invaders. “What do you do?” he shrugged. To illustrate, he told of a time when he and his colleagues were shooting at an Iraqi soldier “standing near” a group of civilians, and he saw a woman go down from their withering fire. “I’m sorry,” Schruppf said, “but the chick was in the way.”

This was the true iconic moment of the war. Here, in the humble words of a humble grunt, we see the intricate complexities of generations of American policy boiled down to its eternal essence, in lines that should be carved in marble on the Pentagon, the White House, and the Capitol Dome: “The Chick Was in the Way.”

The same moral philosophy that sent Sgt. Schruppf to Iraq with a gun in his hand to wade through “chicks” and other bystanders is alive and well today in the righteous actions of America’s doughty defenders. We saw it at work in Afghanistan in mid-January, when a “chick”—and her seven children—got in the way of an American missile during a raid on a residential area in Parwan province. This, despite the repeated demand by the Afghan president that his American patrons refrain from attacking the nation’s villages and slaughtering its civilians. “No way, Jose,” the Americans say. “Just because you were in that movie about Gandhi doesn’t mean we have to listen to you. You work for us—you savvy?” And the raids go on.

Of course, the “Schruppf Doctrine”

is not confined to places where the nation is actually at war; it applies all over the freaking world. The same week the Afghan “chick” and her chicks were fried on America’s Terror War griddle, a farmer in Yemen who committed the heinous crime of walking in his village was blown to pieces by an American drone.

This followed an “incident” a month earlier in which a brave American drone warrior sitting behind a console in well-wadded comfort pushed a button and killed 15 members of a wedding party in Yemen. This, we’re told, was “a signature strike”—one of the primary refinements of the Terror War practice advanced by the Peace Prizer in the White House. Here’s how it works: anyone on the face of the earth who does anything that some drone jockey spying on them from 10,000 miles away thinks might possibly indicate “terrorist activity” can be murdered immediately by said jockey and/or his superiors.

(Because to be fair, sometimes the jockey pushes the button only after a higher-up has decided that some activity or another—like, say, plowing a field, talking to neighbors, or driving to a wedding—merits an immediate, violent, merciless death. Let’s not let the grunts take all the credit! Save some of the glory for the brass! Hell, the Peace Prizer himself picks out targets every week. When will he get his combat medal?)

The name of the game is domination, not democracy. And anyone who “gets in the way”—chick, gook, raghead, squaw—is going down. **CP**



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## GRASPING AT STRAWS

# The Busted Dream

BY MIKE WHITNEY

The American consumer is not dead, but he may be mortally wounded, and that could have a profound effect on the US economy in the years to come.

As you probably know, consumer spending accounts for roughly two-thirds of GDP. But personal consumption has been unusually anemic since the end of the Great Recession. According to economist Stephen Roach at Project Syndicate: “real personal-consumption expenditure has grown at an average annual rate of just 1.1%,” compared to 3.6% before the crisis, which makes it “the weakest period of consumer demand in the post-World War II era.”

Now some analysts believe that the dropoff in consumption is due to household deleveraging, which means that people are still trying to reduce their debts five years after the housing bubble burst. This is a persuasive argument, but I suspect it doesn't completely explain what is going on. What's hurting personal consumption has more to do with expectations than it does with debt.

That might sound like psychobabble, but I assure you, the research backs it up. Consumer spending depends almost entirely on one's view of the future, particularly as it relates to anticipated income.

Unfortunately, many Americans feel deeply uncertain about the future and are not nearly as optimistic as they were before the slump. This is an astonishing development and it has the experts worried. Take a look at this excerpt from a report by the New York Fed:

“The unexplained drag on expectations in the recession has not been unwound. This pattern could imply a permanent downshift in income expectations.... the pessimism of households about their future income is deep and broad based. ... Moreover, the large,

unexplained shock to income expectations might suggest a permanent change in households' views—a phenomenon that would continue to weigh against a recovery in consumer spending.” (“Why Have Americans' Income Expectations Declined So Sharply?”, Federal Reserve)

See? It's all about expectations. But what's this talk about a “permanent change in households' views”?

Could it be that it wasn't really the recession that changed expectations but the way the so called recovery was conducted? After all, policymakers provided unlimited liquidity and bailouts for Wall Street, while ordinary people were left to face harsh belt-tightening measures and a ruthless attack on public services, government workers and vital safety net programs.

University of Michigan economist Richard Curtin, summed it up best in a recent piece titled “Consumer Behavior Adapts to Fundamental Changes in Expectations”. Here's an excerpt:

“I have been reporting on the economic implications of the latest twists and turns in consumer expectations at this conference for nearly four decades. From the heights of expansions to the depths of recessions, consumers had never deserted their bedrock belief that the economy would produce ever increasing levels of affluence. The Great Recession, unlike any other downturn in the past half century, has not only tarnished the American Dream, but has prompted some fundamental changes in consumer expectations and behavior.” (“Consumer Behavior Adapts to Fundamental Changes in Expectations” Economic Outlook Conference November 21, 2013, University of Michigan)

Curtin says “tarnished”, but I would say “dead”. The American Dream is dead. Most Americans no longer believe

that tomorrow will be better than today, or that their children will experience a higher standard of living than their own, or that opportunities abound. Their experience tells them otherwise. Their experience tells them the world has changed. So they've adapted and changed their expectations.

Growing consumer pessimism is apparent in all the surveys. Most workers think wages will stay flat in 2014. Only a small percentage think they'll make more than they did in 2013. People are equally unimpressed with the recovery. Most think the economy will continue to underperform as it has for the last five years. Also, consumers are pessimistic about housing prices in the coming year, which is really surprising given the media's nonstop hype of the illusory “housing rebound.” As it happens, the average “Joe” on the street thinks that prices might even go down, which flies in the face of all the propaganda.

There are things the government could do to restore confidence and boost spending if that's what they wanted to do, but they don't.

The elites who guide US economic policy are focused laserlike on the so called “pivot to Asia”, which anticipates a dramatic restructuring of the economy. According to a report by William Emmons titled “Don't Expect Consumer Spending To Be the Engine of Economic Growth It Once Was” for the St. Louis Fed: “Our objective is clear... We must actively restructure our economy to become more friendly to business investment and exports ... At the same time, other nations... will need to restructure their economies to promote alternative sources of long-run sustainable economic growth.” (St. Louis Fed)

In other words, Chinese consumers are being prepped to replace US consumers. It's all part of the elitist masterplan to remake the world in order to increase profits. The American dream is just collateral damage in this latest skirmish. **CP**





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## DAYDREAM NATION

# A Minimum Rage

BY KRISTIN KOLB

I used to live in Seattle's Georgetown—the city's last affordable neighborhood, historical locus of a robust bar and brothel economy, prior to its maturation into the heli-pad headquarters of Bezos and Gates. It's wedged between the noise and pollution of the private airport, Boeing Field, the noise and pollution of I-5, the charming Duwamish "Superfund" River, and the noise and pollution of Marginal Way, a thoroughfare for semi-trucks and commuters connecting to jobs downtown and west at the Port. It's been described as the armpit of Seattle. It's also a tight community of raucous block parties, fantastic vegetable gardens and loud music to drown out the louder pangs of industry and gentrification. It's still working class—almost a myth in a West Coast city these days.

Twice, Air Force One flew President Obama just 700 feet above my apartment to land at Boeing a block away. Families with flags lined the road to greet his entourage. These were simply private engagements, exclusive fundraisers for venerable senators and nubile reps—seats the Dems needed to attempt, yet again, to dominate DC. My neighbors—immigrants who live in motels, Boeing workers worried about their jobs, young families who can't afford to buy a home elsewhere in the Emerald City—all were eager to hear from the president, but they were satisfied to wave the Stars and Stripes at him through tinted glass. And after dinner, after Obama sat and retreating East, I heard, "Look, there's the president—in the sky!"

My daughter and I shared a school bus stop with a 10-year-old who lived in one of those bleak motels on Marginal Way. After three months, he and his dad stopped showing up. They were homeless, after all. A statistic.

And, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the US is basically tied with Mexico, Chile, and Turkey with the distinction of having the highest child poverty rate in the "developed" world.

Poverty statistics are the rage in the media these days. It's been 50 years since Lyndon Johnson gave his revered State of the Union Address, promptly outlining a full slate of social welfare programs—like food stamps and unemployment insurance—that he obsessively, and, some say, ruthlessly, pushed through Congress.

Obama, presaging this anniversary of the dawn of the Great Society, recited his own lines on December 4, with the invigorating title, "Speech on Economic Mobility," at the grand tank of thinking, The Center for American Progress (for more on CAP's merits, see Ken Silverstein's sizzling piece in *The Baffler*, "They Pretend to Think, We Pretend to Listen").

POTUS, looking weary, sounding atypically bland, swallowed the first portion of his remarks thanking CAP for providing him with staff, and praising John Podesta, his advisor and also the tank's brilliant designer. Then, it morphed into a Nate Silver blog on acid—vague stories and statistics—rather hallucinogenic. If you fast-forward YouTube to the last quarter of the speech, you hope to find the poet-president's Action Plan. Instead, we hear about a "growth agenda," with a smattering of "competitiveness and productivity," and a dash of "responsible budget." Oh, lest I forget the congratulations to fast-food workers, unions, and community activists for leading the charge to increase the minimum wage. Because, Lord knows, our president hasn't done a god-damned thing.

Where were the practical, bullet-

pointed, public works programs, like LBJ's plan of action? Why not echo the stem-winding defenses of all the poverty-fighting laws that LBJ demanded with his fist banging on the podium, his head in his hand?

LBJ strove to be the great father of a great society, now Obama plays the great victim to great political failure, avoiding fault at all costs. So much for the War on Poverty. Now it's a position paper on "economic mobility." The political elite employ euphemisms like drones, with vague story-telling and a barrage of statistics, to evoke the appropriate emotional response, pre-poll.

Back in Seattle, in Obama's flyover neighborhoods, a \$15 living wage ordinance passed by 66 votes at Sea-Tac, the home of the public airport, a bleak land of motels, rental-car lots, and fast food joints. On January 4, the brand-new mayor of Seattle, Ed Murray, proposed a \$15 minimum wage for city employees, the more than 600 who now presently garner \$9.29 an hour—the highest minimum wage in the country.

And, the city elected the first Socialist to the nine-member City Council since 1922—Kshama Sawant, an Indian immigrant and professor of economics at Seattle Central Community College. Perhaps Seattle's fun history as a fortress of Wobblies, Panthers, and anarchists is not yet over.

Maybe our task today is to replace DC's despair with our own calloused, battle-fisted opportunity, planting Victory Gardens like those I loved in Georgetown, picketing along the highway at the local KFC with the women who fry up the Double Downs, and thinking outside the think tank.

I mean, seriously, people. According to a recent CBS Poll, 57 percent of Republicans and 70 percent of moderates support a hike in the minimum wage.

With the spirit of Seattle in us, we can refer to what LBJ said 50 years ago, "America cannot afford to stand still. ... Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity." **CP**

# Rendering Unto AIPAC

## A Brief Tour Through the Israeli Lobby

BY JEFF BLANKFORT

*“Once a year, the Israel lobby in Washington known as AIPAC holds its annual convention where anyone who is anyone in the political world comes to render fealty, rather than homage. It has become a political rite of passage, like a medieval contract for exchanging goods and services ... Anyone who doesn’t pass the litmus test can forget about becoming president of the United States, or senator or even congressman ... The lobby, reputedly Washington’s most powerful ...ensures that anything Israel wants or needs gets quick action on the Hill. That covers anything from \$3 billion a year for the next 10 years for modern weaponry to soft loans for building the \$2.5 billion physical barrier between Israelis and Palestinians, and under the radar the steady expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.”—Arnaud de Borchgrave, Washington Times, June 9, 2008.*

Barack Obama’s nomination as the Democratic candidate for the presidency at the party’s convention in August, 2008 was truly an historic event and presaged an even more important one to come that November. But becoming the first African-American president did not absolve Obama from pledging his allegiance to Israel and genuflecting to its US supporters to any less degree than has every president since Dwight Eisenhower.

Adhering to the rites of passage that De Borchgrave observed is also demanded of every member and potential member of Congress.

Early in their campaigns, every viable candidate on the Democratic or Republican ticket will receive a visit from an AIPAC staff member requesting a statement describing his or her current position on the US-Israel relationship. For those who are short on words, AIPAC will gladly provide assistance.

These statements are then made available to pro-Israel donors in the candidate’s district as well as to a long list of donors throughout the country. In exchange for what is invariably a pledge of loyalty to Israel, AIPAC will see that the candidate will have no shortage of volunteers and funds, although these will not come directly from AIPAC.

It was, however, the spectacle of watching Obama, his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, and McCain, the three individuals who were vying to become the leader of the world’s only superpower, joined by House and Senate leaders of both parties, humbling themselves before the AIPAC audience, that led veteran journalist, Arnaud de Borchgrave, to reveal to the readers of the right wing *Washington Times* an elemental truth about the US political process and the decision making parameters available to the next American president.

It also inspired TV satirist, Jon Stewart, to use video clips of the three candidates speaking before AIPAC, to make

the same point: When it comes to Israel, it is not the White House, but AIPAC that determines US policy. In Germany, the weekly, *Der Tag*’s response to Obama’s speech was to run a photograph of the White House with the headline, “Uncle Barack’s Cabin?” on the cover.

Four months after assuming the presidency, Obama had his first official meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It was a learning experience.

Just to let the president know whose back Congress was protecting—it wasn’t his—AIPAC circulated two letters signed by almost equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans. One, signed by 76 senators, the second, by three quarters of the House (by the time all the signatures were collected), advising him to accommodate himself to Netanyahu’s needs and wishes.

“As we work closely with our democratic ally, Israel, we must take into account the risks it will face in any peace agreement,” the senators wrote Obama in the letter that was released to reporters.

“Without a doubt,” they admitted, “our two governments will agree on some issues and disagree on others, but the United States friendship with Israel requires that we work closely together as we recommit ourselves to our historic role of a trusted friend and active mediator.”

Bi-partisanship has been an unwritten rule at AIPAC since its inception a half a century ago and it has succeeded in making support for Israel the only critical issue, domestic or foreign, in which both parties—who may be at each other’s throats on other policy decisions—not only lock arms but compete for who loves Israel the most.

AIPAC had begun to gather signatures for the letter three weeks before the first Obama-Netanyahu summit. It was clearly designed to send a message to the president that, as far as Congress is concerned, Israel’s desires trump those of the United States.

The letter signed by the House members still had the AIPAC tag on it, inadvertently, perhaps, revealing its origin, a fact that got no further than a *Washington Post* blog. That was more attention than the two letters received. Even though reporters were supposedly given copies, they were ignored by the mainstream media.

It was not the first time that an Israeli prime minister had gone over a president’s head and appealed directly to Congress and it wouldn’t be the last.

For Obama, it would happen again on August 4, following the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran’s president, replacing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who had been described by a speaker at AIPAC’s 2009 policy conference as “the gift that keeps on giving.”

The election of the “moderate” Rouhani brought forth distress signals in Israel and within the American Jewish establishment. With negotiations with Iran threatening on the horizon, AIPAC acted quickly, producing another letter

signed by 76 senators.

Its demand for America's role was in the penultimate paragraph; that "we will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapons capability [Israel's position, not Obama's], a sincere

Ford would give a speech calling for such a reassessment, AIPAC sprang into action.

Within two weeks, it was able to get 76 senators, from both sides of the aisle, to sign a letter reminding Ford that



Obama at AIPAC convention. Photo: AP

demonstration of openness to negotiations, the maintenance and toughening of sanctions, and a convincing threat of the use of force that Iran will believe. We must be prepared to act, and Iran must see that we are prepared."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose devotion to Israel had been unquestioned, also received an AIPAC backed letter signed by 76 senators in 2010, rebuking her for allegedly having spent 45 minutes on the phone chewing out Netanyahu over his plans to continue building new Jewish housing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

A similar letter garnered 333 signatures in the House, where Republican support for Netanyahu is rock solid with the Democrats only slightly less so.

The signatures of exactly 76 senators, one more than three quarters of that body, has an historical significance which AIPAC does not want lost on whoever is in the White House.

The first such letter was sent to Gerald Ford in March, 1975, after he and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, while attempting to defuse tensions between Israel and Egypt, became infuriated with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's refusal to withdraw Israeli troops from key mountain passes in the Sinai and suspended all arms shipments to Israel.

Moreover, Kissinger, more Machiavelli than Zionist, persuaded Ford to order a "reassessment" of Israel-US relations while intimating that the administration would demand Israel withdraw to its pre-1967 border. When it was announced that

"the United States, acting in its own national interests, stands firmly with Israel in the search for peace in future negotiation, and that *this* premise is the basis of the current reassessment of US policy in the Middle East." (emphasis added)

Ford never gave the speech and, instead, opened the floodgates to increased US arms shipments to Israel. That letter, unlike those of today, was well publicized, and put AIPAC on the national map.

It was anything but sleeping before that but preferred to its work outside of the national spotlight or as a former AIPAC policy director, Steve Rosen, put it, "A lobby is like a night flower: It thrives in the dark and dies in the sun." It was the same Steve Rosen who famously told the *New Yorker's* Jeffrey Goldberg "You see this napkin?" he said. "In twenty-four hours, we could have the signatures of seventy senators on this napkin." To understand how AIPAC had reached that point in 1975 and the far more powerful position it commands today when holding back major weapons shipments and threatening Israel with a downgrade of Israel-US relations by an American president would be unthinkable, requires delving into the murky past of Jewish lobbying for Israel in the years following Israeli statehood.

Until the first decade of the current millennium, this was difficult because many pertinent US government documents remained classified. In recent years, due to the diligence of

Grant Smith, who directs the Washington-based Institute for Research: Middle East Policy, and who pored over newly declassified documents for relevant material and pursued others through the FOIA, important new information has come to light.

What emerges is a molehill that grew into a mountain.

The AIPAC of today bears no resemblance to the AIPAC of 1951, when it was one of a half-dozen Jewish organizations that functioned under the umbrella of the American Zionist Council (AZC). Unlike others, such as Hadassah, and the Zionist Organization of America, it had no real history or membership. It was just the latest in a series of organizational name changes, apparently designed to disguise its future activities.

The real lobbying at that time was being done by the AZC and more precisely, by the organization's director, Isaiah "Si" Kenen, a naturalized Jewish Canadian who had been registered as a foreign agent while working for the Israel Office of Information Office (IOI) in Washington.

Kenen, however, ignored the Justice Department's request that he re-register when he informed the DOJ that he was leaving the IOI to open a public relations firm in Washington, the main client of which would be the state of Israel.

Not having him register as a foreign agent was absolutely essential for Israel. In his memoir, Kenen cites the opinion of another influential Zionist at the time, Louis Lipsky, who "decried the impropriety of lobbying by an agent of a foreign government, who would be handicapped because an agent of a foreign government, must report all expenditures, label all documents, and refrain from criticizing the United States."

That was vastly understating the case. Had the AZC, and later AIPAC, and its paid staff, been forced to register as foreign agents, it would have so restricted their activities that it could never have become both a power player in Washington and the nation's largest grassroots Jewish political organization with over 100,000 members and an annual budget approaching \$70 million.

AIPAC's annual policy conferences in Washington, so vividly described by De Borchgrave, attended by half the members of Congress and addressed by leading government officials would have been unthinkable.

Moreover, it is likely that other Jewish organizations that spent a disproportionate amount of time and money on pro-Israel activities such as the American Jewish Committee, (the Jewish establishment's "state department,"), the ZOA, and the Council of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations, which does nothing but advocate for Israel, would have also been required to register.

AIPAC would be prohibited from directly interfering in US policy-making and the pro-Israel Political Action Committees (PACs) along with their officials that donate millions of dollars to AIPAC's favorite candidates each election cycle. These so-called "stealth PACs," because nothing in their

names identifies them with Israel, at one time numbered over 100. (AIPAC, as a 501(c)4 charity is prohibited from contributing to election campaigns.)

Eisenhower's election in 1952 and the departure of Truman brought a changed atmosphere to the White House. Ike, like his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, saw Israel as a liability and the Lobby as a headache,

That required Kenen, functioning largely as a one-man operation, to make use of an extensive phone list of wealthy, influential Jewish donors around the country who could be counted on to persuade their representatives in Congress to keep the administration from following through on its threats to lift the tax-exemption from the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) if Israel continued to divert water from the Jordan River in 1953 and refused to withdraw from the Sinai following its attack on Egypt in 1956.

It was in the spring of 1963, John F. Kennedy's third year in office, and Sen. J.W. Fulbright from Arkansas was chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that the AZC experienced its worst crisis.

In the spring and summer of that year, Fulbright scheduled hearings on "The Activities of Non-Diplomatic Representatives of Foreign Principals in the United States."

The hearings revealed that Israel's quasi-governmental Jewish Agency and the American Zionist Council (AZC) were violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

The nearly 300 printed pages of testimony brought to light "one of the most effective networks of foreign influence," as *Newsweek* of Aug. 12, 1963, described it.

The AZC, it seems, had used tax-exempt donations to the UJA, the nation's largest Jewish charity, distributed through "conduits" (the term used by Fulbright) by the Jewish Agency's American section, a registered foreign agent, to influence American public opinion on Israel's behalf and bring pressure on the US government to increase its support for the Jewish state.

(The Jewish Agency was founded in 1929 to facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine.)

More than \$5 million tax-deductible dollars, a considerable sum for that time (\$30 million in today's dollars) that had been donated to the UJA for philanthropic purposes in Israel, had been recycled back to the AZC to produce and distribute pro-Israel propaganda, among which, most notably was the *Near East Report*, a weekly publication targeting Congress and influential public figures that was edited by Kenen that purported to be independent of the AZC.

This patent violation of the FARA led to a concerted effort by the DOJ under Robert Kennedy to get the AZC to register as a foreign agent, a move that was stubbornly resisted by the AZC's lawyers for the reasons described earlier. It would have been the equivalent of a knockout punch to pro-Israel lobbying in the United States.

This was clearly a red line that Israel could not afford to



have breached.

After President Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon Johnson replaced RFK with Nicholas Katzenbach, his assistant, who spent no energy in pursuing the matter.

The case was officially closed on May 14, 1965, when, in lieu of registration, the DOJ allowed the AZC to provide it with "an expanded portfolio to distinguish it in appearance from the registration statements that are filed in manila folders."

That, noted Grant Smith, whose FOIA requests produced the relevant documents, "was the beginning of a cascading series of capitulations" to the Lobby's demands for "special treatment."

One outcome of the DOJ effort was the disappearance of the AZC and the emergence of the more muscular AIPAC that we know today. It was merely a paper change as Kenen remained at the helm of the lobbying organization until 1974 at which time he turned over the executive directorship to Morris Amitay.

Amitay's abrasive pushiness contrasted with Kenen's more diplomatic style, but he took the organization to another level, fulfilling his ambition "to make an effective modern lobby."

In 1980, he was replaced by Tom Dine, who had served as a legislative aide and whose personality more resembled Kenen's. During Dine's reign which lasted until 1993, he built AIPAC into what it is today, the hub of an impressive network of organizations, think tanks, foundations, and PACs that dominates the Washington beltway and determines, to a large extent, America's Middle East policy.

Members of Congress who challenge Washington's thrall to Israel are invariably picked off in the next election cycle or intimidated into silence or reversing their positions. Senator William Fulbright was to become a prime example.

Having never been forgiven for holding the hearings that exposed Israel and the AZC's contempt for US law, Fulbright entered AIPAC's cross-hairs when he told CBS's "Face the Nation" in October, 1973, that "Israelis control the policy in the Congress and the Senate... [that] Somewhere around 80 percent of the Senate ... is completely in support of Israel and of anything Israel wants." Arkansas Governor Dale Bumpers was AIPAC's choice to replace him.

Following a statement from AIPAC that Fulbright was "consistently unkind to Israel and our supporters in this country," pro-Israel money poured into the campaign coffers of Bumpers in the Democratic primary and the outspoken Arkansan was defeated,

That race was to set a pattern and serve as a warning to other members of Congress to think twice before criticizing Israel. No US senator has made anything approaching public criticism of Israel since although several members of the House did so and either found themselves out of office, e.g., Paul Findley, Pete McCloskey, Cynthia McKinney, Gus Savage, Earl Hilliard, or forced to humbly apologize, e.g. Jim

Moran and Betty McCallum.

Over the years, AIPAC, like its parent AZC, has made a point of exploiting divisions between Congress and the White House, as the "letters of 76 senators" indicate and has done so shamelessly.

In 1988, for example, on Israel's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, AIPAC issued a slick 12 page letter size pamphlet, entitled "Fifty Years of Friendship Between the U.S. Congress and Israel."

A foreword to a graphic chronology of US-Israel relations ignored the role played by the executive branch unless it could be portrayed negatively, AIPAC's president at the time, Melvin Dow, and Executive Director Howard Kohr, who still holds the post, write that, "we prepared this document as a salute to Members of the United States Congress—past and present—who have served through the years to help strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship.

"As America's pro-Israel lobby, we want to thank Senators and Representatives for working to ensure Israel's survival, economic growth, and military strength."

In 1981, even Ronald Reagan, who was considered Israel's great friend, found himself on the other side of the barricades when he pushed through, over AIPAC's opposition, a sale of AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control Systems) to Saudi Arabia. The deal was worth, along with associated contracts, \$8.5 billion to US arms manufacturers.

To win Senate approval by the narrowest of margins, 52-48, Reagan personally lobbied two Republicans opposing the sale, Charles Percy of Illinois and Roger Jepson of Iowa. They had promised AIPAC they would oppose the sale but Reagan persuaded them to change their minds. Both would be targeted by AIPAC and defeated when they ran for re-election.

One way that AIPAC maintains a high level of Congressional support is through free trips to Israel provided by a sham charity, the American Israel Educational Foundation (AIEF) created in 1990 to get around the rule prohibiting lobbies from offering gratis trips to members of Congress.

They make little effort to hide the truth from the IRS. Two-thirds of AIPAC's board members serve on the AIEF board and 47% of the AIEF board is on AIPAC's board. Efforts by IRmep's Grant Smith to have the IRS investigate the collusion of the two groups have gone nowhere.

1984 was an important year for AIPAC.

First, retiring president, Larry Weinberg, one of what, among AIPAC's 50 directors was known as the "Gang of Four," created a new think tank, the Washington Institute of Near East Policy, (WINEP now TWI) which took pro-Israel advocacy to a brazen new level, indeed right through the doors of the Executive branch.

Its first executive director was the London-born, Australian-raised, Martin Indyk, who had worked for AIPAC and whose citizenship Clinton had pushed through Congress in order to appoint him ambassador to Israel in 1993.

In 2002, when Israeli-American Haim Saban bought his way into the once respected Brookings Institution with \$12.3 million and set up the Saban Forum on the Middle East, Indyk would become Brookings's vice-president and Director of Foreign Policy. At the moment, he is Secretary of State John Kerry's Special Envoy to the Israel-PA talks.

WINEP "fellows" are today the most frequent sources of "expert" information on the Middle East for most of the mainstream media and routinely testify before Congressional committees in the same capacity.

In the same year, Israel proposed the US and Israel sign a free trade agreement that would open the American market to a host of Israeli goods.

Heading a long list of opponents to the deal were heavyweights Monsanto, Dow Chemical, and the nation's farm bureaus. Supporting it and the eventual victor in that contest of leviathans was AIPAC, backed by a handful of smaller companies with little political clout.

Before the senate approved the US-Israel FTA, Israel and AIPAC obtained a classified U.S. Trade Commission document containing proprietary information about the American companies that enabled Israel to secure more favorable terms in the agreement.

How that happened was something the FBI wanted to know when it opened an investigation into the matter in 1984, but as has happened in other criminal cases where AIPAC and Israel have been involved, the investigation was dropped without any indictments.

Among the first celebrants of the agreement was apartheid South Africa, Israel's long-time ally. The illustration on the cover of that country's *Financial Times* explained why. It was of an hour glass depicting South African products going through Israel to reach the American market.

AIPAC's confidence in Congress proved was not rewarded in September, 1991, when President George H.W. Bush viewed Israel's demand for \$10 billion in loan guarantees over a five year period, ostensibly to help resettle an influx of Russian Jewish immigrants, as a ploy by Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, to sabotage Bush's planned conference in Madrid to resolve the Israel-Arab conflict.

Realizing that Congress would easily over-ride his veto of the loan guarantee authorization, Bush took the unprecedented step of calling a nationally televised press conference to tell the American people why he was asking Israel for a four month postponement of its request and, to illustrate how much the U.S. was helping Israel, he explained how many dollars each Israeli, man, woman, and child, was receiving courtesy of American taxpayers.

He also was demanding that the Russian Jewish immigrants not be allowed to settle in the Occupied West Bank or Gaza, to which Shamir would not agree.

The overwhelming positive response in the polls to Bush's message shook up AIPAC and its lackeys in Congress who

decided to lick their wounds to fight another day. But not before AIPAC's Dine declared that the day of Bush's speech, Sept. 12, 1991, "was a day that would live in infamy."

Four months later, with Shamir still unwilling to put any restrictions on Jewish settlements, Bush remained firm against the guarantees and AIPAC's Dine and Congress felt they were in no position to challenge him.

In the Senate, however, one member after another railed against the president while bewailing the conditions of the poor Russian Jews who they portrayed as America's responsibility since Washington had led the fight to "free" them.

Israel's friends in the media had already begun attacking Bush, not for opposing the loan guarantees but on the state of the economy. In Israel the truculent Shamir would lose his premiership to Yitzhak Rabin who was to prove more accommodating.

With the November election approaching and a friendly Rabin at his side, Bush approved the guarantees with the qualification that any money spent in the West Bank would be deducted from the first \$2 billion, and so it was. One of the first actions taken by Bill Clinton upon taking office in 1993 was to restore the subtracted amount.

The loan guarantees, it turned out, would not be used to resettle Russian Jews, but "primarily to increase the amount of foreign currency available to the country's business sector and to support infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges, sewage and electrical plants," according to the Jewish Virtual Library.

After the guarantees garnered 305 votes in the House in the summer of 1992, Maxine Waters tried to get her colleagues to co-sponsor a bill calling for \$10 billion in loan guarantees to America's ailing cities but only 30 members signed on. Only AIPAC's *Near East Report* carried the story. **CP**

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## The Jury is Out Class, Politics and the Justice System

BY LEE BALLINGER

In the early 1950s, playwright Reginald Rose served on a jury for a manslaughter case where there were several hours of fierce debate in the jury room. That experience led Rose to write his masterpiece, the Emmy-winning drama *12 Angry Men*, in which a lone dissenter blocks the rush to judgment by a jury weighing the fate of a Puerto Rican youth accused of killing his father.

Over Thanksgiving weekend, I saw a new theatrical production of *12 Angry Men* at the Pasadena Playhouse in Los Angeles. Director Sheldon Epps and half of the twelve

members of the ensemble cast are black. This drives some of the jury's internal conflict in Epps' retelling of the story, even though the defendant isn't identified by race. The multiracial cast flies in the face of the media stereotype of Los Angeles juries as old, white, and middle class.

In the spring of 2012, I found out for myself the accuracy of Epps' jury depiction. Summoned for jury duty, I reported to the big Superior Court building in downtown Los Angeles, where fifteen to twenty courts are going every day. There are potential jurors everywhere—in the hallways, the assembly rooms, the cafeteria.

LA juries today are a head-spinning mix of colors, ages, and nationalities. I would estimate that as many as one in ten don't speak functional English. Middle class is there but hardly dominant. I saw one huge jury panel where over eighty per cent of the people were excused for economic hardship. Part time jobs, shitty jobs, small business owners.

Does this mean defendants in Los Angeles receive their Constitutional right to a trial by a jury of their peers? Some do, but someone up on gang charges won't see his or her reflection in the jury box. And while non-citizens, a large section of the LA population, can be tried, they can't serve on juries.

Despite the intimidating atmosphere, the diversity of the jury pool helps to stimulate a wide-open discussion during jury selection. People denounce the court system when questioned and many challenge every aspect of judicial dogma. Why can't I take the possible punishment into consideration? Circumstantial evidence is bullshit. But it was the topic of the police which drew the most attention.

As potential jurors, we were asked if we would accept the word of a police officer testifying on the witness stand. Among others, I saw a number of white people say that, based on their own experience, the cops cannot be trusted. One middle-aged white woman spoke about how she had grown up believing that the police always told the truth, but that she had lived through experiences which changed her mind completely.

In *12 Angry Men* not one of the jurors expresses any reluctance to serve. But the overwhelming vibe in Los Angeles Superior Court is the desire to avoid jury duty. It is spoken about in the courts and in conversation constantly. Few people listen when a judge gives his stock rah-rah welcoming speech to the jurors in the assembly room.

Why don't people want to serve on juries? Inconvenience? To a degree. For "political" reasons? Sometimes. But the majority of it is just alienation from a hostile process conducted in a deliberately obtuse language. Jurors are generally treated like criminals, except without the pretense of a presumption of innocence. You are forced to share your feelings and experiences, often quite personal and intimate ones, with an entire courtroom filled with strangers. Who are these people? Let me out of here!

Jurors may enter a courtroom thinking only about how much they want to go home, but they can't help but be affected by the way that our 21<sup>st</sup> century incarceration nation seeps into every pore of our being, like pollution or television advertising. The economic, social, and racial inequalities are so glaringly obvious that only a juror in total denial would be unaware of them.

There are 2.7 million people incarcerated in the US with millions more on probation or parole even though our crime rate is below the international norm. For example, according to *USA Today*, violent gun crimes are down 75% compared to twenty years ago. Yet the United States imprisons men and women at a pace nearly ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations. An estimated 65 million Americans have a criminal record. This means that a large percentage of potential jurors have a friend or relative who has already been run over by the juggernaut which is the American court system. It's worth noting that LA Superior Court judges are paid more than the justices of the US Supreme Court, perhaps because they perform a more vital function for that system—keeping the prisons full.

A country based so heavily on incarceration needs the police to keep it that way. Driving through my neighborhood, I often see young men sitting on the sidewalk, handcuffed. They're waiting for the police to take them to jail, most likely only as a way station on the way to prison. These cops are modern day slave catchers, but with a broader racial mandate than the nineteenth century enforcers of fugitive slave laws. Those sent to prison today may well wind up as slaves, working behind the walls for a Fortune 500 company that pays just pennies an hour. But whether they just sit in their cells or package products for Microsoft, they are adding to the bottom line of the prison industrial complex just by being there.

Whether it's a publicly or privately owned jail or prison, their budgets feed the bottom line of countless vendors who supply them. In the case of private prisons, there's a more insidious economic imperative at work. In the Public Interest reviewed sixty contracts between private prison corporations and state and local governments and found that nearly two thirds of them contained language mentioning "quotas" for prisoners. Mandatory occupancy is 70 per cent in California and 100 percent in some Arizona prisons. Mandatory occupancy means more people must be arrested and convicted, the Constitution and the sensitivities of juries be damned.

The annual report of the GEO Group, a private prison corporation, says corporate risks include: "reductions in crime rates" that "could lead to reductions in arrests, convictions, and sentences." Bill Gates is a major investor in GEO Group and he expects the criminal justice system to guarantee him a profit. And so it does.

While the majority of America's poor are white and most inmates are poor, it's also true that the lifetime likelihood of

imprisonment for white men is 1 in 17, 1 in 6 for Latino men, and 1 in 3 for black men. A survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that an estimated 500,000 people were threatened by or had force used against them by police officers in one year. Blacks and Latinos made up half of those who had such experiences even though they made up only one fifth of the population covered by the survey. Eighty per cent of those 500,000 were arrested.

Similarly, eighty per cent of defendants are indigent and

Funding for various law enforcement drug task forces began to dwindle during President Bush's tenure, but presidential candidate Barack Obama promised to revive the Byrne grant program, claiming that it is "critical to creating the anti-drug task forces our communities need." Following the election, Obama allocated \$2 billion in new funding for the Byrne grant program despite its abysmal failure to do anything other than lock up casual drug users and smalltime dealers.



*The modern Panopticon: Florence, Colorado Federal Prison. Photo: DOJ.*

unable to hire a lawyer. In Wisconsin, anyone who earns more than \$3,000 a year is considered able to afford a lawyer and thus over 11,000 people each year in that state go to court without representation.

The morphing of the United States into incarceration nation dates to the beginning of the so-called "war on drugs," which got underway during the Reagan administration when drug use was actually declining. What was increasing were factory and mill closures, which created a mass of permanently unemployed. No jobs waiting on the outside has meant the end of most educational and cultural programs in prison as there is no longer anything to be rehabilitated for. This also removes, from a corporate perspective, any need for lenient sentencing. Alan Mobley, an ex-con who is now a professor of criminology at San Diego State, writes that today "the prison industry creates its own repeat customers."

Not only does the drug war fuel the prison industrial complex, it corrupts the police who make it all function with constant arrests. The South Florida *Sun Sentinel* reported that the Sunrise, Florida police made millions luring would-be cocaine buyers there and then seizing their cash and other goods. In Maysville, Kentucky, Timothy Fegan, the former director of the Buffalo Trace-Gateway Narcotics Task Force, has been indicted for stealing money seized in drug raids as well as cash kept on hand for drug buys. In Birmingham, Alabama, the former head of the West Alabama Narcotics Task Force, Jeffrey Snyder, was sentenced to federal prison for stealing money seized by the task force.

The drug war and its twin brother, the war on terror, provide the excuse for the militarization of American police forces, both urban and rural. MRAP (an 18 ton armored vehicle of the type used in Afghanistan), is now in the



arsenal of several police departments, including some on college campuses. It came, as Chase Madar wrote online for TomDispatch, “like so much other equipment police departments are stocking up on—from tactical military vests, assault rifles, and grenade launchers to actual tanks and helicopters—as a freebie via a Pentagon-organized surplus military equipment program.” We are now at a point where a movie like *The Hunger Games*, with its depiction of high tech equipment used without hesitation for class warfare, looks like a documentary about the United States.

That doesn’t mean plain old-fashioned guns are obsolete. Shootings of presumably innocent people by the Los Angeles Police Department are increasing at a rate of greater than 50% a year. Meanwhile, German police fired a total of 85 bullets in 2011 while 84 shots were fired at a single suspect in Harlem in April 2011. This ratio must seem about right to the one per cent. In the same year that New York cops in Harlem sprayed twice as many bullets at an unarmed man as they did when they killed Amadou Diallo—leading Bruce Springsteen to write his protest anthem “41 Shots”—JPMorgan Chase donated \$4.6 million to the New York City Police Department.

Schoolchildren are also now at risk of getting caught in the line of fire as the school-to-prison pipeline continues to run at near capacity. Kids are now incarcerated for school disciplinary offenses which once would have been handled in the principal’s office. A recent Department of Justice lawsuit revealed that in Mississippi, students have been arrested for dress code violations and for playfully throwing peanuts on a bus. If students are never going to find work, why not get them into prison early?

Jurors will have a tough time fairly evaluating those and all other cases. Court appointed defense attorneys, such as the one in *12 Angry Men*, face crushing case loads with little in the way of resources. Meanwhile, as legal expert Ben Eicher describes it: “A prosecutor has the entire law enforcement investigative power and money at his or her disposal; a prosecutor’s evidence is based on what the same law enforcement investigators say was found or said—meaning the fact-gatherers are also the advocates; a prosecutor has unlimited resources. The defense attorney generally has little to work with. When a defendant does have money and gains an acquittal the hue and cry is always ‘See, money buys acquittals.’ No, money buys convictions.”

The wildly disproportionate power that prosecutors hold can overwhelm the resources of even a wealthy defendant. Money certainly didn’t buy former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson an acquittal. Tyson was sent to prison after being convicted by an Indiana court in 1992 of raping Desiree Washington. According to juror David Vahle, at one point in the deliberations the vote to convict was only six to six and, just as in *12 Angry Men*, it took a lot of debate to reach a consensus. But that consensus fell apart after Tyson was

in prison. Five jurors came forward to say they had doubts about Tyson’s guilt because it had come to light after the trial that the prosecution had withheld key evidence. Juror Ken Turnbaugh said Tyson deserved a new trial. Vahle and NBC-TV legal correspondent Star Jones, a former district attorney, both said that Washington may have brought charges in order to extract a financial settlement from Tyson.

How many times do American prosecutors withhold evidence but nobody discovers it? Jurors have the impossible task of trying to divine that, guided by defense lawyers whose position is akin to that of Grenada when it was invaded by the United States.

In Arkansas, evidence may consist solely of the word of a landlord as allegedly delinquent tenants are funneled directly to criminal courts and, if they can’t pay up, the result can be arrest and imprisonment. In Minnesota, a quintessential “blue state,” there has been an exponential increase in arrest warrants for debtors over the past four years. And those two states are just the tip of the debtor prison iceberg.

Jurors are put in an impossible moral bind, asked to referee a game between two very unequal teams. When you see a man facing his third strike searching the pool of potential jurors for a friendly face, or an immigrant woman defendant who speaks no English stare blankly at the judge, it makes you search for your own humanity. But you can’t find it because you are a cog in an inhumane system.

At the end of the Pasadena Playhouse production of *12 Angry Men*, the last holdout for a guilty plea changes his vote to innocent. It is an emotionally charged moment and the audience responds with a standing ovation. The feeling in the theater is intense and palpable: Justice is done! We’ve won!

Justice was not done. A life was saved and that is a beautiful thing. But the unseen defendant in *12 Angry Men* also stands in for the millions of defendants who have been brought to the bar and convicted over the past thirty years of steroidal prison growth.

In the middle of this one-sided assault on our rights and our peace of mind, jurors are expected to deliver justice and feel good about it. That can happen—and not just on stage. I watched a jury celebrate after acquitting a Mexican man who faced seventeen years in prison. But juries themselves are becoming obsolete. Over 90 per cent of cases today are resolved by plea bargaining in which a defendant, quite possibly innocent, takes a lighter sentence in exchange for a guilty plea. The media emphasis on juries and our Constitutional right to a jury trial distract us from this reality. “The rule of law and due process are now largely a fiction,” Alan Mobley told me.

This is the end result of allowing ambitious prosecutors and private prison corporations so much power. The international restorative justice movement (RJ) is trying to take us in a different, much healthier direction. RJ recognizes that our adversarial system of prosecution versus defense doesn’t reveal the truth, it only creates more adversaries. RJ brings

together offender and victim to speak frankly to each other, to move beyond vengeance in an effort to find solutions, healing, and balance. RJ has been effective in many countries, although in the U.S. it has so far been limited mostly to juveniles. Studies show that RJ reduces repeat criminal activity, saves money, and in most cases is satisfying to victim and offender alike. Once this door has been opened, anything can happen. In Vermont, two art shows took place in tandem, one featuring the art of crime victims and one featuring the art of those who had committed crimes. Deborah Lee Luskin of the Brattleboro Community Justice Center said that “Seen together, these two exhibits provided a good reminder of the human stories behind the sensational news accounts or dry statistical accounting of violent crime.”

As RJ tries to move into the world of adult offenders in the United States, it will meet greater resistance from those with a vested interest in the status quo. That struggle could help unleash a meaningful debate about solutions, an escape from the endless shrill cries of “Get tough on crime!”

But to achieve systemic change, solutions must go beyond the criminal justice system. The most common denominator of all the people who are incarcerated is that they are poor. This confirms that there is no way to significantly reduce crime without eliminating poverty. Take the case of my father-in-law, who was murdered by two homeless teenagers. They were homeless because our politicians, Democrat and Republican, are far more concerned with protecting the real estate industry and its financiers than they are about housing people who have nowhere to live. If we had put an end to homelessness when it emerged (at the exact same time as the drug war began and factories began to close), my father-in-law would be alive today. Get tough on crime? Get serious about crime prevention.

Are the American people prepared to do this? They are trying to show that they want to. In 1959, Reginald Rose wrote his follow-up to *12 Angry Men*, a teleplay called *Thunder on Sycamore Street* which told the story of an ex-con attempting to go straight while his neighbors form a mob to drive him from their neighborhood. That wind is shifting today. In a recent poll, which the *Los Angeles Times* characterized as “a shift from a tough-on-crime stance,” up to 72% of Californians favor releasing nonviolent offenders and reducing their sentences. Nearly half of those questioned opposed building or enlarging prisons, this in a state where a massive prison building boom has meant tens of thousands of jobs.

Similar attitudes carry over to the “crime” of entering the United States without papers. While federal prosecution of immigrants for “illegal entry” has gone up 1,600 per cent since 2002, only 19 per cent of Californians say that those “illegally” in the country should be deported. This is one factor in the abysmal approval rating Americans give to their millionaire-dominated, anti-immigrant Congress.

Can we become a country where the hard-won unity of the

jury in *12 Angry Men* becomes a template for daily life while the convoluted court system which brought that jury together in the first place is replaced by various forms of restorative justice? This will only be possible if we have the courage to promote a vision of a world where things are controlled but people are not; a society of unlocked doors where no one lives in the streets and no one is given carte blanche to make those streets into free fire zones. **CP**

**LEE BALLINGER** is co-editor of *Rock and Rap Confidential*.

## The Eyes of Motorola

### How the Electronics Giant has Quietly Become One of the Largest Military-Industrial-Surveillance Contractors

BY DARWIN BOND-GRAHAM

Three years ago the electronics giant Motorola split into two new companies. One of them, Motorola Mobility, departed with the company’s consumer cell phone products and a trove of related commercial patents. This half of Motorola was quickly bought by Google to expand the tech giant’s offering of cell phones, tablets, and other gadgets. The other Motorola, the one you have likely never heard of, is called Motorola Solutions. This half is still headquartered in a leafy campus in Schaumburg, Illinois, in a complex of buildings that but for the company’s marquee atop a central tower, looks somewhat like an NSA facility. After it’s split with the consumer-oriented “mobility” division, Motorola Solutions quietly set off on a different path to become one of the largest and most powerful military-industrial companies in the world. It has largely succeeded.

Motorola Solutions sells billions in communications and surveillance equipment to customers such as the US Army, the Los Angeles Police Department, and foreign armies like the Israeli Defense Forces. Now with cities across the United States spending billions yearly to equip their police with digital communications gear, and to build vast surveillance systems, Motorola Solutions is doing a brisk business. While the company is more obscure than its Google-owned twin, it has become a powerful police and military contractor. On its board of directors are influential police and spy agency leaders. Motorola Solutions lobbyist are ensconced in city halls, state capitols, and the US Congress, and predictably Motorola Solutions is already concentrating campaign contributions to federal and state legislators on security and budget committees where its market is created and shaped. Investors in Motorola Solutions are now reaping the financial reward of the continuing militarization of America’s security apparatus, from the level of local police agencies to the FBI, spy agencies like the NSA and CIA, and the biggest client of

all, the Pentagon.

In 2012 Motorola Solutions sold over \$8 billion in electronics and netted a profit of \$881 million which translated into dividends of 96 cents a share, or a total payout of \$270 million for shareholders. The company's 2011's earnings were even better, over a billion dollars. Motorola Solutions is a cash generator for its owners thanks to its dominance in the police and military communications markets, and its share of the growing market for surveillance systems being built by both public and private organizations.

In January 2014 Motorola Solutions signed a \$100 million deal with the Israeli Defense Forces to equip the nation's soldiers with secure smartphones. A representative of the Israeli military said the contract will bring about "a revolution of smartphones in the future battlefield," that battlefield being Israel's borders, settlements, and cities.

Other big military contracts to close in 2013 for Motorola Solutions included a \$17 million deal to provide the U.S. Navy with radio systems at 53 bases around the world and a \$16 million work order with the US Army to maintain radio systems in Iraq and Kuwait.

The US military and foreign armed forces are majors drivers of business for Motorola Solutions, but so too are domestic police agencies. Name a big or small city police department and chances are its radios and other electronics are supplied by Motorola Solutions. The nation's biggest police agencies, NYPD, LAPD, Philadelphia PD, the Houston police and others have contracts with the company that cost millions yearly. Motorola estimates that 65 percent of its total revenue flows in from government contracts, most of these being law enforcement and military deals. Federal grants from the Department of Homeland Security and Justice Department to outfit local law enforcement with military-spec gear and surveillance systems is further boosting business for Motorola.

To bolster their image and open doors in even more police departments across the US Motorola Solutions recruited William J. Bratton to its board in 2011. Bratton, now New York City's top cop under the supposedly "Left" mayor Bill de Blasio, was the city's police commissioner in the mid-1990s. From 2002 to 2009 Bratton led the LAPD. These two posts have given Bratton a national platform from which to promote certain public policies. While leading the NYPD and LAPD Bratton championed the use of expensive technologies, particularly surveillance systems, to suppress crime and control the public sphere. While chief of the LAPD, Bratton even appeared in joint press events with Motorola Solutions representatives to praise the company's surveillance products that were being used by Los Angeles to blanket public housing developments with sensors capable of automatically reading vehicle license plates and scanning pedestrians faces and matching them against mug shots in biometric identification databases.

Motorola paid Bratton \$140,000 last year, and he has

amassed stock and options in the company worth upwards of \$630,000. When New York mayor de Blasio announced Bratton as his pick to run the NYPD, Motorola Solutions announced that Bratton was leaving its board, but another high-profile police leader will likely fill his seat.

Four star Air Force General Michael V. Hayden is another Motorola Solutions board member who opens doors at the highest levels of government and industry. Hayden has been the director of the two largest US spy agencies, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency, and he served as the director of National Intelligence for George W. Bush. Motorola Solutions is deeply involved in the CIA and NSA's telecommunications surveillance activities. For his services as a director, Motorola Solutions paid General Hayden \$100,000 in cash last year, and awarded him stock worth another \$140,000.

The biggest shareholder in Motorola Solutions is a hedge fund that has made a giant bet on the company's further monopolization of police and military communications and surveillance markets. ValueAct Capital's offices are on Pacific Avenue in San Francisco, sandwiched between the Financial District and Northbeach's trendy Italian eateries and cafes. Like many hedge funds, ValueAct Capital's investment strategy is activists and political. Motorola Solutions will be a lucrative bet for the fund's managers not because the company has a product that's in demand, or because the company is positioned to respond to broad, impersonal market forces, but rather because the corporation actively stokes demand through lobbying and campaign cash, and recruits connected ambassadors like Bratton and Hayden to represent it.

In 2012 Motorola Solutions gave \$320,000 to the Democratic Governors Association. The company gave another \$50,000 to the Republican Governors Association, and the National Conference of Democratic Mayors got \$22,000. These are all independent 527 groups that use outside spending tactics to elect state and local officials who have influence over billions in police agency spending. Barack Obama and Mitt Romney benefited from \$19,000 and \$15,000 in cash from Motorola also in 2012. And Motorola spent another \$1.7 million lobbying the federal government to preserve and expand its near monopoly over police radio contracts.

At the state level Motorola Solutions is just as prolific in funding political races and influencing leaders who will draft budgets and earmark funds for particular homeland security projects. The company's CEO Gregory Brown is a major donor to the Illinois Republican Party. Motorola Solutions spends tens of thousands in company funds yearly on races in California, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Arkansas, and beyond.

These expenditures, combined with Motorola Solutions' door-opening board members, has allowed the company to profit from continued spending on homeland security

by local, state, and federal agencies. It has translated into big profits and capital gains for investors. ValueAct Capital has amassed over 28 million shares in Motorola Solutions, giving the hedge fund a 10.6 percent ownership stake. In 2012 ValueAct probably received \$26 million in dividends. Its equity in the company is worth roughly \$1.8 billion today.

Behind ValueAct Capital is Jeffery Ubben, a San Francisco investor who was a managing partner at Richard Blum's eponymous private equity firm Blum Capital. Making big bets on surveillance is Ubben's thing; he's also a shareholder and board member of Axiom Corporation, one of the largest data mining firms in the world.

Motorola Solutions has a lucrative business with San Francisco's police department and the city of Oakland across the Bay, as well as with BayRICS, a regional authority comprised of emergency services agencies in northern California.

A surveillance boom has swept the US with many major cities investing millions in sophisticated camera and sensor networks, and computer systems to track persons and vehicles, and analyze behavior. In Atlanta Motorola Solutions has installed digital cameras around the city, and placed powerful wireless PTZ (point, tilt, zoom) cameras around the downtown.

In Chicago the police were equipped with Motorola Solutions surveillance equipment prior to the G8 and NATO summit in 2012. Similarly the Charlotte police spent \$1.5 million of federal grant money on Motorola Solutions radios in preparation for the Democratic National Convention, also in 2012.

These surveillance systems, tailored for US police agencies, include features used in the systems that Motorola has equipped the Israeli army with. Israel uses Motorola's wide area surveillance system and something called the Moto Eagle surveillance system to secure settlements across the West Bank. Israel is, in fact, one of Motorola Solution's hotbeds for developing new military and police technologies. The company's Airport City office, just east of the Ben Gurion Airport, develops technologies that straddle the battlefield and police beat. The Boycott, Divest, Sanction movement has targeted Motorola for years because of its Israel contracts that directly facilitate the occupation of Palestinian lands, and the militarized policing that Palestinians and other non-Jewish residents are subjected to.

Back in the United States Motorola Solutions' most advanced surveillance systems are being purchased by cities with large Black populations. In Los Angeles Motorola's surveillance cameras, sensors, and video analysis tools like biometric facial recognition systems are used to watch over the all-Black Jordan Downs public housing development. Atlanta's surveillance system watches over the downtown where the local business elite hope to sanitize public space of homeless and other populations.

Cleveland's growing city surveillance system, called the

"Cleveland Shared Security Surveillance" program, or CS3, was launched in 2007 by Motorola. It integrates city-owned surveillance tools and privately-owned cameras and sensors, making it a quasi-public, part private system. It has grown into a large meshed network of mobile and stationary cameras aimed at commercial districts, neighborhoods, and what Motorola and the city's police call "high risk areas," all of which are disproportionately inhabited by African American residents. The city-owned cameras sit conspicuously atop light poles and other fixtures in public space. They are contained in black and white enclosures with a small round glass bubble protruding from the bottom. Inside the bubble an electronic eye pans and tilts as its operators observe the public. A little blue light at the top blinks like a police cruiser around the clock. As much as they are there to see, the cameras are also meant to be seen. You're being watched through the eyes of Motorola Solutions. **CP**

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## The Rescue Fallacy Race, Privilege and Adoption

BY RUTH FOWLER

In the last few months I've been struck by three separate news stories, all concerning adoption. In the first, a black, orphaned teen—Davion Navar Henry Only—who had been in the Florida foster system since birth, hit the headlines after making an emotive plea in church for someone to adopt him following the recent discovery of his biological mother's death: "I'll take anyone," Only said. "Old or young, dad or mom, black, white, purple. I don't care. And I would be really appreciative. The best I could be."

In the second story, a blonde Roma child is removed from her adoptive 'dark' Roma parents, who are suspected of "stealing" her, "abducting" her, "sex-trafficking" her and running a child-sex ring after authorities became suspicious about her parents' claim that they took her into their care upon the request of her biological parents, who were also Roma.

In the third story, cameraman Duane Watkins and his wife have a chance encounter with the photographer behind the blog 'Humans of New York'. After impressing Brandon Stanton with his story of adopting a young Ethiopian girl following infertility issues, Duane asks Stanton to put out an appeal on his massively popular blog, begging for the funds to complete another expensive international adoption: "Would there be any possibility that you could help us raise the adoption fees to get her a brother? We've already found him, but aren't financially ready yet." Stanton agrees, and within a few hours, the blog has raised over the \$26,000 requested. Within three days, the total is near \$90,000, and the Watkins an-



nounce they will take the entirety of this money (over three times what they initially requested) for their children's college education fund.

These three stories, so close upon the heels of one another, represent to me, the overwhelmingly racialized narrative surrounding children and adoption, a narrative which is explicitly denied and ignored by those whites in control of the adoption process. These stories are all deeply troubling, and give us a unique perspective into the centrality of whiteness as it's inserted into an emotive area which renders pragmatism and common sense null and void against the onslaught of the savior myth.

Firstly, Only's story tragically highlights a common plight for children in care and eligible for adoption in the States. Like Only, there are nearly 500,000 children in the foster system in the US, 29% of whom are black. Of this number, less than a quarter will find adoptive homes. According to a report in *Time* magazine,

Black children are adopted less frequently and more slowly than kids of any other race. White children are five times as likely as to be adopted than children from any minority group, and are adopted out of foster care an average of nine months sooner than black children."

Only's case is not the exception—he represents a pretty typical experience for a black child within the American system. Yet white adoptive parents in America comprise a huge percentage of the total number of international adoptions: from a high of 22,991 in 2004, to 8,668 in the 2012 fiscal year. International adoption is preferable to giving a homeless child a home. Why? Because international adoption places the parents at the centre of the adoption experience. It allows parents to "choose" their child, have a higher likelihood of adopting an infant, and avoid 'damaged' children—those who are older than five, those with behavioral difficulties, and those with disabilities. White Americans have a romanticized view of international adoption, specifically adoption concerning black and brown babies, which does not extend to the American black and brown children and teens who are languishing in the foster care system, like Only, with little opportunity for escape.

There is something about the black or brown child from a third world country which triggers a deeply insidious savior narrative within the white soul. The ethics of transracial adoption have been questioned many, many times. Adoption has been plagued by notions of racism and ethnic essentialism because it denied white families the right to adopt a black or brown child (and vice versa) and then cultural insensitivity as it placed black and brown children with white families who were, simply, inadequately equipped to educate their child about the issues they might face. In the same *Time* magazine article quoted earlier:

In its report, 'Finding Families for African American

Children,' the [Evan B. Donaldson] institute argues that race should be a factor in adoption placement, and that agencies should be allowed to screen non-black families who want to adopt black children—for their ability to teach self-esteem and defense against racism, and for their level of interaction with other black people. The authors' recommendations reflect the findings that transracial adoptees report struggling to fit in with their peers, their communities and even with their own families. The study also says that minority children adopted by white parents are likely to express a desire to be white, and black transracial adoptees have higher rates of behavioral problems than Asian or Native American children adopted transracially; they also exhibit more problems than biracial or white adoptees, or the biological children of adoptive parents.

The notion of "color blindness" is propounded by (predominantly) white liberals as evidence of their lack of racism. White people claim they do not "see" skin color, and therefore can love a child regardless of skin color. I don't think anyone would deny that a white family cannot provide a loving home to a child because of their lack of skin pigmentation: however, a white family has a moral imperative to acknowledge the centrality of their own whiteness and its complicity in systemic racism which still exists, and therefore still oppresses, people of color today. They must take pains to allow their child to take pride in a separate, different racial identity to their own. The same report states that: "black children had a greater sense of racial pride when their parents acknowledged racial identity, moved to integrated neighborhoods, and provided African American role models. Black children whose white parents minimized the importance of racial identity were reluctant to identify themselves racially."

When it comes to international adoption, there seems to be a pervasive, implicit but unarticulated notion that 'foreign' children, mainly children born to families with immediate economic problems due to their nation's third world status, are not 'tainted' by the same legacies of slavery, systemic racism, imperialism and colonialism which mark the bodies of black people within the US. Duane Watkin's positioning of himself and his family as a "saviors", using over-emotional language and details of their first child's adoption to move the HONY audience into donating to his fund, explicitly situates this unknown child, Richard as a possession, as "his". He wants to "bring Richard home" he claims, which seems deeply simplistic and disturbing to anyone who has ever witnessed the fear, trauma, uncertainty and pain of the newly adopted transracial international child, who have rarely met their "parents" before they are flown over to a new country, a new language, and a new life which will not be 'home' for many many months. This claiming of ownership over a black body who cannot speak and is being spoken for is incredibly

disturbing given the legacies of slavery, propriety and ownership that still colors the black experience today: an experience which is denied by the white gaze, the white owner, the white paternal figure who asserts his “right” to bring that child home as a son and brother, without even talking to that child in advance and gaining his or her consent.

The HONY blog makes no mention of how far Duane and his wife are in the adoption process: it seems, not very far from the flippant mention of spying this child in a catalogue, like a commodity, the sketchy details they provide. Watkins, sincere, kind, good hearted man that he may be, has violated his daughter’s privacy by telling her story in order to generate income, and has violated a child’s privacy, a child who is not his son, is not his daughter’s “brother”, a child who is, simply, an unknown black body upon which Watkins and his family have projected their own needs and desires onto, with emotive language and manipulation which reeks of white privilege and a massive insensitivity to the legacies of racism and colonialism. Perhaps Richard will be Watkins son one day: perhaps not. Nevertheless, at this moment in time, he is not “theirs” and deserves to be treated with the respect and dignity of any child who is not part of your own family, and any child who is. As an adult adoptee phrases it:

An adoptee can already feel the sting of how money plays a role and fundraising may add to this feeling of being a commodity...how would you like to feel bought and paid for? Your actions today matter to your future adoptee. If you cannot afford adoption and believe adoption agencies are gouging you, then don’t do it. Start a group and actively work to reform adoption, because honestly, how many of you believe that adoption actually costs as much as being charged? I don’t and believe they already have all processes down pat and can process an adoption for pennies on the dollar of what it costs now—but the people getting rich off it won’t like it. The wait times will increase because of less advertising and convincing a mother she is not as good as you are so she “needs to do the right thing” and surrender to create another adoptee to be adopted and this happens in both domestic and international in one form or another. The supply and demand are driven by you—the prospective adoptive parents, so really—you are in the ones in power but you allow your desires to keep it status quo—so you achieve your dream.

International adoption is ethically unsound at the best of times: issues surrounding child trafficking, the sheer extortionate cost of adoption, the historically rank practice of shipping black and brown children to white adults for large sums of money, the numbers of corrupt adoption agencies operating... and the lack of transparency surrounding the Watkins case is just another example of how sentimentalism

overrides pragmatism, how the myth of the savior is used to silence the voice of caution, to suggest the voice of caution is somehow racist, bigoted and malicious.

We do not know if Richard has a family: the chances are, he does, given the sheer numbers of children in the international adoption system who are not orphaned and the lack of transparency in (amongst others) the Ethiopian adoption system. This has shocked other white American families who have participated in it, so much so that they lend a note of caution to the sentimentalism of the Watkins’ tale. The Watkins use their daughter as a shield for their own desire for another child, and place their family’s need at the center of this narrative, in so doing eliding all the families and children in Ethiopia who could benefit from the money raised, and could have used that money to combat the orphan crisis in the most effective way possible: by keeping families together.

But what about the childless parents who ‘need’ children? Raising children is a basic human privilege we continually treat (incorrectly) as a right. Whether we have biological children or whether we adopt, parents are the ones who are ‘blessed’ with a child, and not the other way around. By deliberately subverting the narrative and making Richard and Chaltu the ‘blessed’ ones who have been saved from a life of poverty in a third world country (we are told that Richard “has not been in a car, on a plane, he has never seen a park, been on an elevator, escalator, in a pool or down a slide” as if that is proof that this poor child cannot possibly survive without a white American family to rescue him) The Watkins blithely perpetuate racist cultural stereotypes about a black country and suggest, wrongly, that the best solution is to ship those children out to white, western families.

“It’s too complicated.” “They cannot handle their own kids.” “They are too poor.” “Life is too unstable there.” These are the arguments we bandy around about birth parents. Frankly, this is an easy pill to swallow and goes down in seconds without much consideration. Just like that, I’ve severed the biological tie and discredited the argument for reunification. Yet people working in impoverished countries tell me something totally different. My friends, Troy and Tara Livesay, work in maternal care in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere. By every statistic and standard, it is a hot mess. Yet at Heartline, their organization that offers prenatal care, safe birthing facilities, and parenting and child development classes for vulnerable moms, their numbers disclose something astonishing: Out of roughly 300 births—and I’m talking very poor women, some raped, some teenagers, some single moms, extremely disadvantaged—only ONE birth mom has ever relinquished her baby. As Tara told me, “If our small, simple operation has virtually a 100% success rate, we are not trying hard enough for birth families.”

What would happen if we reallocated a percentage of the millions we spend on adoption toward community development? What if we prioritized first families and supported

initiatives that train, empower, and equip them to parent? This would absolutely be Orphan Prevention, not to mention grief prevention, loss prevention, abandonment prevention, trauma prevention, broken family prevention. What if we asked important questions about supply and demand here, and broadened our definition of orphan care to include prevention and First Family empowerment?”

The Watkins case delineates the centrality of whiteness and the white experience: it posits the white westerner’s desires as more important than the silent, blank, black body of the Ethiopian who is spoken for. Those who donated to Watkins and defended his move to crowdsource funds for a child are, it seems in the comments section, overwhelmingly white. But what do black people think of transracial adoption? Why are we, as white people, deciding what is best for black children?

United Kingdom-based poet and playwright, Lemn Sissay, entered the British care system in the 1960s having been given up for adoption by his mother who gave birth in England before returning to Ethiopia. In a BBC interview, Sissay claims that non-Africans should be closely “monitored” when seeking to adopt African children and that while many good adopting parents exist, “having an African baby is often a sign to non-African adopters of their philanthropic, political, familial or religious credentials.” and that, ultimately “taking a child from another culture is an act of aggression”. The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) is against interracial adoptions. “The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken a vehement stand against the placement of black children in white homes for any reason,” the group’s “Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoption” reads. “We affirm the inviolable position of black children in black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.”

I am not anti-adoption, but I am certainly anti-unethical adoption, and I firmly believe that many international transracial adoptions sustain and perpetuate an unhealthy racialized narrative which privileges white experience and gives many black and brown children a home and parents—at the cost, often, of their own, biological parents, or at the cost of knowing and acknowledging their cultural heritage. But it would be too simplistic to simply condemn children who need a home—children like Only, who’ll “take anyone”—to suffer in the state system simply because of racial binaries. It would be ridiculous and detrimental to deny children of color a home because their new parents may be white. But we need to stop thinking of white families as “rescuing” children from the third world, when clearly these white families are incapable of “rescuing” children from their own country who are also in great need. Adoption is not “rescuing”: adoption is adding to your family and giving your child the best experience that you can. It’s not providing a kid with a “better than nothing” experience.

What’s needed is extraordinary cognizance on the part of white adoptive parents, a recognition that we do not live in a post-racial society, but a society which is still extremely stratified, where white faces dominate magazine covers, movie billboards, talk shows, Congress, the Senate, CEO and managerial positions. It’s a world where dark parents of a blonde child suggests to a racist world “pedophiles”, whereas the blonde parents of a dark child are “angels” and are “rewarded” for being “Good Samaritans” with nearly 60,000 dollars of money they did not ask for and clearly do not “need”—and yet, have no intention of sharing with those who may most benefit from it: the families in Ethiopia who are unable to care for their own children because of a basic lack of resources and funds. **CP**

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## Rampant Inequality Whose World is It Anyway?

BY JOHN K. WHITE

A simple calculation in *The Irish Times* got me thinking again about inequality and just why it’s so dangerous. In the article (Jan 20), it was reported that 85 people are as wealthy as half of the world’s population. Incredible, unimaginable, mind-boggling.

Others have made similar comparisons. Paul Krugman noted that the typical worker’s income is about 35% less since the 1970s, while income gains for the richest 0.01% increased 7-fold in the same period. In *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Margaret Atwood wrote that the world’s 25 million richest people equalled the 2 billion poorest, as if documenting our modern Faustian pact with money. In *Do The Math!*, I made my own simple comparison, calculating that the Forbes Top 100 (at an average of \$7.7 billion each) matched the population of Indonesia making an average world income (\$6,300). We live in the most sophisticated, technologically advanced society ever, where armies of aid can be mobilized in minutes, and yet staggering inequality still exists. But just who does the world belong to?

Some casual observations may clarify the motives. In *El País* (Jan 20), it was noted that “Technology giants dodge Spanish taxman, paying just 1.2 million euros on 2012 profits.” Those giants included Google, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Yahoo, eBay, and Microsoft. Spain has a population of almost 47 million. That works out to a tax of 2 and a half cents per citizen. Two and a half cents! The article further noted that “Google transfers most of its US profits to Bermuda to avoid taxes” and that according to one American senator, Ireland is the Holy Grail in tax evasion, allowing American affiliates to skip the tax man altogether by basing themselves there.

Is it any wonder infrastructure is falling apart, national

debts grow bigger by the second, more and more are forced into unemployment and poverty, and yet the rich get richer every year? Not to mention, the famous hedge fund loophole where billion-dollar-per-year earners are able to pay tax at 15% instead of 35%, by listing their earnings as capital gains.

Some want to pay their share, such as Warren Buffet who famously noted that his cleaner was taxed at a higher rate than he was. He also described the United States as “a great meritocracy” and disparaged inherited wealth: “I cannot think of anything that’s more counter to that than dynastic wealth.” As part of a millionaire’s group advocating more taxes for the rich, Peter Vollmer noted that “the most decisive split is the one that exists between those who feel that wealth is a social responsibility and those who don’t.” Indeed, some wealthy citizens do recognize that life is meant to be shared. Just not enough. Even the wealthiest man in the world, Bill Gates, wished he wasn’t, saying “There’s nothing good that comes out of that.”

An article in the *New York Times* (Jan 20), praising Ben Bernanke’s eight-year tenure at the head of the Federal Reserve, reported that “The five largest banks have more total assets today than they did six years ago.” In another article in the same paper, a reformed hedge-fund trader told how a bonus of \$3.6 million wasn’t enough. To be sure, making money has become a real-live board game for the real wolves of Wall Street. But we all know that we can’t take it with us don’t we? And that shared stewardship is the basis of any decent society. It’s time to limit obscene hoarding of money and recognize that taxes are a group collection to efficiently manage individual wills.

It is hard, however, to convince people that excessive wealth is counterproductive to a prosperous society, which many believe is solely an extension of their own ideals and efforts, or worse that trickle-down economics works. If remuneration were directly related to training, skill, commitment, merit—all the things we think it should be connected to—one could argue in favour of a titans-of-industry, trickle-down system. But if such attributes are not applicable, the argument fails.

Prior to the \$182 billion blowout at AIG—the largest bailout in American history—the head of the financial products division received \$300 million in salary and bonuses over an 8-year period, primarily for engaging AIG in the ultimately disastrous world of mortgage-backed securities. Is anyone worth that much, especially when the company almost goes bankrupt?

How about Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott, head of the largest corporation in the United States, who made more than 1,000 times that of a regular nonsupervisory floor staff as noted by Paul Krugman? In the UK, the Barclays Bank president received £63 million or more than 3,000 times that of a front-line teller, prompting the then UK business secretary Peter Mandelson to note: “He hasn’t earned that money, he’s taken

£63 million not by building business or adding value or creating long-term economic strength, he has done so by deal-making and shuffling paper around.”

That’s the real argument; that the world belongs to me because I’ve earned it by the sweat of my brow, or in today’s reality the sweat of my financial brow. It’s no longer a matter of scale, as in when is enough enough? Is one car enough? Two? Three? Ten? Is one house enough? Two? Three? Ten? A limit of 10 rental properties? Is \$1 million a year enough to live on? \$1 billion? The measure of a human shouldn’t be determined predominantly by wealth, as if playing a children’s board game.

There is much evidence to show that excessive wealth forecasts decline. In *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, Giovanni Arrighi examined the root cause for failure of the four main capital-accumulating powers in history—the Genoese-backed Spanish (1450–1648), the Dutch (1628–1784), the British (1776–1914), and the Americans (1917–present)—each of which advanced the capitalist world system through a “systematic cycle of accumulation.” In his meticulous analysis, he noted that “the maturity of every major development of the capitalist world-economy is heralded by a particular switch from trade in commodities to trade in money.” As such, the transfer from a manufacturing economy to a financial-services economy fuels its own demise, where old-fashioned usury ultimately ends up playing havoc with the system.

In the United States in 2009, the finance industry surpassed manufacturing for the first time. In 1987, manufacturing made up 30% of all industry and finance 14%. By 2009, manufacturing had fallen to 18% while finance had increased to 20%. More than half of all big businesses in the United States (defined here as having assets greater than \$250 million) are now in finance. What’s more, more than 70% of all trades are high-frequency trades, where punters bet on the short-term rise and fall of a stock, often within minutes, facilitated by ultra-fast computers and encouraged by investment banks that take a percentage of every bet. Gambling is now the biggest business in town.

As manufacturing turns more to finance and finance in turn becomes like a game with limited responsibility to its fellow players (i.e., other citizens), inequality increases and the world becomes poorer for all of us. It is unimaginable how 85 people can equal half of the world.

I wonder how much longer such rampant inequality can continue. To whom does the world belong? **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Hollywood Does Economic Opportunism

### Gold Diggers 2013

BY KIM NICOLINI

If you doubt we are living during an economic depression, go to the movies and witness the evidence. I started compiling a list of my ten favorite movies from 2013 when I noticed many are stories of economic opportunism. The central characters claw their way to success, whether raking in cash or fighting for survival under oppressive economic regimes.

During times of economic despair, cinema rises to the occasion with stories of material excess, cut-throat competition, romantic heists, and heroes of the underclass. Movies don't necessarily reflect the reality of the "now", but provide an alternative reality. Scam artists are heroes; the rich get

Cowperthwaite); *Passion* (Brian de Palma); *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Vallée); *The Iceman* (Ariel Vromen); *Nebraska* (Alexander Payne); and *American Hustle* (David O. Russell).

In these movies, money is central. It drives the plots whether set on Wall Street, the Great Plains, AIDS era 1980s, or the dystopian near future. People are consumed by it, devise elaborate schemes to fill their pockets with it, or fall victims to the powers that control it. Although stories that reflect the current state of global economic despair, these movies are mostly set "out of time"—based on actual historical events or providing visions of a not-too-distant future. It's easier for audiences to accept their real economic despair if movies push the despair into the past or future.

There are three Gatsbys in this mix. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* is the ultimate American climber whose voracious appetite for status and economic success inspires him to chase money and the acquisition of things (including

want these characters to succeed even if their success provokes a nausea-inducing repulsion. Maybe we understand how fragile their dream is. That their failure is imminent. For all their material wealth, they will end up with the same "nothing" everyone else does.

All three films are orgiastic, hallucinatory dystopian visions—candy colored nightmares much like the world in *Catching Fire*. While *Catching Fire* could be read as science fiction, it is clearly a metaphor for the present. The divide between the Districts and the Capital mirror the divide between the Haves and the Have Nots, the government and the people who comply to its whims, and the impending menace of a totalitarian economy. Katniss Everdeen is a hero for today even if she is projected into tomorrow.

*Hunger Games* offers a lavish view of decadence tainted with soiled money and the rot of a bad trip. Children are thrown into an arena and fight to their death to entertain the rich and control the poor. The Capital is occupied by the wealthy who are both colorful and rotten like they are made of fruit that has been stuffing itself on its own riches. Katniss takes on the uncivilized System, but she is a reluctant

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**“Scam artists are heroes; the rich get their comeuppance, and the disenfranchised attempt to carve their own destiny.”**

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their comeuppance, and the disenfranchised attempt to carve their own destiny.

Enter the Gold Diggers of 2013—to reference the iconic film series from the Great Depression. These movies aren't necessarily the "best" films of the year, but they all focus on economic opportunism. These include: *The Great Gatsby* (Baz Luhrmann); *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese); *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine); *Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Francis Lawrence); *Blackfish* (Gabriela

people) as a gauge of his own viability. It drives him forward, and it brings him down. The 2013's Gatsbys are icons of America's Waste Culture, shallow materialists who exploit anything and anyone for their own economic gain. Luhrmann's *Gatsby* is a wall of ice consumed by misguided desire. Korine's *Alien* is a hoodlum drug dealer whose identity is constructed by guns, shoes and bong. Scorsese's *Jordan Belfort* is a Wall Street swindler and self-serving Robin Hood who steals from anyone to give to himself. It is surprising that we

revolutionary. She is out to save her herself and her family, not the world. The world is too damn big when your own life is at stake. Katniss is appealing because we understand that we can be Katniss too.

Not that we would want to be Katniss or the Orca Tilikum in the documentary *Blackfish* which reveals the horrific exploits of Sea World, an entertainment corporation that heartlessly captures Orcas and uses them as spectacle to entertain the masses. Sea World has no problem separating chil-



Michael Shannon in *The Iceman*.

dren from their mothers and plucking these magnificent creatures from their “homes” only to imprison them in undersized containers. Sea World is not far removed from the Arena in the *Hunger Games*. When the film’s tragic protagonist Tilikum kills his trainers, consider it revolt against a system in which monetary profit trumps moral decency. To quote the *Hunger Games*: “Remember who the enemy is.”

There’s not a lot of moral decency in Brian De Palma’s *Passion*. A psycho-economic thriller where everything is synthetic, the film is set within the global economy where two female marketing executives (Rachel McAdams and Noomi Rapace) manipulate each other to fight for power. The movie is a tantalizing product that shows how the market has mutated female cosmology. These two women are like “Careers” from *The Hunger Games*, thrown into the “cut-throat” arena to fight each other to the death. It is a sickeningly pretty picture about a not pretty economic culture.

*Dallas Buyers Club* is based on Ron Woodruff, a heterosexual homophobic Texan electrician and rodeo bull

rider who contracted AIDS during one random sexual encounter. When Big Pharma and the government fail to come through for Woodruff (Matthew McConaughey), he exploits every economic opportunity at his disposal to save his own ass. When the FDA fucks him over, Woodruff becomes a drug smuggler and an entrepreneur out of necessity. Through his ventures, he extends his life and lines his pockets with cash. His business partner Rayon (Jared Leto) and sympathetic doctor Eve (Jennifer Garner) are Hollywood constructs to temper Woodruff’s self-serving opportunism and make the film more marketable. Like Katniss Everdeen, Woodruff is out to save himself.

Michael Shannon’s portrayal of real-life contract killer Richard Kuklinski in *The Iceman* shows schizophrenia in the American Dream. Family means everything to Kuklinski. He does anything he can to provide for his wife (Winona Ryder) and daughters, including committing murder for the Mob. This movie reveals the savagery and hypocrisy that underscores the American Dream—the tensions between por-

nography and family, piety and murder. Kuklinski and his wife practice willful ignorance to maintain the illusion of the Dream rather than succumbing to the reality of the Nightmare. As long as the carpets are clean, who cares how much blood is in the basement?

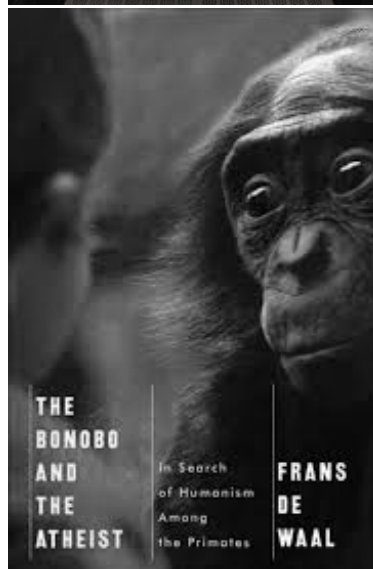
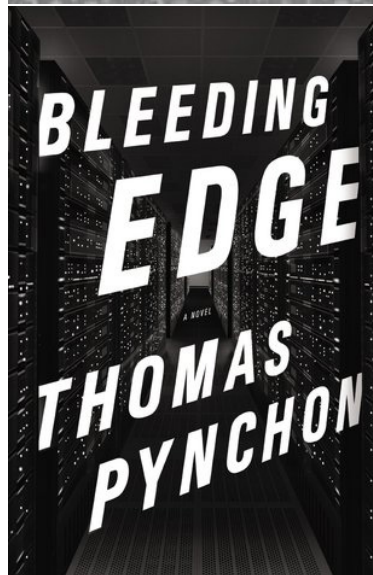
*Nebraska* illustrates how tenuous that Dream is. Woody Grant (Bruce Dern) chases down the million dollars he believes he won when he receives an award letter in the mail. Woody holds onto that paper as if his life depends on it even though the letter is clearly a scam. He begins walking from Billings, Montana to Omaha, Nebraska to collect his prize. Woody’s son Grant (Will Forte) eventually drives Woody to Omaha. The father and son’s names combined make Grant Wood (the Midwest Depression Era painter of “American Gothic”). Woody’s friends and family descend on him like vultures when they get wind of the million bucks. Everyone wants a piece of the pie even though there is no pie to be had. When he realizes he can’t get the whole pie, Woody settles for a truck (an emblem of the dying working class). The nostalgic black and white cinema-

tography combined with the Midwest landscape hearken back to the Dust Bowl, a time when voracious economic opportunism turned fertile farmland into an apocalyptic wasteland.

Set in 1978, David O. Russell's *American Hustle* excavates America's Culture of Want and the layers of hustle that drive it. Featuring an amazing ensemble cast (Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Jennifer Lawrence, Jeremy Renner, Bradley Cooper) caught in a network of fraud, scams, love and desire, this film blurs the lines between law and crime, want and need, artifice and sincerity. Sydney (Adams) sums up the film when she tells Irving (Bale), "You are nothing to me until you are everything". We live in a culture of everything or nothing. We want it all because we are supposed to be able to have it all. But as Irving points out, we con ourselves every time we open our wallets and attempt to buy happiness.

Beneath the hustles and briefcases of cash being exchanged, O. Russell's characters are humans who want something that can't be bought with money-love. At its heart and below the heists, the movie hinges on classic cinematic sincerity, not unlike the Depression Era films of Howard Hawks and Ernst Lubitsch. An on-going trope is Rosalyn's (Lawrence) fingernail polish which smells like flowers but also garbage. So many characters in the films of 2013 are like this nail polish. They are lavishly beautiful and tragically ugly; both driven and brought down by the *American Hustle*. O. Russell's film, however, gives us hope in love even when can't find our Golden Ticket. **CP**

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## The 10 Best Books of 2013

By JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

1. *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates*  
by Frans de Waal  
W.W. Norton, 304 pages
2. *Detroit: an American Autopsy*  
by Charlie LeDuff  
Penguin Books, 304 pages
3. *Proud to be Weird*  
by Ralph Steadman  
Ammo Books, 448 pages
4. *Bleeding Edge*  
by Thomas Pynchon  
Penguin Press, 496 pages
5. *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*  
by Max Blumenthal  
Nation Books, 512 pages
6. *Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier*  
by Tom Kizzia  
Crown, 336 pages
7. *Life After Life: A Novel*  
by Kate Atkinson  
Back Bay Books, 560 pages
8. *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica*  
by TJ Clark  
Princeton University Press, 344 pages
9. *Baghdad Solitaire*  
by Leslie Cockburn  
Asahina and Wallace, 380 pages
10. *New and Selected Poems: 1962-2012*  
by Charles Simic  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 384 pages

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