

# Tells the Facts and Names the Names CounterPunch

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Ken Silverstein & Alexander Cockburn

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### Nike's War Crimes

"[Companies] like Nike should be viewed as enemies, in the same manner we view armies and governments that perpetrate human rights violations. What is the difference between the behavior of Nike in Indonesia and elsewhere and the Japanese imperial army during World War II."

-- Jose Ramos-Horta,  
East Timor independence leader

## Doomsday At Deseret

On August 22, 1996 the US Army fired up the first furnaces on American soil designed to dispose of the world's deadliest gasses. The incinerator, located at the Deseret Chemical Depot fifty miles west of Salt Lake City, lies on the edge of the small Mormon ranch town of Tooele. Here, stored in rounded bunkers called "igloos", are 13,616 tons of chemical weapons, accounting for 44 per cent of the nation's arsenal of mustard gas, Lewisite, the psycho-active agent BZ, GB (sarin) and VX nerve gasses.

These lethal materials are packed in 56,000 M55 rockets, more than one million artillery shells, thousands of mines, cluster bombs, spray tanks and ton-capacity containers. Some of the weapons date back to World War I, while others were upgraded to new levels of lethality during Reagan's arms buildup.

On August 25, 1996, less than 72 hours after it opened, the Tooele plant was forced to shut down after sarin gas leaked from filters above the furnace. Some days later, after Tooele had come back on line, the burners were again turned off when cracks in the concrete ceiling allowed a solution contaminated with nerve agents to leak into a utility room below.

In early September an M-55 rocket loaded with explosives, propellant and sarin gas was being pushed through the furnace door by a robot when it jammed. Workers had to enter the chamber in rubber suits to dislodge the rocket with long spatula-type poles. All the while the furnace door was open, with the risk that the workers would be either fried or exposed to the nerve agent.

These early "malfunctions" prompted the plant manager, Gary Millar, to urge the US Army and the plant's contractor, EG&G Defense Materials, headquartered in Wellesley, Mass., to close the plant pending safety review and over-

haul. Millar's urgings went unheeded and the nerve agents continued to leak out. On one occasion it took more than 24 hours to detect the source of the leaking sarin gas, which had again contaminated an area where unprotected personnel worked. Two of the workers who had been exposed to the leak were later fired.

By now Millar's efforts to get the plant closed down were having an effect on his own career. His employer, EG&G, told him to stay home for a few weeks, on the grounds that he was suffering from inordinate stress. When he refused to stand down, he was fired. Millar, who had put in twenty-two years with the defense contractor, says he was dismissed because he insisted on "a level of safety and environmental performance required by state and federal laws and which any reasonably prudent person in my position would have insisted on".

"I started getting feedback that a number of the EG&G people saw me as a threat to their performance and choose to force me out rather than change to a higher level of performance and a safer culture", Millar says. "These managers spent as much time building and maintaining their turf boundaries as they did getting the job done."

In November Millar sent a twelve-page letter to the chief executive officer of EG&G, Fred Barnes. He told Barnes that the plant was operating with hundreds of chronic technical deficiencies. He criticized Army managers and EG&G corporate officials who insisted on cutting corners and having "an attitude that didn't see safety as much as a risk".

"I can only conclude that current EG&G management actions are typical of the senior management at Three Mile Island before their nuclear incident or at NASA before the Challenger accident," Millar wrote. "I strongly believe

(continued on p. 3)

# Our Little Secret

## BROTHER RANDY

Members of Congress already make \$133,600 and are now debating whether to give themselves a cost-of-living adjustment. Public employment can also be lucrative for members' relatives. Take Randy DeLay, deadbeat brother of Republican House Whip, and anti-Gingrich coup plotter, Tom DeLay.

Until the early 1990s, Randy's financial prospects were grim. Four business ventures in which he was involved—a restaurant, two oil projects and investments in beach property—had gone belly up. Shareholders in one of the oil ventures sued DeLay in a dispute which was later settled out of court. In another case, DeLay's uncle and four other business partners sold a company called Oilfield Distribution out from under

Randy and the new owners fired him from his \$120,000 per year post as the firm's Chief Executive Officer. DeLay filed for bankruptcy in 1992.

Salvation came in early 1995, when Tom was elected to the whip's post. Big firms and trade associations began to hire Randy as a lobbyist, though he had no previous experience. His clients included Houston Power and Light, Cemex, the Mexican cement monopoly, Union Pacific Railroad and the city of Houston, home port to both DeLays.

A fine article by Michael Barryhill in the *Houston Press* reports that during the past two-and-a-half years, Randy DeLay has earned \$750,000 in fees and expenses. The bankrupt of yesteryear now enjoys a fine office in a Houston high-rise and regularly flies to Washington to meet with clients.

Tom, for his part, promises that he offers his brother no special favors. "Be assured there is no conflict of interest," he wrote in a statement issued earlier this year. "I have taken steps to make Randy's access to my office more difficult than any other registered lobbyist."

## FRÈRE JACQUES

Our Little Secret has been laboring through the summer months to penetrate the murky prose and thought processes of Jacques Derrida, most particularly his newly translated *Politics of Friendship*. Amid our efforts there came some news about the Pomo hero's own application of what his British publisher Verso isolates as the prime theme of the *Politics of Friendship*, "an anti-genealogy, upsetting the genealogical motive itself: the order of filiation and preference, the familial and phallogocentric schema of fraternity, and the virility of virtue whose authority has traditionally gone unquestioned in our culture of friendship and our models of democracy."

Quite so. Derrida raised the anti-genealogical standard when his girl-friend, Sylviane Agasinski came to him with the news that she was pregnant. Derrida immediately terminated the relationship. Agasinski, who writes on philoso-

phy and photography, gave birth to a bouncing boy, and formed an ongoing relationship with Lionel Jospin, now the socialist prime minister of France. ■

## DARK DAYS IN OREGON

In 1973, Oregon became the first state to decriminalize possession and use of marijuana, starting a trend that was soon followed by Georgia, Alaska, and California. This summer Oregon, home of the Merry Pranksters and some of the most lucrative and potent marijuana plantations on the continent, became the first state to recriminalize possession of small quantities of the herb for personal use. The law calls for jail time, fines, forfeiture provisions and a six-month suspension of driving privileges for anyone caught with less than an ounce of marijuana.

The measure, which received backing from law enforcement types, the Oregon medical association and, oddly enough, the state's timber lobby, was seen by many as a way to counter a initiative that will appear on the ballot in 1998 to legalize the medicinal use of marijuana and the production of industrial hemp by Oregon farmers.

In the wake of California-style property tax limitation measures, Oregon finds itself in the midst of a growing fiscal crisis. Libraries have closed across the state. Schools have committed triage, increasing class sizes and letting go art and music teachers and librarians. There's not enough money to run the state's famous system of parks, so the legislature is entertaining the notion of selling dozens of them off. One economist estimated that the costs of the new marijuana law could run to \$500 million dollars over the next ten years. California has saved more than \$1 billion in court and prison costs since it decriminalized the weed in 1975.

Gov. John Kitzhaber, a physician and Lincoln bedroom guest, brushed these concerns aside. The point, Kitzhaber said, is really about giving more power to the police. "This measure has less to do with the possession of marijuana than it does with expanding the powers of search and seizure. Indeed, it will provide law enforcement with an additional tool that may have potential benefits in terms of prosecuting persons who are involved in other more serious criminal activity."

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## JAMES CARVILLE: HUMANITARIAN

In the summer of 1996, James Carville appeared in a series of ridiculous TV commercials for Nike, promoting its athletes as political candidates. Carville's spot featured him touting the political virtues of Ken Griffey, Jr., the star centerfielder for the Seattle Mariners. "The Kid's got the goods," Carville gushed. The commercials were awful and were pulled from the airwaves after a mercifully short run.

Not long ago Carville was confronted in Chicago by an anti-sweatshop organizer about his Nike spots. "Mr. Carville, how can you justify working for Nike given their human rights record in places like Indonesia and Vietnam?"

Carville was indignant. "Look, I'm no fucking protectionist," he snarled. "And guess what: I own stock in Royal Dutch Shell, too. What's the big deal?"

## MUM'S THE WORD

We recently noted the drug smuggling operations of the South African secret service, plus efforts by government backed scientists in the pre-Mandela years to develop drugs to sterilize the black population and assassinate black leaders with full government approval. The South African secret agency manufactured Ecstasy, mandrax and other drugs in secret labs and then flew them to London, raising cash there for other secret ops (and also as straight profit-making ventures by the agents).

As details of these vile enterprises were made public in the South African Truth Commission, the British press ran substantial stories in *The Observer* and in *The Sunday Times*. But the US press has been curiously discreet. This is not entirely surprising. The *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* have all devoted much space across the last nine months in seeking to discredit Gary Webb's series in the *San Jose Mercury News* about CIA connivance in drug smuggling by the Nicaraguan contras, with large amounts of the smuggled drugs ending up in the poor sections of Los Angeles. The South African saga plainly confirms that these are indeed exactly the kind of ventures secret services get involved in.

Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Los Angeles Times* have mentioned the

story at all. Back in February AP put a story on its wire about the arrest of Wouter Basson, the criminal government scientist at the heart of the affair. The AP report was picked up only in a few local papers. Major papers, notably the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*, covering Basson's arrest back in February focused primarily on the implications of the possibility that Basson may have sold or traded chemical warfare information to Libya and other "rogue states". The bulk of both articles focused on the development and international dissemination of chemical weapons. Basson's revelations about

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## A U.S. apology and compensation might have saved the lives of those on PanAm 103.

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systematic, officially-sanctioned torture and mass killings of blacks (and white anti-apartheid activists) was less newsworthy than the possibility that South African military technology may have been allowed to fall into the hands of states the US had branded as international outlaws.

Those asking themselves the obvious question: how much did the South African secret service and the CIA collude, should recall that it was a CIA tip that put the police onto Mandela, enabling them to arrest him and put him away on Robben Island all those years.

## THAT DEVIL MUAMMAR

Obsession with Libya may also explain similarly slim attention given by the US press to stories in the German and British press about Abolghasem Mesbahi, a former high-ranking Iranian intelligence officer who has defected to Germany. Mesbahi, in hiding, says that the late Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the 1988 bombing of the PanAm jumbo jet in retaliation for the shooting down of an Iranian Airbus by the *USS Vincennes* five months earlier. The *Vincennes* crew got medals for their exploit, which probably increased the Ayatollah's ire. A U.S. government apology and compensation might have saved

(*Doomsday, cont. from p. 1*)

that the [Tooele] operation poses a high risk potential to both employees and the public."

As Millar knew, there was scant point in turning to the US Army for muscle against EG&G's management. EG&G, which is amply stocked with former military officers, functions merely as the Army's subsidiary. EG&G's Barnes brushed aside Millar's letter, saying that the manager had been relieved of his duties because of "a difference in philosophy at this particular site".

Millar finally began to send copies of his 10,000 word letter to the press and got some coverage on the AP wire. Public attention prompted the US Army to dispatch an investigative team to Tooele supposedly to examine Millar's charges and assess the safety of the plant. In other word, to organize a cover-up.

On March 18 of this year the Army team released its report. Predictably the Army concluded that it could find no evidence that Millar had been fired because of his safety concerns. The plant was safe, the report said. It was Millar himself who was at fault for many of the problems that had occurred. With a nice line in bureaucratic throat-slitting, the Army report charged that "during his 15 months as general manager, Mr. Millar directed numerous documented and undocumented organizational restructurings and removed several key subordinate managers from their positions. These changes, overlaid on the complex operations of the plant as it progressed toward live-agent trial burn operations, created a turbulent, unfocused management environment". Echoing its assertions about Gulf War Syndrome, the Army also concluded that stress had indeed played a factor in Millar's supposed lapses.

The cover-up has gone well, but there's a problem: the plant continues to leak nerve gas. The Army's liaison manager at the plant, Tim Thomas, confirms to us that chemical alarms are going off at a rate of one to two times a week, and because of inadequate monitoring devices, the Army can't identify the precise chemical signalling the alarm.

For the US Army, EG&G and other defense contractors the stakes are extremely high. Scheduled for construction  
(continued on p. 5)

## Clarence Thomas's Second Home

Clarence Thomas may not be welcome inside the offices of most civil rights groups in Washington but one place he knows he can go for comfort is the Center for New Black Leadership, a Washington think tank that has become a haven for black conservatives.

The Center has commissioned Steven Smith, who once clerked for Thomas, to write "The Truth About Justice Clarence Thomas and the Need for New Black Leadership," a 35-page puff. Smith refers to Thomas as "the standard bearer for black conservatives."

Black conservatism is a boom industry, same way as Laura Ingraham and other conservative women have created a niche for themselves in mainstream media. The market has always been there. As long ago as 1981, the economist Thomas Sowell started a short-lived counter to the NAACP called the Black Alternatives Association, Inc., and received a million dollars in pledges from conservative foundations and corporations. Today, with affirmative action still high on the conservative hit list and the GOP still hoping to break the Democrats' hold over the black vote, the market for black conservative thought is far from tapped out. Other black conservative groups include Black Americans for Family Values in Los Angeles, the Lincoln Institute in Washington and Rescue Black America in Michigan.

The Center, founded two years ago, is quickly becoming a leader of the black conservative cause. In addition to defending Thomas, they've testified several times before Congress and, with a niece of Martin Luther King Jr., launched a high-profile campaign in support of school vouchers.

Phyllis Berry Myers, an EEOC official in the Reagan era, who testified on Thomas's behalf during his Senate confirmation hearings is a founding board member. Other founders include Minnesota businessman Peter Bell, San Francisco lawyer Brian W. Jones who subsequently left to be a counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Boston University professor Glenn Loury. Shelby Steele, a Hoover Institution fellow and prominent black conservative sits on the board.

By promoting "market-oriented, community-based" solutions to the social problems plaguing African-Americans, the center's members see themselves as bucking the civil rights establishment of the NAACP and Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "The civil rights leadership is a one-party system like Communist Russia and people who disagree with it are not part of a loyal opposition. They are dissenters," Steele said.

There is nothing revolutionary about the Center for New Black Leadership's proposals which include school vouchers in inner city neighborhoods, the dismantling of affirmative action programs, and tax cuts—the same conservative

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**"The civil rights leadership is a one-party system like Communist Russia", Shelby Steele says.**

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prescriptions handed down by Ralph Reed, Bill Bennett and Jack Kemp.

Though the Center claims it has been forced to "beg" for dollars it pulls in \$300,000 a year from the same foundations that give money to conservative outlets such as Paul Weyrich's Free Congress Foundation and the anti-feminist Independent Women's Forum. Three of its main sponsors are the Linde and Harry Bradley Foundation based in Milwaukee, Wis., which provided the group with seed money, the New York City-based JM Foundation and the John M. Olin Foundation. In its first year of operation, the JM Foundation gave the group \$25,000, while Olin gave \$50,000. More money is being sluiced in by corporate benefactors who neither Jones nor the center's new president, attorney Gerald Reynolds, would identify.

The Center recently received another windfall in the form of Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington, the spring-heeled Greek, who last month won a multimillion dollar divorce settlement from her wretched husband, former California Republican Rep. and oil mil-

lionaire Michael Huffington. Arianna joined the board last year with her friend, Bush administration official Michael L. Williams. Williams is best-known for his 1990 ruling as Department of Education Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights that college scholarships awarded on the basis of race were illegal. Williams now heads up something called the Galilee Group, which his bio describes as "an organization dedicated to providing visionary leadership for solving the equity issues of the knowledge-based society of the 21st Century".

The fledgling group has already had its share of infighting. Loury left the Center this spring after a falling out over affirmative action. Loury—who quit the American Enterprise Institute to protest AEI fellow Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism*—had a disagreement with the Center for New Black Leadership's board members over California Proposition 209, a ballot initiative designed to dismantle state affirmative action programs.

Loury has long criticized affirmative action, but when confronted with Prop 209, he concluded "efforts to ensure a modest degree of racial diversity in a public workforce may be justified". He stayed clear of the conservative push for Prop 209's passage and argued that in the interests of being able to reach out to mainstream African Americans, the Center should do the same.

But being a no show in an arena in which white conservatives needed their presence most carried a price. "There's pressure from funders who say we're supporting you, we thought you stood in a certain place. You might not be able to raise money from those sources", Loury says. He adds that funders did not openly threaten to pull the plug. "It's more subtle than that. You want to keep people happy if not excited about what you do or else you're not going to get their support."

Loury soon became a target for conservatives. In February, Sowell, now a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, attacked Loury in a *Weekly Standard* article titled, "The Nuance Excuse".

"One of the curious things about the bitter battle over preferences and quo-

(continued next page)

*(Doomsday, cont. from p. 3)*

in the next five years are similar incinerators—each costing anywhere from \$500 million to \$2 billion—to be sited at Umatilla, Oregon (Raytheon has the contract); Anniston, Alabama (Westinghouse); Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Pueblo, Colorado; and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky. These plum contracts—totaling more than \$10 billion—are only the beginning of the story. As a result of the Chemical Weapons Convention the international market in chemical weapons disposal is hugely lucrative, with the total market estimated at nearly \$75 billion. So it's scarcely surprising that Millar's letter got thrown in the trash.

The nerve agents stored at Tooele and the other sites are the most lethal in the world. VX, for example, has a toxicity ten thousands times that of its agro-industrial cognate, malathion. And, unlike sarin gas which dissipates quickly, VX is designed to persist in the environment at lethal levels for weeks. All the military nerve agents are closely associated with chemicals used in intensive agriculture and in fact were developed by Shell, Monsanto, FMC and DuPont under contract to the Army. A deadly dose of VX is about a millionth the size of a grain of salt. Victims of VX and sarin poisoning die a wretched and painful death, typified by excessive salivation, uncontrollable weeping and urination, followed by seizures and massive internal bleeding.

**E**ven under the US Army's own conservative reckoning, a catastrophic incident at the Tooele plant involving VX would have a "one per cent kill radius of 60 miles", meaning that at 60 miles from Tooele, one percent of the population would die. At 30 miles, 50 per cent could be expected to die. At 15

miles, 75 per cent. As noted above, the Salt Lake City metro area (population 750,000) is less than 50 miles from Tooele.

Early in July, here at CounterPunch, we were contacted by a member of the Army's chemical weapons investigative team, the one that had deep-sixed Millar. He told us that the conclusion of the Army's probe had been "pre-ordained", and that it had been obvious from the start that Millar was going to be the scapegoat. The investigator said the US Army

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**A deadly dose of VX is about a millionth the size of a grain of salt. Victims of VX and sarin die a wretched and painful death.**

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team had been tightly controlled by Brigadier-General Thomas Konitzer. Among other measures, Konitzer squashed an assessment by our informant which had concluded that the Tooele plant was "plagued by technical and organizational problems which, under the current management regime, opened the potential for a catastrophic incident".

But Konitzer was uninterested in anything except Millar's psychological mindset. "It's clear to me," our man concludes, "that the Army is more concerned with controlling leaks to the media than in securing the sound and safe operation of the plant. Was Gary Millar under stress? Given what was going on out there, and the indifference of his superiors, he would've been insane not to be".

The Army investigator said that most of the flaws in the Tooele plant were well known by the Army and EG&G since at

least 1994, when Steven Jones had pointed them out. Jones had been the environment and safety officer at the Tooele plant until he was fired in 1994 for refusing to sign off on a document certifying that the incinerator was safe to operate. Jones pointed to a list of more than 3,000 safety violations at the facility, including some major design flaws. EG&G's president justified the dismissal of Jones on the grounds that the safety officer had approached his work with "an overabundance of enthusiasm".

**W**e reached Jones at his home in Provo, Utah. Ever since his dismissal in September of 1994 he's been battling EG&G over his dismissal. And his criticisms of the plant have intensified. "All of the mishaps at the plant were predicted three years ago," Jones said. He told us unequivocally that if the plant is permitted to stay in operation without major changes there's going to "a catastrophe."

Before taking the job at Tooele, Jones had served as an environmental and health officer for the Defense Department, overseeing the what he called the military's "hot spots." "Every day there are deficiencies

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*(Black Studies, continued from p. 4)* tas that came to a head in the California Civil Rights Initiative is how many critics of affirmative action were missing in action when the issue faced its first test at the ballot box.," Sowell wrote. "After the fight was won without them, we could say to them what Henri IV said, after a great victory in battle, to one of his followers: "Hang yourself, brave Crillon; we fought at Arques and you were not there."

When asked about whether members stick to the conservative party line, Steele replied, "We don't ask all board members to agree with every position the organization takes," but he acknowledged that affirmative action is not a subject on which the Center for New Black Leadership tolerates dissent. Loury's limited support for affirmative action "was not a point of view that we wanted to be associated with," he said. "He supported racial preferences; we did not." ■

*(Doomsday, cont. from p. 5)*

being revealed," Jones says. "One of the biggest flaws is that the stack monitors don't work when they're exposed to heat, which means when the furnaces are burning. They have absolutely no idea what's coming out of the stack."

According to Jones, few of the employees have been trained to handle the extremely dangerous chemicals. A particular problem has developed with the operators of the forklifts used to move the M-55 rockets from their igloos (bunkers) to the furnace. Under the best of circumstances, the Army's own estimates suggest there's a one in 200 chance that a forklift is going to drop or puncture a rocket. Inside the rockets are volatile fuels, detonators, high explosives and enough nerve gas to kill 100,000 people. A forklift has already dropped a one-ton container of sarin gas, Jones reports.

Jones also tells us that the ventilator system at Tooele doesn't work and that the overall approach to worker safety is abysmal. "The Army acts as if it's immune from OSHA. They neither know nor care what's coming out of those stacks. They see their mission as merely to destroy the agent. If there are no dead bodies, they believe the mission is a success. But when the body count comes at Tooele or one of the other plants, it's going to come quick and could be in the tens of thousands."

The description of the decommissioning process at the plant furnished to us

by Jones is remarkable. A conveyer belt carries a rocket under a huge "laser-guided" slicer, which often fouls up, cutting the rocket in the wrong place, and dispenses the various sections of the rocket to the wrong furnace. Often explosives end up in the furnace reserved for nerve agents and vice versa. Jones pointed out that at the Army's prototype incinerator, operated by Raytheon at Johnston Island in the South Pacific, there have been numerous instances where the nerve agent kilns have been rocked and damaged by explosions. In its three years of operation, the Johnston

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### **Fired safetyman says a forklift has already dropped a one-ton container of sarin gas.**

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Island incinerator has had 32 releases of nerve gas into the plant and the atmosphere.

"Never put anything negative about the plant in writing," Jones tells us he was told by his superiors. "This direction makes it impossible to do inspections because if you find deficiencies you can't write them up." Jones reckons that it would take EG&G at least three years to get even a grasp of the safety problems at the plant. But he's under no illusions that the company or the Army

will come to their senses. In May, EG&G fired its environmental officer, Tina Campbell, after she complained about repeated violations. In late June, the plant experienced another large leak and remains temporarily shut down until the source can be located.

"The Army and the defense contractors are so heavily invested in this incineration technology that it looks like only a major disaster will derail them from building the other plants, which are exact clones of Tooele", Jones says. "But the risks climb for the Alabama and Pine Bluff plants where hundreds of thousands of people live near the site." In yet another example of environmental racism, nearly fifty-percent of the people living near the Arkansas and Alabama facilities are black.

Inhabitants of Utah can scarcely take comfort from the reason plants like Tooele are located there. When the Atomic Energy Commission was justifying atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons at its Nevada site, the Commission agreed that it would only explode its bombs when the wind was coming out of the west, away from Las Vegas and Reno and towards the rural inhabitants of Utah, who were classified as "a low-use segment of the population". Eisenhower held a similar view of the expendability of Mormons, saying in 1956, the year the Dugway Proving Grounds conducted open air tests of sarin gas west of Tooele, that "We can afford to sacrifice a few thousand people out there in the interests of national security." ■

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