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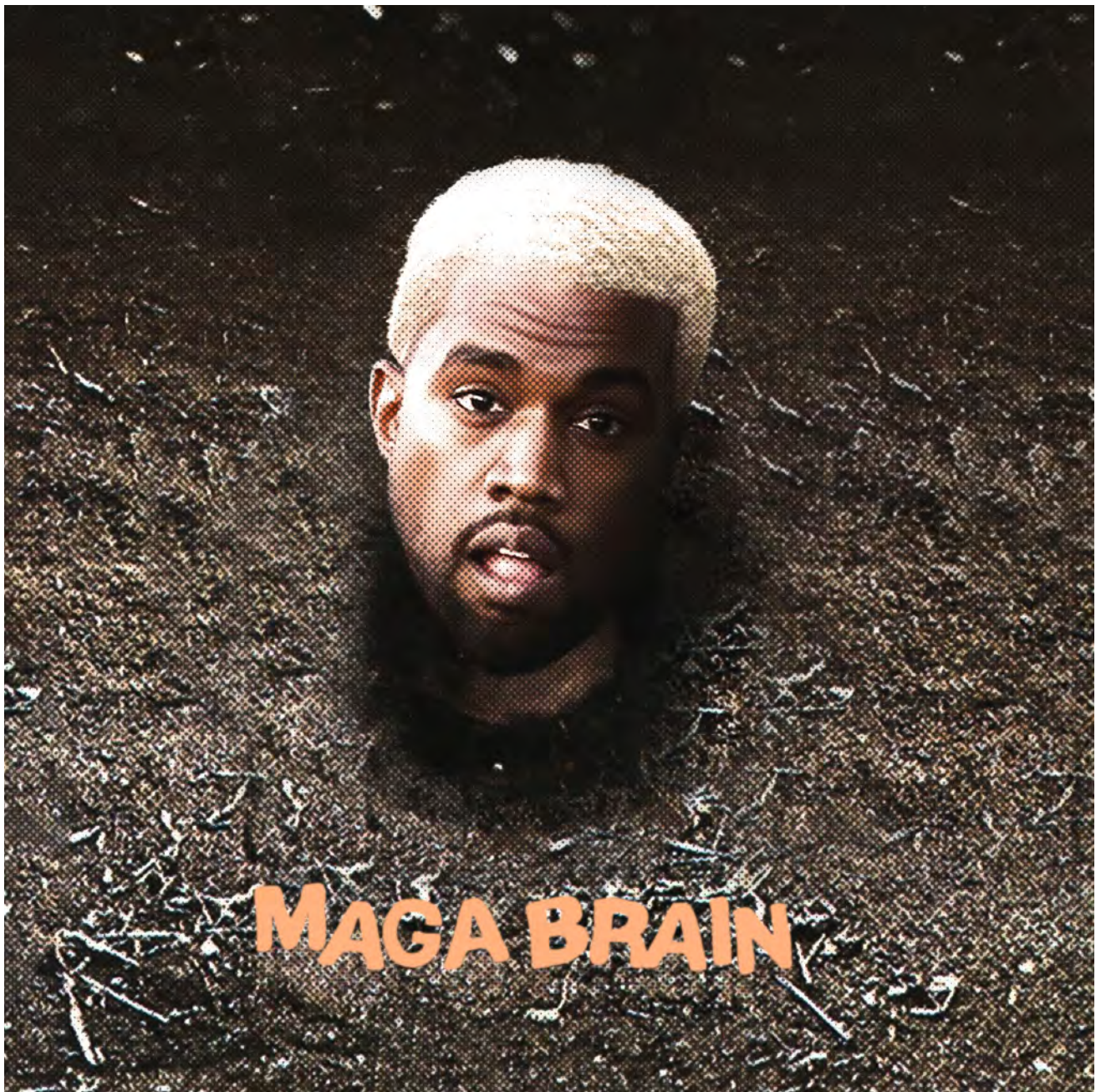
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE WEAPONS INDUSTRY BY JOAN ROELOFS

MARX'S ALTERNATIVE BY PAUL STREET

BURNING THE HEMISPHERE BY STAN COX

MEXICANS WANT CHANGE BY LAURA CARLSEN

FREE TRADE IS NOT FREE BY PETE DOLACK



# CounterPunch

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"Maga Brain" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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VOLUME 25 NUMBER 3 • 2018

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ..... 5

## BORDERZONE NOTES

### Mexicans Want Change

BY LAURA CARLSEN ..... 10

## EUROZONE NOTES

### Long to Reign Over Us

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK ..... 12

## ARTICLES

### Neoliberalism and Hip Hop: On Gangsters Real and Fake

BY NICK PEMBERTON ..... 14

### The Political Economy of the Weapons Industry

BY JOAN ROELOFS ..... 16

### Trump's Quest for Energy Dominance

BY JOHN SCHLOSSBERG ..... 22

### How Capitalism is Working: Marx's Alternative

BY PAUL STREET ..... 25

### We Burned Through a Whole Hemisphere in Just 500 years

BY STAN COX ..... 29

## COLUMNS

Roaming Charges ..... 6

Maria's Missing Dead

By Jeffrey St. Clair

Man-made disaster in Puerto Rico.

Empire Burlesque ..... 7

The American Mirror

By Chris Floyd

The future is all used up.

Bottomlines ..... 8

"Free Trade" is Not Free

By Pete Dolack

Making NAFTA worse.

Between the Lines ..... 9

Careless Courts

By Ruth Fowler

The perils of family court.

## CULTURE & REVIEWS

Somebody's Watching You

By Lee Ballinger ..... 33

Dreaming in the Cinema

By Ed Leer ..... 35

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## How to De-ICE

I encourage the states of Washington and Oregon to charge the federal agents and officers engaged in the outrageous separation of migrant children from their parents with false imprisonment. Yes, they would likely lose such a case, but such defiance does not go unnoticed and would make me proud of our state. Let other states soil themselves.

*Rich Domingue*

## Our Monsters

Henry Kissinger is probably biggest war criminal since Hitler. Although Truman and his A Bomb is always in contention. We have produced more monsters than ever in human history.

*Fred Kushner*

## The Creep

Rudy Giuliani's still the same creep who's first mayoral campaign event resembled Mussolini's March on Rome, with drunken on- and off-duty cops vandalizing the streets and yelling racist crap about David Dinkins.

*Brian Shea*

## Chickenocracy

All local politicians have their own version of the "chickenocracy." It's all about kowtowing to corporations to increase jobs and the tax base. It just gets "bigger and badder" when it gets to state and fed levels, but the self-serving greed and compassionless psychopathology is always the same. Don't believe the pretty lies about politicians being caring and loving "public servants."

*Vera Lynne Pepper*

## Predators

Bill Clinton's a sexual predator. His wife should have left him but she stayed with him for greed of power. Hillary has no dignity, she's a fake feminist. He shouldn't be publishing books to clean his image. Neither of them should.

*Malu Huacuja*

## Keef's Act

During the mid-late 1990s sometime I heard Alexander Cockburn give a talk on one of his new books, at the Shaman Drum bookstore in Ann Arbor. During the talk he shared an anecdote about being at some banquet and sitting at the same table as Keith Richards. He said he was stuck at how "perfectly lucid" Richards was, engaging in small talk and normal conversation, just like everyone else. At some point, Richards was called to speak at the microphone, and once at the mike he all of a sudden slipped into the Keith caricature: acting wasted and druggy, slurring and mumbling his speech, talking weirdness. Afterwards, he got back to Cockburn's table, sat back down, and resumed his perfect normalcy. Cockburn said he then realized that the whole Richards public persona was "all an act."

*Jim Nicita*

## Brink of the Abyss

Those 5 to 4 SCOTUS decisions are becoming more frequent, not to mention ominous. The liberal left, however, isn't clocking any of that. It's still hoping Right will prevail over Might, but that is very unlikely, at least in the short-term. SCOTUS isn't losing sleep about the



*Margot Kidder at Standing Rock. Photo: Carol Miller.*

long-predicted blue wave either, which probably won't materialize. Its underlying message is that neither should Trump and the Alt Right. The 2018 election will be seminal, meaning that if the R's win, Trump will frame it as a mandate. What that will mean, to a certainty, is that he will not just double-down on his present policies, but he will likely suspend the Constitution, perhaps before the end of the year, with SCOTUS' blessings. The left, as usual, will mouth moralistic platitudes, but that's a very dubious undertaking. It urgently needs to think outside the box but that, too, will be difficult. If the left is expecting any kind of revolution, what with SCOTUS lurking in the background, it is living in a fantasy. If it's still over-focused on the Deep State—as if the Gestapo, the Alt Right and Mattis/Pompeo/Bolton were any better—it is living in a fantasy. It's time to finally get real. America, quite literally, is on the brink of the abyss.

*Michael Green*

## You Can Speak of Palestine

Anthony Bourdain was not only a good person and a well-known television personality by way of his food shows, he went to Palestine (focusing on Gaza), and touted it, wrote about it, filmed it. He said many times that his heart was in Palestine, and with Palestinian people. He showed people like Rick Steves, who privately says he supports Palestine and made a many-punches-pulled Travel with Steves about his trip there that you can speak of it, you can "expose" your integrity and principal and not be destroyed, can remain on the air. I thoroughly enjoyed what I saw of him, and am very sad he suffered so and that he's gone.

*Marianne Torres*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# Maria's Missing Dead

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

**T**hey knew it was coming. They knew when it would hit. They knew how strong the winds would be and how much rain the storm bands would unleash. They knew how high the surf might surge. They knew it would take out Puerto Rico's decrepit power grid. They knew the island's archaic water system would fail. They knew there would be landslides, burying roads, cutting off towns and isolating villages. They knew bridges and small dams would collapse. They knew backup generators would run out of gas. They knew hospitals and clinics would lose power. They knew tens of thousands of houses would be destroyed, leaving families homeless for months and sparking a refugee crisis. They knew there would be deaths and thousands of injuries. They knew children would be separated from parents, the elderly and infirm left alone. They knew there would be shortages of food, water, and medicine. They knew that Puerto Rico, struggling under crushing debt, imposed austerity and the cruel legacy of colonialism, was even less capable of dealing with the immediate aftermath of a super-storm than was Houston or New Orleans or Miami. They knew and yet they did nothing.

Hurricane Maria gave plenty of warning. Despite being under siege from Trump's budget cuts, NOAA had meticulously tracked the storm since it first formed as an ominous wrinkle in the broiling waters of the eastern Atlantic off the coast of West Africa. They tracked it as it migrated across the Atlantic, incubating in 85-degree waters until it coalesced into a tropical depression near the Lesser Antilles. Then within 24 hours, Maria morphed from a tropical storm into a powerful hurricane, fueled by the most "explosive

intensification" ever documented in the Atlantic Basin. On September 19, Maria entered in the Caribbean Sea, after smashing across the island of Dominica packing 165 mile per hour winds, the fiercest ever to hit the island.

The first tentacles of Maria lashed Puerto Rico on September 20th. Over the next 24 hours, some parts of the island were drenched by 40 inches of rain, eight inches more than Houston received over three days during Hurricane Harvey. The power went out within a few hours, plunging the island into the largest blackout in US history and the second largest in the history of the world. For months, people in rural villages were forced to drink water contaminated by toxic waste, rotting animal corpses and raw sewage.

George W. Bush was swiftly vilified for his callously lethargic response to the swamping of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Yet within a mere two weeks, Congress had appropriated \$60 billion in emergency funding for Katrina survivors. In the wake of Maria, the government of Puerto Rico pleaded with the Trump administration for \$94 billion disaster relief. It took the Ryan/McConnell-led Congress six months to act on Puerto Rico's urgent request for help and then they only allocated a mere \$16 billion in federal aid. In those six months, more than 5,700 Puerto Ricans may have died, according to a mortality analysis by public health researchers at Harvard University. These weren't victims of the storm itself, but of government indifference and incompetence in the days, weeks and months that followed.

In the months after the storm, Puerto Ricans died from lack of basic medical care. They died because they ran out of

crucial medicines. They died because they couldn't get to dialysis treatments. They died because their breathing machines stopped working. They died of chronic conditions and acute disorders. They died of stress and heart attacks, they died of strokes and dehydration. They died of dehydration, exposure and starvation. They died of despair and suicide. They died from the criminal neglect of their own government.

Trump should thank Roseanne Barr, whose racist Twitter-spasm knocked the Harvard Report on post-Maria deaths in Puerto Rico off the Sunday morning news talk shows, none of which even mentioned the staggering mortality rate, which was 90 times the government's own total. The press, which largely left the island after Trump's paper-towel tossing photo op in San Juan, is nearly as complicit as the president.

For weeks, the official death toll in Puerto Rico stood at 16, an absurd figure that Trump repeatedly invoked in a running advertisement for how his administration should have rated a "10 out of 10" for its response to the Hurricane. This number eventually climbed to 64 deaths, and there it stood for 8 months, rarely questioned by the media despite the ongoing carnage of the island. The devastating Harvard Report, released on the eve of the new Atlantic hurricane season, came and went, a brief interlude in the national psychodrama.

"It took too long to understand the need for an appropriate response was not about politics but about saying lives," said Carmen Yulín Cruz, San Juan's feisty mayor. "Now will the government believe it?" There's no sign that the government even read it, nevermind absorbed its urgent lessons.

Now there is no excuse. Now we know what Puerto Ricans have known all along. Still, they do nothing. Instead, FEMA and its crony contractors are leaving the island, where tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans remain without safe drinking water and reliable electrical power. Fields remain fallow. Food is scarce. And people are dying every day. But who's counting? **CP**





## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# The American Mirror

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**QUINLAN:** Come on, read my future for me.

**TANA:** You haven't got any.

**QUINLAN:** Hmm? What do you mean?

**TANA:** Your future's all used up.

**A** grotesquely bloated, corrupt cop stumbling through a self-created mire of lies and death, sick of the world and his own ugly, irredeemable self. Glints and flecks of a better person, far in the past, appear, reflected not in his own time-assaulted visage but in a despised Other, a strong brown man with a beautiful wife, the kind of glamorous woman he used to have. A lowly Other, as he sees it, an inferior creature putting on airs ... yet embodying the gritty nobility and thirst for justice that he, the bloated one, the one whose soul is already rotting in its putrescent flesh, once held in his own heart as his ideal. This comes out every time he speaks the Other's name, in a slurred drawl that mixes loathing and yearning in equal measure: "Vargas."

Orson Welles' portrayal of Capt. Hank Quinlan in his 1958 film "Touch of Evil" is perhaps the most courageous self-immolation in cinema history—even Marlon Brando in "Apocalypse Now" makes sure there is a kind of ruined beauty and grandeur in his portrayal of Kurtz. But Welles—himself once a glamorous golden boy of American culture, at one time married to one of the most alluring women in the world, Rita Hayworth—cuts himself no such slack. There is no ruined grandeur in the jowly, sweating, loathsome wretch he pushes at the audience—often in large, intense close-ups. This is what we can come to, he says, using himself as a canvas of human degeneracy. Perhaps, he hints, this what we are—this is all we

are—at the core.

To cover up his own long-term corruption, Quinlan tries to frame both the upright Mexican detective, Miguel Vargas, played by Charlton Heston (not a brown man at all, of course; but then again, the Other is always a fiction, generated by a fearful mind)—as well as Vargas's new wife, played by Janet Leigh. (This "mixed marriage" is another rumbling undercurrent in the film.) In the end, Quinlan is shot by his disillusioned partner, and dies in a pool of industrial wastewater.

Just before this, Quinlan visits a brothel-keeper, with whom he once had a relationship. He's now so rotten and bloated that she can barely recognize him. She's played by yet another person once considered one of the world's most alluring women: Marlene Dietrich. He thinks she's reading cards for fortune-telling—she says she's just doing accounts—and he asks her to tell his future. That's where the dialogue above comes in.

This exchange comes to my mind more and more as I read the staggering farrago of the daily news. In this light—or rather, in this darkness visible—Quinlan increasingly appears not just as an emblem of universal, institutional and individual corruption, but as a prophecy of America's present reality... and its destiny.

As many have noted, Donald Trump's presidency does not represent some kind of aberration in the nation's politics, or in its character; it is much more of an apotheosis. Or perhaps a long-simmering impostume finally swollen to the bursting point, dousing us all with fountains of rancid pus, built up over many generations. Trump has held a mirror up to America's nature—and shown us,

in its reflection, a gigantic close-up of Quinlan.

The chronicle of a nation's death is oft foretold, of course, without the prophecy necessarily proving true. But it's hard to escape the feeling that we are now in uncharted waters, with the ship of state fatally holed. Just as Trump is bringing the country's racist, grifting, shallow, violent, psychosexually disturbed quintessence to the fore, we are also witnessing the collapse of almost every institutional force that once stood as a bulwark—or at least a light brake—against our worst instincts.

The political opposition is utterly enfeebled, clueless, corrupt and compromised. The media is, if anything, even worse: vapid, ignorant, juvenile, and largely in the hands of corporate behemoths and oligarchs; its main act of "resistance" has been the resurrection of a berserk McCarthyism that paints America as the innocent victim of a Kremlin ogre, while letting Trump skate on the manifold and manifest ordinary crimes this cheap hood has perpetrated over decades. Academia? Also on their knees to corporations and oligarchs. The justice system? Forget it. It's now a killing machine running wild in the streets, combined with a shakedown operation looting the people with fines, fees, bail and confiscation. Hollywood? The industry making movies with the military and the CIA, when it's not bludgeoning us with vigilante superheroes and mind-numbing CGI spectacles, all of them featuring dehumanized, demonized Others who deserve destruction? (They also slashed up "Touch of Evil," then relegated it to B-movie drive-in fare.)

No one can see what's yet to come. But the image we see in the American mirror today—a corpulent, desolate wreck, sinking into poison water, grunting out his last breaths of humanity—makes one fear the nation's future is indeed all used up. **CP**



## BOTTOMLINES

# “Free Trade” is Not Free

BY PETE DOLACK

Once when I was giving a talk on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a member of the audience asked, quite sincerely, “Why do governments sign these trade deals that restrict their own powers?” Although some thought that was a naïve question, I then, and still do, thought that was an excellent issue to raise. Sometimes it is necessary to ask the obvious.

After all, on the surface, international trade policy doesn’t make sense. Governments cede their rights to establish health, safety, labor and environmental regulations, allow powerful special interests to override legislation determined by democratic processes, and allow these special interests to bypass well-established court systems, already stacked in their favor, and instead adjudicate disputes in a secret tribunals in which lawyers whose day jobs are to defend the special interests sit in judgment.

Quite a sweet deal for those special interests. Well, let us not use euphemisms: We are speaking here of multi-national corporations with vast reach; the biggest of which have annual revenues larger than the gross domestic products of most of the world’s countries. In an economic system where money and capital rules (after all, it is called capitalism for a reason), the power bestowed by possession of vast amounts of money and capital enables government policies to be bent toward those interests.

It is the “magic of the market” at work. And what is the capitalist market? Nothing other than the aggregate interests of the largest industrialists and financiers. The relentless rigor of capitalist competition and its mandate to grow or die, and the accompanying movement of production to low-wage havens as part of

the drive to fatten profits by any means necessary (wage cuts, work speedups and automation among them) is the inevitable result. And should a corporate leadership not be willing to do this, the whip of Wall Street is at the ready, threatening to drive the stock price lower should there be any deviation from “enhancing shareholder value.”

Wall Street demands for ever more money diverted to speculators are not unwelcome in the boardroom. Much pay for top executives is in the form of stock, giving them extra incentive to keep profits as high as possible and therefore, to use another Wall Street euphemism, “align interests.”

Thus we should not be holding our breath for the Trump administration to negotiate a “better” North American Free Trade Agreement. Given that the Trump administration is stocked with billionaires, that the capitalist rulers of the U.S. have many levers to pull, and that every indication given by the new administration is that intends an all-out sprint to get as much of corporate wish lists in place before voters realized they’ve been had yet again, any changes to NAFTA are highly unlikely to benefit working people. Trump himself built up the fortune he inherited from his father by screwing working people, and much of his trade policy is in the hands of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, an investment banker who bought companies to flip them for big short-term profits through layoffs and taking away pensions and medical benefits.

It is always prudent to look at what is done and what is said in official documents, rather than be guided by empty campaign bluster. The Trump administration’s attacks on every social gain of the 20th century speaks loudly as to its

real intentions, as do its two leading trade documents. The more recent, its National Trade Estimate Report, takes aim at regulations in no less than 137 countries for their supposed “trade barriers” and the earlier, its Summary of Objectives for the NAFTA Renegotiation, contains boilerplate language lifted straight from the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the linchpin of NAFTA—Chapter 11, which safeguards “investor rights” and in effect elevates multi-national corporations above governments—is untouched in the negotiations. The only part the Trump administration wishes to eliminate is Chapter 19, the anti-dumping panels. Simply put, the Trump gang wants to flood Canada and Mexico with cheap food, among other commodities, without penalty.

The Canadian government would appear to have the most interest in eliminating Chapter 11 because it is sued the most often due to its higher environmental standards. Yet the Trudeau government is holding as tight-fisted to keeping that in place as was the prior Harper régime. It makes no sense at first but is actually no surprise. Canada is no less dominated by large corporations than any other capitalist country.

The ongoing neoliberal turn, from which so-called “free trade” policy flows, derives from the limits of mid-20th century Keynesianism having been reached. As corporations first seek new markets in the developing world, then transfer production there to take advantage of low wages and lax enforcement, competitors are compelled to do the same or risk being unable to compete. Countries like Mexico or China do not take anybody’s job away; Western corporations do, and then demand tariffs, regulations and standard be lowered or eliminated altogether to make global supply chains as profitable as possible. Trade deals like NAFTA and TPP are drawn up to make that happen. In turn, corporate dominance over society ensures that private profit, not human need, is served. **CP**





## BETWEEN THE LINES

# Careless Courts

BY RUTH FOWLER

**T**here's a lot of information out there about how the criminal justice system is failing marginalized people, people of color, people with minor drug offenses, undocumented people. But there is very, very little information about how the court system is failing parents and children by penalizing those without the means to pay for the necessary legal assistance to adequately navigate a system so incomprehensible that even those employed within it don't seem to understand it and frequently make enormous mistakes.

For three years I've been embroiled in a contentious custody battle in the US family court system which has taken me to court over 24 times. At first I had the means to pay for an attorney. Even with an attorney, navigating the legal system was complicated and overwhelming, responding to subpoenas, issuing subpoenas, trying to track down information, slipping through legal loopholes so obscure that neither party nor the judge, commissioner, clerk or attorney seemed quite to comprehend what was legal, what was not. Have you ever tried calling anyone to be a witness in court, particularly in a child custody case? It's hell. No one wants to get involved, friends disappear into the woodwork. All the while, you're reliant on some attorney who's charging you an extortionate rate, and there is no way to understand if the information you're provided with, the assurances that people you are paying are giving to you, is trustworthy.

There are other alternatives. Some companies, such as the LA based Leavitt & Quinn are a family law center specializing in providing services to low income women in the LA area. With an income of \$8,000 a year they decided that their 'low cost' charge for services would be

\$180 an hour. The Harriet Buhai center, which teaches women how to prepare for court and represent themselves. Document, document, document, they say.

"He will screw up," the attorneys kept telling me about my ex-husband. "Just give him enough rope to hang himself." This is a phrase I have heard over and over again, most recently in Alice Anderson's devastating memoir, 'Some Bright Morning I'll Fly Away'. In it Alice recounts her decade long battle with a family court system which continually allows abusive fathers access to their children. For some reason a man can abuse his wife, a child can witness this abuse, but the courts will not consider that same man a danger to the child. If the father does do something to hurt the child, they will be given supervised visitation and a reunification program of counseling—counseling with the abused child—to bring them unsupervised visitation again, and the vicious cycle will start over again.

A documentary by the British filmmaker Rachel Meyerick, 'What doesn't kill me', quotes statistics from Joan Meier's research which states that protective mothers who challenge custody in family court often lose custody altogether—83% of the time, in the case of alleged sexual abuse. As Barry Goldstein, an expert in domestic violence states, "A US Justice Department study found that professionals without the necessary domestic violence training tend to focus on the myth that mothers frequently make false reports. This is based on the stereotype of a woman scorned."

The bar is different for women and men. Family court continues to handle domestic violence, abuse and sexual assault—criminal matters when it

occurs normally, but when it occurs with a family, they're not held up to the same kind of rigor. This means professionals working in family court are not trained to deal with the kinds of personalities of serial abusers, many of whom can be charming, cordial and extremely persuasive.

I recently filed in court asking for the right to return to my home country for eighty days to work with my son. My refusal to leave the US without my son has meant that my career, based in the UK, has pretty much dried up. I have the legal right to leave for eighty days—unless one of those days was a holiday which landed with my ex. My ex, predictably, was refusing to let me leave.

The petty bureaucracies of the American legal system and an ex-husband now dictate my every move: whether I can leave the city, the state, the country. Whether my son can come with me or not. If I choose to work and leave him behind, it will be used in court as evidence that I am an unfit mother and that my ex-husband an exceptional parent. So here I am, navigating a court system, tied to a country I really don't want to be in, exhaustedly deciphering arcane rules and trying to appease bad tempered legal officials, spending time and money I don't have on simply trying to stay united with my own child.

The ostensible drive of family court is to prioritize the best interests of the child. And yet here is my child, surviving on calworks, foodstamps, GAIN and scholarships because his mother cannot return home to work without effectively abandoning him. The irony is not lost on the legal system. It just doesn't give a fuck about women or children, like most of America. Like most marginalized people, no one will care until we're lying on the floor and either party can use us to push for some legislation that might benefit their own financial interests. America: the land of ilk and money. **CP**

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## BORDERZONE NOTES

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# Mexicans Want Change, But Will the System Let Them

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**M**exico will soon have a new president. As millions of Mexicans prepare for what they hope will be a new era, a large part of the ruling class—on both sides of the border—is nervously trying to figure out a way to avoid or co-opt the results of the popular vote.

Polls show the center-left candidate, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, holding a commanding lead, with roughly a twenty-point margin over his nearest rival. Lopez Obrador heads up the coalition made up of his National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), the Labor Party and the small evangelical Social Encounter Party (PES). The Bloomberg aggregated poll in late May showed that at 52% of the vote, the other three candidates together don't reach him.

If elected, Lopez Obrador, often referred to in print as AMLO, rules for six years over a system that gives the president too much power and endless opportunities for misusing it. AMLO's hallmark has been to reduce the corruption that the combination of omnipotence and impunity has generated throughout Mexico's political development, from seventy years of one-party rule to the limited democracy today.

That message explains a large part of his appeal. Current president Enrique Peña Nieto comes from the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that established the authoritarian system, later given a veneer of democracy. He has faced one corruption scandal after another. Although his party's

control of the executive, legislative and judicial branches—and mainstream media—has enabled him to shield himself and most of his allies from legal consequences, the political consequences have left him with a 77% disapproval rate and mired his hand-picked successor at the bottom of the polls.

The majority of Mexicans are fed up with the inertia of a system that keeps half the population in poverty while bloating global billionaires. Mexico adopted the neoliberal model whole-hog in the late eighties: an export-oriented economy, transnational corporate production, unregulated financial mobility without labor mobility, militarization, environmental exploitation and destruction, state support for foreign investors while withdrawing from national development, and rock-bottom wages (the minimum is set at about \$4.00 a day, depending on the exchange rate). The model has predictably led to multiple crises, many of them veiled from public view or given a headline and then forgotten as those directly affected are left alone to deal with the impacts. Despite what the World Bank and the PRI say, the situation is not getting better for the average Mexican—64% of those surveyed say their family economy got worse over the past year. This year the vote is the way many of them plan to say “Enough!”.

AMLO criticizes neoliberalism by name, but he's not a self-proclaimed socialist like Bernie Sanders and in fact, he's moved toward the center in this campaign to broaden his appeal. One

of the beauties of neoliberalism, for the system, is that a handful of rich, white men can sabotage an entire nation. This is what weighs heavy on the candidate's mind. The wealthiest 10% of the population controls 64% of the nation's wealth and the richest 1% controls nearly half. That exclusive club has divided on the elections, with some going into high gear to prevent a AMLO presidency and others getting used to the idea.

German Larrea, the second richest man in Mexico and head of Grupo Mexico, a conglomerate that holds major mining, railroad and infrastructure interests, sent a letter to his employees: “Recently we have heard proposals to nationalize industries and roll back the reforms in education and energy, among other ideas that would mean going backwards decades and a return to an economic model that has been proved to have failed in several countries”. Then comes the veiled threat: “We are worried about the well-being of our employees and our company and will take every measure necessary to assure the continuity of our business.” The Cinemex chain of movie theaters screened a short cartoon warning of “using a magic wand” and offering “free money” to right the nation's ills, again an obvious reference to AMLO. A group of anti-AMLO businessmen has reportedly attempted to convince the Peña Nieto to withdraw the PRI candidate José Antonio Meade to consolidate the opposition with the conservative Ricardo Anaya.

Lopez Obrador brought on a big-time financier and agribusiness leader named Alfonso Romo to assuage the 1 percent. Romo joined Lopez Obrador in his 2012 campaign and is now the point person in relations with the economic elite. Among other concessions, Romo announced that Lopez Obrador had decided not to undo Peña Nieto's unpopular oil privatization or withdraw Mexico from NAFTA.

On the other hand, much of the financial world is settling into the idea of President Lopez Obrador. The head of the Mexican stock market reportedly

told his employees that he didn't expect major volatility if AMLO wins. It's actually Donald Trump who has caused the dips lately, with his going-nowhere-fast NAFTA renegotiation and the steel and aluminum tariffs. Even so, financial experts are saying that so far, the financial system is relatively sanguine about both the upheavals from Washington and the upcoming Mexican elections.

It's a fine line to walk between mollifying and mastering a ruling elite that's used to getting its own way. Lopez Obrador's proposed cabinet is a tight-rope act. Business magnates rub elbows with academics and leftwing activists. Managing a Lula-style ideological split once in power isn't easy without it getting out of control—as Lula himself learned the hard way.

The margin in the polls make it seem like AMLO is a shoe-in for the July 1<sup>st</sup> elections and he tends to reinforce that image by talking as if he were already the president-elect. But it's not that simple.

There are a number of ways the popular will is already being violated. First, the possibility that the candidate of choice will be shot to death before election day. More than 100 politicians have been assassinated so far. The toll rises every passing day. Violence in places like Tamaulipas on the northern border and Guerrero appears calculated to discourage people from going to the polls.

The obviously class-based polarization of Mexican society could be another cause of violence. To hear people talk about Lopez Obrador, he's either a Savior or Satan. Although the candidate had moved away from the slogan of his 2006 campaign, "First, the Poor" by his 2012 run, the idea of the poor having a voice in power is still present and still anathema to most of the well-heeled. Or to put it another way, they hate him with a passion. It's unlikely that that sentiment will boil over into physical violence but expect the campaigns (election campaigns and campaigns to undermine his power if in office) to get more vicious and the division to deepen.

Another pitfall is the degree of control that the conservative parties have over the electoral process. Mexico set up exemplary electoral laws and institutions, including the National Electoral Institute, the Special Prosecutor's Office for Electoral Crimes and the Federal Electoral Tribunal, along with their state counterparts. The system runs mostly on public funding, allows no corporate money, and caps private donations and campaign spending overall.

But as usual, the gap between the law and the way it plays out is the size of the Grand Canyon. A recent report by Mexicans against Corruption and Impunity found that for every peso declared by parties and candidates, 15 are spent under the table. This includes money drawn off public coffers, private money channeled illicitly into campaigns and drug cartel money. The institutions have been hijacked by the parties (MORENA is not represented) and biased officials. The independent candidate Jaime Rodríguez shouldn't be on the ballot at all since most of his signatures proved invalid, but in a twisted political, quasi-legal calculation the Tribunal reversed the Electoral Institute and put him on. The electoral institutes have been so lax in enforcement that political parties routinely calculate the fines as far lower than the benefits of violating the laws. Polls show that the population is skeptical, to say the least, regarding the institutions' capacity or willingness to ensure free and fair elections.

Vote buying and coercion are common. Civil society organizations and journalists have documented the widespread use of welfare programs for electoral purposes. Recipients report that government agents of the cash-transfer program Prospera, which reaches seven million families, threaten to cut off benefits to those who don't vote PRI. Testimonies and investigative reports show that a program for housewives, the Pink Wage, is also being used to coerce the vote, violating the voting rights of women who receive and administer gov-

ernment payments in especially vulnerable, impoverished families.

The U.S. media long ago agreed on the accepted vocabulary for referring to Lopez Obrador—"populist", "firebrand" and "messianic" are telltale signs of the editorial line, and you rarely see an article that doesn't compare him to Hugo Chavez. While the Cold War rants against Lopez Obrador in Murdoch's Wall Street Journal and other financial rags are to be expected, they turn ominous with the open suggestion that the Trump administration intervene in Mexico's elections. Members of the Trump administration have publicly stated that the US government does not want AMLO in the presidency and US Embassy employees don't even pretend to be impartial—the center-left candidate has vowed to ratchet down the drug war the U.S. funds under the Merida Initiative, in light of the 200,000 killed and 36,000 disappeared since the two governments implemented the policy.

Nearly 200 scholars and civic leaders, of which I'm one, signed an open letter to Congress to pre-empt U.S. intervention: "We urge you and your colleagues to make every effort to ensure that the US supports Mexican democracy by insisting on the strict adherence to fair electoral practices and compliance with laws... The US government should maintain the utmost respect for Mexican national sovereignty and the popular vote and express its commitment to building a strong relationship with any new Mexican administration."

Meanwhile, Mexico's population has mobilized like never before to protect these elections. Hundreds will be deployed as poll-watchers and a record number will vote. US observers will be on the ground too, with an eye on Mexico's process and another on Washington. Both populations, so closely linked, must be on high alert for dirty tricks to assure that Mexico can freely choose who will lead it in the turbulent times to come. **CP**



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# EUROZONE NOTES

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## Long to Reign Over Us

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

**W**indsor, May 2018: in the last few weeks there has been a notable presence of armed, unarmed and mounted police, search dogs, and the National Police Air Service. A Windsor council leader wants police to use legal powers to clear the city of unsightly homeless people. All this is happening because a habitué of the castle known for dressing up as a Nazi, using racial slurs, and being poster-boy for Britain's war in Afghanistan is wedding a "retired American actress" who seems to have upset a few members of her unregal family by not deeming them fit wedding guests. The cost of the whole shebang is under wraps, but estimates venture around US\$45 million. Such a national asset is this couple that more than US\$40 million of that will be spent on security (including ridding the landscape of the rough-sleeping blot). The British royal family will apparently pay for the nuptial trappings but not security as these are "public" figures. To add insult to injury, the homeless menace will be solaced by a charity with a "For Richer For Poorer" (sic) range of wedding memorabilia, the proceeds of which will be used to succor them. On the profit-turning side, you can get a pack of four "heritage" condoms called "Crown Jewels" (yes, honestly), which supposedly play "God Save the Queen" and "Star-Spangled Banner" (don't ask us how or when).

All this contempt for homeless people, outlandish ostentation, and drain on the public purse isn't due to any personal merits of the couple concerned, Prince Harry, sixth in line to the British throne, and Ms. Meghan Markle. Surely any

reasonable person would think this is an especially, expensively cruel form of madness. And, in fact, a quick survey of Europe's royalty, families of limited gene pools and unlimited resources, exemplifies the utter insanity and indecency of their sovereignty over us.

In the 1970s Holland's Prince Bernhard, former member of the Reiter SS cavalry corps and consummate businessman (on more than 300 corporate boards), received million-dollar bribes from Lockheed and Northrop but Queen Juliana threatened to abdicate if her man was prosecuted. So he wasn't. His defense? "I am above such things." The House of Orange still isn't fussy about its family connections. Jorge Zorreguieta, father-in-law of the present king, Willem-Alexander, was a senior member of the Argentine Dirty War regime. The Swedish dynasty was founded by Napoleon's Marshall of France Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, after being "adopted" by the heirless King Charles XIII, basically because the Swedish army wanted a soldier on the throne. Here, "divine right" was actually martial might. Belgium's "humanitarian king", Leopold II, subjugated his private Congo fiefdom through mass mutilation and some ten million deaths. Members of the royal House of Hanover (which once supplied six porphyria-prone British monarchs but has done little since then) include George III (mad), George IV (debtor, dissolute, unfit to govern), and William IV (didn't like Lord Melbourne's government so dismissed it).

Meanwhile, Elizabeth II of the "global brand", sixteen-queens-in-one

monarchy (as sovereign of the United Kingdom and fifteen other realms), and gracious arms-touting hostess of tyrants, quaintly chooses her High Sheriffs by stabbing names on a list with a bodkin. Why? Because that's what Elizabeth I did. Eat up fast if ever you dine with Her because when She stops eating the plates are whisked away. Her role is "ceremonial" but in 1975 she didn't like Gough Whitlam's Labour government in Australia so, inspired perhaps by the precedent set by William IV, she dismissed it via her governor-general. The National Archive of Australia refuses to release the documents more than 40 years later. It's calculated that eighteen officially "working" members of this secretive, unaccountable monarchy each costs British taxpayers about £19m a year. Non-transparency is enshrined in the system which, ergo, is intrinsically corrupt.

In Spain, the Bourbon show lurches on, after shaky beginnings with monarchs like Felipe V, a sex fiend who thought he was a frog and defecated wherever he felt like it around the palace. His son Fernando VI enjoyed beating up servants and was partial to opiates. Carlos II, The Hunter, was so enchanted by conjugal relations with his thirteen-year-old bride that he wrote the whole thing down in a letter to his dad. Fernando VII, "The Desired", also wrote things down so we know that his penis was as long as a pool cue and thick as a fist. And now the young Mallorcan rapper, Valtòny, has been sentenced to three years and six months in prison for "slander against the Crown" with his angry lyrics about this dreadful family. And he's not the only victim of the concerted attack against free speech by the conjoined Spanish government/judiciary in recent months.

The Habsburg-jawed, high-living, former King Juan Carlos (installed by Franco), is known for obscure sources of income, never declared (because never had to be declared) spending of public money; shooting an elephant, a bear, one of Europe's last bison, and

many other animals in royal blood-lust fun-and-games called hunting; womanizing; cozying up to the House of Saud; and supposedly heroic role in the attempted military coup of February 23, 1981, although the memoirs of Sabino Fernández Campo, Falangist chief of the royal house, suggest otherwise. Maybe he was actually behind the putsch. At least he was privately toasting it with champagne. His younger brother Prince Alfonso, aged 14, died mysteriously, shot when they were “playing.” The circumstances have never been revealed. But it’s obvious that this family should be kept away from guns, as five years ago, grandson Froilan shot himself through the foot. Another kind of royal foot-shooting was achieved by Iñaki Urdangarín, brother-in-law of today’s King Felipe VI, who is now slumming out his exile in a Geneva mansion while the Supreme Court mulls over his appeal against a prison sentence for major tax fraud. After the Catalan independence referendum on October 1, Felipe made a speech paving the way for the “nuclear option” of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which has been used to strip the Catalan government of its powers. And sixteen Catalan leaders are now in prison or exile. Felipe’s not very popular in Catalonia.

These arbitrary powers, antisocial or barking mad behavior, and stupid customs spring from the preposterous idea that there is a “divine right of kings” whereby the monarch, not subject to earthly authority, directly derives the right to rule from divinities. In Christianity, this goes back to the Bible but the idea thrives in other religions too. With the rise of the nation-state the theory, pushed by James I of England, became very influential in the west. Vexed by a downplaying of divine right in a popular Puritan Bible, James—who, speaking of kings, declared in 1610, that “[...] even by God himself they are called gods”—ordered another, tweaked translation of the original texts in order to assure absolute royal authority in both political and spiritual domains.

Swear on the bogus Bible, right? Divine kingship meant that monarchs rose above the human realm, beyond the political, legal and moral order, to act with arbitrariness and impunity, even while their “sacred” private and social lives were hedged about by rules, protocol, and taboos. The paradox is that monarchs claim to be the clots acting as the congealing principle of the realm, but they aren’t part of it since they’re above and outside its community and its laws.

Royalty is a political spectacle with religious overtones, arrayed in a panoply of items from magic bodkins to a Gold State Coach. Way back in 1967 Guy Debord wrote that, “The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world [...]. In the spectacle, one part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it.” The monarchy papers over the gap, putting family weddings and funerals on show for excluded individuals to watch on telly, feeling they’re part of it even as the gap widens.

In their recent fascinating book *On Kings*, David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins, studying kingship and kingly politics from BaKongo to the Azteca, the Shilluk and elsewhere, show how eons of kingship—“one of the most enduring forms of human governance”—reveal the nature of power, and how different forms of the state originated in the ritual sphere. The people are productive but the monarchy is extractive, using military exploits, plunder, monuments, conspicuous consumption, and strategic distribution of wealth to draw attention to its God-given powers and reinforce still more the political benefits of its wealth. Analyzing the nature of tyranny, Graeber and Sahlins make an exhaustive case for toppling kings and queens from earthly and celestial thrones, starting with the legal and political framework supporting the monarchy, which always lives on after individual kings are deposed.

However cocooned in antediluvian finery it is, the kingship model is no marginal phenomenon but central to

today’s political systems. Rather than the state, a “shopworn concept” (p. 456), the core organizing principle of political life is sovereignty, the power of command. Since the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century nation-states have been founded on the principle of “popular” sovereignty, but this oxymoron reeks of early gods and their kingly playthings. If popular “sovereignty” really exists, then it must stop being sovereign (rule from above), and start being based on the principles of freedom and justice. Otherwise, it can’t be popular: literally, of the *populus*, all the people. As for the people, let’s look at homelessness, especially since the Windsor homeless are causing such offense to royalty devotees. A UK study finds that England’s approximately 307,000 homeless people die at an average age of 47, compared with 81 for other royal subjects, and a rough sleeper is 35 times more likely to commit suicide than people with homes.

As long as great social inequality prevails, sovereignty will remain beyond the legal and moral order as a sociopathic spectacle dividing and damaging society. Since Donald Trump, also well outside the legal and moral order, is a warped excrescence of divine right, it’s probably not happenstance that the Guggenheim offered him, instead of the Van Gogh masterpiece he’d set his heart on, an 18-karat gold throne for delivering his crap. (Possible title of the work? *Turd Lying in Gold*.) We must rethink “sovereignty”. At present we have “democracies” with deeply authoritarian legacies, especially the monarch (literally, “s/he who rules alone”), this unelected head of state, pampered spawn of the sperm race winner, ruling over humans and realms. Without his raiment, the emperor can be identified, even by a tiny child, for what he really is: just another human being. **CP**

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# Neoliberalism and Hip Hop: On Gangsters Real and Fake

BY NICK PEMBERTON

Dr. Cornel West writes in his Obama postmortem “Pity the Sad Legacy of Barack Obama” that “we are witnessing the postmodern version of the full-scale gangsterization of the world.” West notes Obama’s bailing out of Wall St., illegal drone strikes, privatization of education and funding of the Israel occupation of Palestine as signs of living in a gangster world. Cornel West said about himself: “I was a gangster before I met Jesus and now I am a redeemed sinner with gangster proclivities.” Among these gangster proclivities was West’s 2007 hip hop album that was highly political. West was told by former Harvard President Larry Summers that it was an embarrassment for a Harvard intellectual to be into hip hop. This is coming from the man who suggested polluting Africa because it was overpopulated.

Dr. West calls our current President Donald Trump a nightmare. Who could disagree with that? Mr. Trump somehow remains shocking in his level of cruelty and corruption. Trump and his buddies in the Republican Party are making a sincere effort to gut the entire structures of the state. Deregulation, privatization, corruption, ecocide and war are at an all-time high under this administration. Throughout his life, Trump has been nothing but a rich sleazy crook whose only skill is being belligerent enough to rip people off without consequence. Donald Trump is a gangster and he is proud of it.

Rather than focus on the real gangsters of our society, commentators cite gangster rap as highly dangerous. Rappers are loud, proud, unapologetic and fearless. They represent everything the ruling class fears about black America, dating back to the days of slavery. Hip hop is far from the only musical tradition in black America but it consistently is the most repulsive to rich people. Fox New’s Geraldo Rivera said: “hip-hop has done more damage to young African-Americans than racism in recent years.” Bill O’Reilly of Fox News, a gangster if there ever was one, said this about the fight for racial justice in America: You have to attack the fundamental disease if you want to cure it. You’re gonna have to get people like Jay-Z, Kanye West, all these gangsta rappers to knock it off.” This was why it was not surprising at all when white America lost their minds over Kanye West’s recent statements. Loud, black, and supports Trump, someone call the FBI!

There has surely been a shift in race relations in America over the last half-century but the shift has been more aesthetic than material. Cultural exports of black America abound but the average black American is poorer than they were in the 1960s. If any gangsters are to be blamed for the current state of

black America it would be Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton—a loveless Bonnie and Clyde duo who rob for banks rather than rob from them. Mass incarceration, the war on welfare and the strengthening of the police state were key power moves by the Clintons. The seasoned gangster Hillary Clinton felt personally slighted when the huckster Donald Trump stumbled onto her D.C. turf and stole it from right under her nose. Blame her loss in part on Obama’s failures, who tragically ballooned the war on Africa more subtly than any of the more clunky gangsters before him could have. Under all politicians in the corporate duopoly funding for schools in black neighborhoods are slashed and police violence remains a serious threat. One could hardly blame people such as neoliberal essayist Ta-Nehisi Coates for admiring Obama’s ability to gain popularity among white people as a President rather than a cultural export. But one has to ask wasn’t Obama’s popularity primarily about culture? Is there a single accomplishment of his that will be remembered?

If Barack Obama’s victory was a cultural one, why is he respected while hip hop is scorned? Obama has always been the right kind of black person. Harvard law, with an absent black father and loving white mother. Barack talks smooth; he is trendy, he is hip. He speaks about a unified America, not unlike Kanye West’s recent embrace of Trump. Willing to lecture poor blacks and play ball with rich whites, Obama erased white guilt as easily as he enriched white pocketbooks.

Obama is embraced because he echoes the supreme pessimism and personal responsibility narratives of the ruling class. They paint a vision of an individualistic and self-interested society. Race becomes an identity rather than a power relation. Obama weaves sweet stories about personal triumph with no sense of collective responsibility. Still, let’s give this to Obama: his election stuck it to racists from Fox News to the Clintons who could only imagine the next Jay-Z album or LeBron James dunk. The fact that his inauguration day was the highlight of his eight-year administration proves both his personal failure and the supreme racism surrounding him.

Hip hop artists represent the wrong type of black person for white America. They draw from a Malcolm X tradition. Radical, courageous, community-oriented, class centric and above all a nuisance to the polite gangsters running the show. Hip hop is the proud and loud gangster Cornel West, not the sweet talking Ta-Nehisi Coates, who Dr. West accuses of fetishizing race. Race as a fetish is promoted in corporate hip-hop songs while the things that West wants to address along with race: “the centrality of Wall Street power, US military policies, and the complex dynamics of class, gender, and sexuality in black America” is left out.

Corporate hip hop often offers the same nihilist pessimism that Obama, Coates and the white liberals who drool over them offer. These people form a fetish around black violence and the hyper-masculinity behind it. They are obsessed with the spitting stealing pants dragging illiterate angry drug



abusing gun toting thoughtless savage that roams Chicago, Baltimore, Somalia and Libya. They cry tears for the broken black man while ignoring all examples outside of their own fetish. Conservatives love this fetish because they can justify more police and racist policies. Liberals are mostly the same but they add on a savior complex.

There is plenty of success for rappers like Lil Wayne who reinforce these stereotypes but the corporate gatekeepers ignore people like Jean Grae. Grae, the best rapper of all time, is a clever, vibrant wordsmith that rivals Shakespeare in her mix of fun-loving irony and gripping, vivid tales of doom. Mainstream rappers largely buy into the neoliberal idea of race as a fetish divorced from economic conditions or communal responsibility. The gangster is embraced not just because he is black, but especially because he is black. This gangster confirms our anxieties, our fears, and eventually, our superiority.

Hip hop is defended on many grounds, but it is rarely celebrated as a defense against the overwhelming pessimism in our society. By its nature, hip hop is an art form that pays tribute to other forms of music. Hip hop is not just about composing, it is largely about sampling from already known songs. Mashing up the right beats from a variety of musical genres means that one must be a superb listener. As a result, hip hop must not only build on other genres but on itself. Take for example Drake's new single "Nice For What" which samples Lauryn Hill's "Ex-Factor." Hip hop almost functions as long-form jazz. Play off your musical partners in history just as jazz musicians play off of each other when they are performing.

The positive influences of hip hop on children have been documented by some. Rap features children's voices on a lot of songs. It also talks about childhood—its joys and its vulnerabilities—far more than other music genres. Hip hop is hailed for its accessibility—one can easily make a beat with their mouth without any money or rap a song without singing lessons (although the talent of rapping remains quite difficult—there are surely many more people who are able to sing). If one has a computer, making more complex beats are a possibility. Hip hop is being increasingly used as music therapy because the repeating beats lend stability to children with unstable lives.

There also is a level of authenticity reached in hip hop that is found nowhere else. Long verses lead to gripping narratives that are seldom found in rock or pop songs that have far fewer words. The stories of hip hop are also a substitution for literacy. Kendrick Lamar has said he makes his music for people in prisons because he knows they will have the time to listen to it many times and discover the meaning of it. Writing hip hop verses is different from poetry, but it incorporates many of the same elements. Then there is the central message that is largely ignored by the critics: resiliency, defiance, struggle and triumph.

On the other hand, there is an embrace of money and violence in hip hop. Take for example the frequent referencing of Donald Trump in hip hop songs before his Presidency.

Mr. Trump is the epitome of a gangster. Lawlessness, greed and even murder are sometimes hailed. One has to admit that many rappers say these things without much thought. But other rappers talk about these subjects as a way to raise awareness about the state of the world in abandoned communities. Take Kendrick Lamar's "Ronald Reagan Era": "Can't detour when you at war with your city / Why run for? / Just ride with me, just die with me / That gun store, right there / When you fight, don't fight fair / Cause you'll never win." One could read these lyrics and assume that Lamar is supporting violence. But if one were to listen to the entire song in its chaotic and rebellious tone they would understand that this was more a punch back against the system of neoliberalism. Based on the title of the song one can see that Lamar recognizes that neoliberals like Reagan are the biggest gangsters. The line "you'll never win" recognizes that the gangsters of the ghetto and the prisons are just small potatoes compared to the ruling class who have abandoned these communities.

There is also a sensationalized view of violence in black communities. One example is the critically acclaimed TV show "The Wire". While the show challenges the war on drugs it is nonetheless fixated on the black gangster character. The statistics show high violence rates in the city where poor blacks live. But why be obsessed with it? Shouldn't we more focused on police murder that never gets punished? Instead, we remain obsessed over turf wars, not unlike the framing of religious differences in countries that the U.S. invades. The rapper that really shook neoliberal gangster Bill Clinton was Sister Souljah who said: "if black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?... White people, this government and that mayor were well aware of the fact that black people were dying every day in Los Angeles under gang violence. So if you're a gang member and you would normally be killing somebody, why not kill a white person? Do you think that somebody thinks that white people are better, are above and beyond dying, when they would kill their own kind?" Bill compared Souljah to David Duke but the real fear he may have felt was the complete logic behind her words. Black on black crime is an expected pity. Black on white crime would end the world.

If there is one critique of hip hop that hits home it would be its woman problem. No one could deny the misogyny in hip hop, but then again many people deny that there is misogyny across culture. God, who remains the largest cultural exporter, is still a man. As are 92% of movie directors. And while rappers are rightly cited as having a God complex, it was Alfred Hitchcock who said: "In the documentary the basic material has been created by God, whereas in the fiction film the director is a God; he must create life." Whose art has been more misogynistic than the critically acclaimed voyeuristic Hitchcock? It seems that every one of his films would dreadfully fail through the lens of Laura Mulvey's "Male Gaze".

Is hip hop any different than most mainstream art as far as

women are concerned? Cruder maybe, less creepy certainly. If there is a divide at all it may be that hip hop's misogyny is more Old Testament—graphic, shocking, dangerous. While film's misogyny is more New Testament—serious, entitled, ominous. So why the difference in critical reception? Why embrace Hitchcock's gaze and capture and turn your nose up on a rapper stealing yo girl from a club? Perhaps it is because the former is how the critics met their wife and the latter is how they fear they will lose her.

The previous line was a joke but it is a very serious dynamic for black men in the United States. The sexual predator framing has a deep history in the United States. Whether that be the lynchings of black men for sleeping with white women, the brutal murder of Emmitt Till, the infamous “super-predator” quote from Hillary Clinton, the killing of young boys such as Trayvon Martin, or the fetishized physical characteristics still prominent in pop culture today (including most crudely the stereotype about penis size). There is a deep fear of black men in the United States.

It is important to remember too that the record labels run by rich white men are much more likely to fund artists who promote the image of the dangerous gangster rather than ones who cut against it. Bill Clinton's Telecommunications Act of 1996 consolidated the power of radio giants and pushed radical rappers underground. Although everywhere one looks, there are exceptions to the rule. Especially lately, which is quite encouraging. It is hard to get into the recent mumble rap craze, but the A-list stars are almost universally positive, even if they aren't always radical. Between Kendrick Lamar, Drake, J. Cole, Chance the Rapper, Macklemore and Rapsody, there is mainstream talent to be sure. The likes of Jean Grae, Talib Kweli, Immortal Technique, K-OS, Jedi Mind Tricks and Gang Starr are also worth mentioning as less popular positive stars. Throw in some of the older rappers such as Jay-Z, Missy Elliot, Tupac, Nas, Rakim and AZ, and there is plenty of rich material to choose from.

It is flabbergasting then, when we consider the real corporate gangsters of the world, that conservatives blame hip hop for corrupted youth. But it may be interesting to trace the rise of hip hop. Hip hop began in the Bronx in the late 1970s. Neoliberalism was beginning to take its foothold during this time period and it was Ronald Reagan's reign that began in 1981 that would revolutionize the way we think about the free market. There has hardly been a politician since Reagan who has broken from his mold.

Hip hop has been always been about rebellion. It fights back against the powers that be, especially the police state. However one could also link it to an increasingly multicultural world that has risen astronomically in diversity under globalization. Hip hop samples from music throughout time and history. It blends together music from several different cultures in one song. The production of even a single hip hop song can draw from several continents. African artists have begun to blossom

in the mainstream rap scene, with Drake's *Views* being dominated by a wide variety of geographical influences. Hip hop songs are also the ones you are most likely to hear at a club or a party where diverse groups of people come together.

The subject matter of many of the songs are all the more possible under neoliberalism. Police violence, precarious economic conditions and a lack of a childhood are all things that have thrived under neoliberalism. The embrace of chaos and even lawlessness is distinctly neoliberal. Other genres simply don't come close to speaking to the concerns of the age. People may be nostalgic for The Beatles or Grateful Dead but that is simply not the society we live in. Maybe it is wrong to embrace such a society but it would be even worse not to talk about it. And one has to acknowledge that any decent rapper is at best ambiguous about such a society—if not overtly critical.

It would be absurd to blame hip hop for any part of neoliberalism. It would be more accurate to say that it is a response to it. And a mostly positive one at that. When rappers are criticized as gangsters, the rich fail to recognize that rappers are talking about how to succeed in the neoliberal world. Violence and money is not so much embraced as it is grappled with. How does one explain that the cruelest people in the world—whether that be the drug kingpin or the oil giant—are the most successful? How does one explain that their mother is working two jobs and raising a family the right way and that she gets no reward for this? One may feel angry after listening to hip hop, but one never feels defeated. The defiance, fearlessness and authenticity always bring hope. The far-reaching influences of hip hop has led it to spread across the world as a music that pops as well as it punches. There is no better music to dance and laugh to. It is hip hop that pushes back against the corporate banality of our soulless and joyless culture. Hip hop rewrites known classics and blends unknown treasures into the precarious and multifarious nature of the 21st century. Neoliberalism assumes that conformity is inevitable and that defiance is death. Hip hop puts a middle finger to such a world, even if it at times embraces the chaos of the neoliberal gangster era. **CP**

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## The Political Economy of the Weapons Industry

# Guess Who's Sleeping With Our Insecurity Blanket?

BY JOAN ROELOFS

For many people the “military-industrial-complex (MIC)” brings to mind the top twenty weapons manufacturers. President Dwight Eisenhower, who warned about it in

1961, wanted to call it the military-industrial-congressional-complex, but decided it was not prudent to do so. Today it might well be called the military-industrial-congressional-almost-everything-complex. Most departments and levels of government, businesses, and also many charities, social service, environmental, and cultural organizations, are deeply embedded with the military.

The weapons industry may be spearheading the military budget and military operations; it is aided immensely by the cheering or silence of citizens and their representatives. Here we will provide some likely reasons for that assent. We will use the common typology of three national sectors: government, business, and nonprofit, with varying amounts of interaction among them. This does not preclude, though it masks somewhat, the proposition that government is the executive of the ruling class.

Every kind of business figures in the Department of Defense (DoD) budget. Lockheed is currently the largest contractor in the weapons business. It connects with the worldwide MIC by sourcing parts, for example, for the F-35 fighter plane, from many countries. This helps a lot to market the weapon, despite its low opinion among military experts as well as anti-military critics. Lockheed also does civilian work, which enhances its aura while it spreads its values.

Other types of businesses have enormous multi-year contracts—in the billions. This despite the constitutional proviso that Congress not appropriate military funds for more than a two year term. Notable are the construction companies, such as Fluor, KBR, Bechtel, and Hensel Phelps. These build huge bases, often with high tech surveillance or operational capacity, in the US and abroad, where they hire locals or commonly, third country nationals to carry out the work. There are also billion-funded contractors in communications technology, intelligence analysis, transportation, logistics, food, and clothing. “Contracting out” is our modern military way; this also spreads its influence far and wide.

Medium, small, and tiny businesses dangle from the “Christmas tree” of the Pentagon, promoting popular cheering or silence on the military budget. These include special set-asides for minority-owned and small businesses. A Black-owned small business, KEPA-TCI (construction), received contracts for \$356 million. [Data comes from several sources, available free on the internet: websites, tax forms, and annual reports of organizations; [usaspending.gov](http://usaspending.gov) (USA) and [governmentcontractswon.com](http://governmentcontractswon.com) (GCW).] Major corporations of all types serving our services have been excellently described in Nick Turse’s *The Complex*. Really small and tiny businesses are drawn into the system: landscapers, dry cleaners, child care centers, and Come-Bye Goose Control of Maryland.

Among the businesses with large DoD contracts are book publishers: McGraw-Hill, Greenwood, Scholastic, Pearson, Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt, Elsevier, and others. Rarely have the biases in this industry, in fiction, nonfiction, and textbook

offerings, been examined. Yet the influences on this small but significant population, the reading public, and the larger schooled contingent, may help explain the silence of the literate crowd and college graduates.

Much of what is left of organized industrial labor is in weapons manufacture. Its PACs fund the few “progressive” candidates in our political system, who tend to be silent about war and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Unlike other factories, the armaments makers do not suddenly move overseas, although they do use subcontractors worldwide.

Military spending may be only about 6% of the GDP, yet it has great impact because: 1. it is a growing sector; 2. it is recession-proof; 3. it does not rely on consumer whims; 4. it is the only thing prospering in many areas; and 5. the “multiplier” effect: subcontracting, corporate purchasing, and employee spending perk up the regional economy. It is ideally suited to Keynesian remedies, because of its ready destruction and obsolescence: what isn’t consumed in warfare, rusted out, or donated to our friends still needs to be replaced by the slightly more lethal thing. Many of our science graduates work for the military directly or its contractee labs concocting these.

The military’s unbeatable weapon is jobs, and all members of Congress, and state and local officials, are aware of this. It is where well-paying jobs are found for mechanics, scientists, and engineers; even janitorial workers do well in these taxpayer-rich firms. Weaponry is also important in our manufactured goods exports as our allies are required to have equipment that meets our specifications. Governments, rebels, terrorists, pirates, and gangsters all fancy our high tech and low tech lethal devices.

Our military economy also yields a high return on investments. These benefit not only corporate executives and other rich, but many middle and working class folk, as well as churches, benevolent, and cultural organizations. The lucrative mutual funds offered by Vanguard, Fidelity, and others are heavily invested in the weapons manufacturers.

Individual investors may not know what is in their fund’s portfolios; the institutions usually know. A current project of World Beyond War (<https://worldbeyondwar.org/divest>) advocates divestment of military stocks in the pension funds of state and local government workers: police, firepersons, teachers, and other civil servants. Researchers are making a state-by-state analysis of these funds. Among the findings are the extensive military stock holdings of CALpers, the California Public Employees Retirement System (the sixth largest pension fund on earth), the California State Teachers Retirement System, the New York State Teachers Retirement System, the New York City Employees Retirement System, and the New York State Common Retirement Fund (state and local employees). Amazing! the New York City teachers were once the proud parents of red diaper babies.

The governmental side of the MIC complex goes far beyond the DoD. In the executive branch, Departments of



State, Homeland Security, Energy, Veterans Affairs, Interior; and CIA, AID, FBI, NASA, and other agencies; are permeated with military projects and goals. Even the Department of Agriculture has a joint program with the DoD to “restore” Afghanistan by creating a dairy cattle industry. No matter that the cattle and their feed must be imported, cattle cannot graze in the terrain as the native sheep and goats can, there is no adequate transportation or refrigeration, and the Afghans don’t normally drink milk. The native animals provide yogurt, butter, and wool, and graze on the rugged slopes, but that is all so un-American.

Congress is a firm ally of the military. Campaign contributions from contractor PACs are generous, and lobbying is extensive. So also are the outlays of financial institutions, which are heavily invested in the MIC. Congresspeople have significant shares of weapons industry stocks. To clinch the deal, members of Congress (and also state and local lawmakers) are well aware of the economic importance of military contracts in their states and districts.

Military bases, inside the US as well as worldwide, are an economic hub for communities. The DoD Base Structure Report for Fy2015 lists more than 4,000 domestic properties. Some are bombing ranges or recruiting stations; perhaps 400 are bases with a major impact on their localities. The largest of these, Fort Bragg, NC, is a city unto itself, and a cultural influence as well as economic asset to its region, as so well described by Catherine Lutz in *Homefront*. California has about 40 bases (<https://militarybases.com/by-state/>), and is home to major weapons makers as well. Officers generally live off-base, so the real estate, restaurant, retail, auto repair, hotel and other businesses are prospering. Local civilians find employment on bases. Closed, unconvertible installations are sometimes tourist attractions, such as the unlikely of all vacation spots, the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

DoD has direct contracts and grants with state and local governments. These are for various projects and services, including large amounts to fund the National Guard. The Army Engineers maintain swimming holes and parks, and police forces get a deal on Bearcats. JROTC programs nationwide provide funding for public schools, and even more for those that are public school military academies; six are in Chicago.

National, state and local governments are well covered by the “insecurity blanket;” the nonprofit sector is not neglected. Nevertheless, it does harbor the very small group of anti-war organizations, such as Iraq Veterans Against War, Veterans for Peace, World Beyond War, Peace Action, Union of Concerned

Scientists, Center for International Policy, Catholic Worker, Answer Coalition, and others. Yet unlike the Vietnam War period there is no vocal group of religious leaders protesting war, and the few students who are politically active are more concerned with other issues.

Nonprofit organizations and institutions are involved several ways. Some are obviously partners of the MIC: Boy and Girl Scouts, Red Cross, veterans’ charities, military think-tanks such as RAND and Institute for Defense Analysis, establishment think-tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, Atlantic Council, and the flagship of US world projection, the Council on Foreign Relations. There are also many international non-governmental organizations that assist the US government in delivering “humanitarian” assistance, sing the praises of the market economy, or attempt to repair the “collateral” damage inflicted on lands and people, for example, Mercy Corps, Open Society Institutes, and CARE.



*Patriot missile. Photo: Raytheon.*

Educational institutions in all sectors are embedded with the military. The military schools include the service academies, National Defense University, Army War College, Naval War College, Air Force Institute of Technology, Air University, Defense Acquisition University, Defense Language Institute, Naval Postgraduate School,

Defense Information School, the medical school, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and the notorious School of the Americas in Fort Benning, GA, now renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. “In addition, Senior Military Colleges offer a combination of higher education with military instruction. SMCs include Texas A&M University, Norwich University, The Virginia Military Institute, The Citadel, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), University of North Georgia and the Mary Baldwin Women’s Institute for Leadership” (<https://www.usa.gov/military-colleges>).

A university doesn’t have to be special to be part of the MIC. Most are awash with contracts, ROTC programs, and/or military officers and contractors on their boards of trustees. A study of the 100 most militarized universities includes prestigious institutions, as well as diploma mills that produce employees for military intelligence agencies and contractors (<https://news.vice.com/article/these-are-the-100-most-militarized-universities-in-america>).

Major liberal foundations have long engaged in covert and overt operations to support imperial projection, described by David Horowitz as the “Sinews of Empire” in his important 1969 *Ramparts* article. They have been close associates of the

Central Intelligence Agency, and were active in its instigation. The foundation created and supported Council on Foreign Relations has long been a link among Wall Street, large corporations, academia, the media, and our foreign and military policymakers.

Less obvious are the military connections of philanthropic, cultural, social service, environmental, and professional organizations. They are linked through donations; joint programs; sponsorship of events, exhibits, and concerts; awards (both ways); investments; boards of directors; top executives; and contracts. The data here covers approximately the last twenty years, and rounds out the reasons for the astounding support (according to the polls) that US citizens have conferred on our military, its budget, and its operations.

Military contractor philanthropy was the subject of my previous CP reports, in 2006 and 2016. Every type of nonprofit (as well as public schools and universities) received support from the major weapons manufacturers; some findings were outstanding. Minority organizations were extremely well endowed. For many years there was crucial support for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from Lockheed; Boeing also funded the Congressional Black Caucus. The former president and CEO of the NAACP, Bruce Gordon, is now on the Board of Trustees of Northrop Grumman.

General Electric is the most generous military contractor philanthropist, with direct grants to organizations and educational institutions, partnerships with both, and matching contributions made by its thousands of employees. The latter reaches many of the nongovernmental and educational entities throughout the country.

Major donors to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (listed in its 2016 Annual Report) include the Defense Intelligence Agency, Cisco Systems, Open Society Foundations, US Department of Defense, General Electric, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Lockheed Martin. This is an echo of the CEIP's military connections reported in Horace Coon's book of the 1930s, *Money to Burn*.

The DoD itself donates surplus property to organizations; among those eligible are Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League Baseball, and United Service Organizations. The Denton Program allows non-governmental organizations to use extra space on U.S. military cargo aircraft to transport humanitarian assistance materials.

There is a multitude of joint programs and sponsorships. Here is a small sample.

The American Association of University Women's National Tech Savvy Program encourages girls to enter STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers, with sponsorship from Lockheed, BAE Systems, and Boeing. Junior Achievement, sponsored by Bechtel, United Technologies, and others, aims to train children in market-based economics and

entrepreneurship. Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts is partnered with Northrop Grumman for an "early childhood STEM 'Learning through the Arts' initiative for pre-K and kindergarten students." The Bechtel Foundation has two programs for a "sustainable California"—an education program to help "young people develop the knowledge, skills, and character to explore and understand the world," and an environmental program to promote the "management, stewardship and conservation for the state's natural resources."

The NAACP ACT-SO is a "yearlong enrichment program designed to recruit, stimulate, and encourage high academic and cultural achievement among African-American high school students," with sponsorship from Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman et al. The national winners receive financial awards from major corporations, college scholarships, internships, and apprenticeships—in the military industries.

In recent years the weapons makers have become enthusiastic environmentalists. Lockheed was a sponsor of the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation Sustainability Forum in 2013. Northrop Grumman supports Keep America Beautiful, National Public Lands Day, and a partnership with Conservation International and the Arbor Day Foundation (for forest restoration). United Technologies is the founding sponsor of the U.S. Green Building Council Center for Green Schools, and co-creator of the Sustainable Cities Design Academy. Tree Musketeers is a national youth environmental organization partnered by Northrop Grumman and Boeing.

Awards go both ways: industries give awards to nonprofits, and nonprofits awards to military industries and people. United Technologies, for its efforts in response to climate change, was on Climate A list of the Climate Disclosure Project. The Corporate Responsibility Association gave Lockheed position 8 in 2016 in its 100 Best Corporate Citizens List. Points of Light included General Electric and Raytheon in its 2014 list of the 50 Most Community-Minded Companies in America. Harold Koh, the lawyer who as Obama's advisor defended drone strikes and intervention in Libya, was recently given distinguished visiting professor status by Phi Beta Kappa. In 2017, the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility recognized 34 Young Hispanic Corporate Achievers; 3 were executives in the weapons industry. Elizabeth Amato, an executive at United Technologies, received the YWCA Women Achievers Award.

Despite laborious searching through tax form 990s, it is difficult to discover the specifics of organizations' investments. Many have substantial ones; in 2006, the American Friends Service Committee had \$3.5 million in revenue from investments. Human Rights Watch reported \$3.5 million investment income on its 2015 tax form 990, and more than \$107 million in endowment funds.

One of the few surveys of nonprofit policies (by Commonfund in 2012) found that only 17% of foundations used environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria in their investments. ESG seems to have replaced "socially re-

sponsible investing (SRI)” in investment terminology, and it has a somewhat different slant. The most common restriction is the avoidance of companies doing business in regions with conflict risk; the next relates to climate change and carbon emissions; employee diversity is also an important consideration. Commonfund’s study of charities, social service and cultural organizations reported that 70% of their sample did not consider ESG in their investment policies. Although 61% of religious organizations did employ ESG criteria, only 16% of social service organizations and 3% of cultural organizations did.

Weapon industries are hardly ever mentioned in these reports. Religious organizations sometimes still used the SRI investment screens, but the most common were alcohol, gambling, pornography, and tobacco. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a resource for churches, lists almost 30 issues for investment consideration, including executive compensation, climate change, and opioid crisis, but none concerning weapons or war. The United Church (UCC) advisory, a pioneer in SRI investment policies, does include a screen: only companies should be chosen which have less than 10% revenue from alcohol or gambling, 1% from tobacco, 10% from conventional weapons and 5% from nuclear weapons.

The Art Institute of Chicago states on their website that “[W]ith the fiduciary responsibility to maximize returns on investment consistent with appropriate levels of risk, the Art Institute maintains a strong presumption against divesting for social, moral, or political reasons.” Listed as an associate is Honeywell International, and a major benefactor is the Crown Family (General Dynamics), which recently donated a \$2 million endowment for a Professorship in Painting and Drawing.

Nonprofit institutions (as well as individuals and pension funds of all sectors) have heavy investments in the funds of financial companies such as State Street, Vanguard, BlackRock, Fidelity, CREF, and others, which have portfolios rich in military industries (<https://worldbeyondwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/indirect.pdf>). These include information technology firms, which, although often regarded as “socially responsible,” are among the major DoD contractors.

In recent years foundations and other large nonprofits, such as universities, have favored investments in hedge funds, real estate, derivatives, and private equity. The Carnegie Endowment, more “transparent” than most, lists such funds on its 2015 tax form 990 (Schedule D Part VII). It is unlikely that Lockheed, Boeing, et al, are among the distressed debt bonanzas, so these institutions may be low on weapons stock. Nevertheless, most of them have firm connections to the MIC through donations, leadership, and/or contracts.

Close association with the military among nonprofit board members and executives works to keep the lid on anti-war activities and expression. The Aspen Institute is a think-tank that has resident experts, and also a policy of convening with activists, such as anti-poverty community leaders. Its Board

of Trustees is chaired by James Crown, who is also a director of General Dynamics. Among other board members are Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Javier Solana (former Secretary-General of NATO), and former Congresswoman Jane Harman. Harman “received the Defense Department Medal for Distinguished Service in 1998, the CIA Seal Medal in 2007, and the CIA Director’s Award and the National Intelligence Distinguished Public Service Medal in 2011. She is currently a member of the Director of National Intelligence’s Senior Advisory Group, the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations.” Lifetime Aspen Trustees include Lester Crown and Henry Kissinger.

In recent years, the Carnegie Corporation board of trustees included Condoleezza Rice and General Lloyd Austin III (Ret.), Commander of CENTCOM, a leader in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and also a board member of United Technologies. A former president of Physicians for Peace (not the similarly named well-known group) is Rear Admiral Harold Bernsen, formerly Commander of the US Middle East Force and not a physician.

TIAA, the college teachers’ retirement fund, had a CEO from 1993-2002, John H. Biggs, who was at the same time a director of Boeing. TIAA’s current board of directors includes an associate of a major military research firm, MITRE Corporations, and several members of the Council on Foreign Relations. Its senior executive Vice President, Rahul Merchant, is currently also a director at two information technology firms that have large military contracts: Juniper Networks and AASKI.

The American Association of Retired Persons’ chief lobbyist from 2002-2007, Chris Hansen, had previously served in that capacity at Boeing. The current VP of communications at Northrop Grumman, Lisa Davis, held that position at AARP from 1996-2005.

Board members and CEOs of the major weapons corporations serve on the boards of many nonprofits. Just to indicate the scope, these include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Newman’s Own Foundation, New York Public Library, Carnegie Hall Society, Conservation International, Wolf Trap Foundation, WGBH, Boy Scouts, Newport Festival Foundation, Toys for Tots, STEM organizations, Catalyst, the National Science Center, the US Institute of Peace, and many foundations and universities.

The DoD promotes the employment of retired military officers as board members or CEOs of nonprofits, and several organizations and degree programs further this transition. U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Eden Murrie (Ret.) is now Director of Government Transformation and Agency Partnerships at the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. She maintains that “[F]ormer military leaders have direct leadership experience and bring talent and integrity that could be applied in a nonprofit organization. . .” ([seniormilitaryintransition.com/tag/eden-murrie/](http://seniormilitaryintransition.com/tag/eden-murrie/)). Given the early retirement age, former military personnel (and reservists) are a natural fit for positions of influ-



ence in federal, state, and local governments, school boards, nonprofits, and volunteer work; many are in those places.

Perhaps the coziest relationships under the insecurity blanket are the multitudes of contracts and grants the Department of Defense tenders to the nonprofit world. DoD fiscal reporting is notoriously inaccurate, and there were conflicting accounts between and within the online databases. Nevertheless, even a fuzzy picture gives a good idea of the depth and scope of the coverage.

From the TNC 2016 Annual Report: “The Nature Conservancy is an organization that takes care of people and land, and they look for opportunities to partner. They’re non-political. We need nongovernment organizations like TNC to help mobilize our citizens. They are on the ground. They understand the people, the politics, the partnerships. We need groups like TNC to subsidize what government organizations can’t do” (Mamie Parker, Former Assistant Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arkansas Trustee, The Nature Conservancy).

Among the subsidies going the other way are 44 DoD contracts with TNC totaling several million for the years 2008-2018 (USA). These are for such services as Prairie Habitat Reforestation, \$100,000, and Runway and Biosecurity upkeep at Palmyra Atoll, HI, \$82,000 (USA). For the years 2000-2016, GCW lists a total of \$5,500,000 in TNC’s DoD contracts.

Grants to TNC for specific projects, not clearly different from contracts, were much larger. Each is listed separately (USA); a rough count of the total was more than \$150 million. One \$55 million grant was for “Army compatible use buffer (acubs) in vicinity of Fort Benning military installation.” Similar grants, the largest, \$14 million, were for this service at other bases. Another was for the implementation of Fort Benning army installation’s ecological monitoring plan. Included in the description of these grants was the notice: “Assist State and local governments to mitigate or prevent incompatible civilian land use/activity that is likely to impair the continued operational utility of a Department of Defense (DoD) military installation. Grantees and participating governments are expected to adopt and implement the study recommendations.”

TNC’s Form 990 for 2017 states its investment income as \$21 million. It reported government grants of \$108.5 million, and government contracts of \$9 million. These may include funds from state and local as well as all departments of the federal government. The Department of the Interior, which manages the vast lands used for bombing ranges and live ammunition war games, is another TNC grantor.

Other environmental organizations sustained by DoD contracts are the National Audubon Society (\$945,000 for 6 years, GCW), and Point Reyes Bird Observatory (\$145,000, 6 years, GCW). USA reports contracts with Stichting Deltares, a Dutch coastal research institute, for \$550,000 in 2016, grants to the San Diego Zoo of \$367,000, and to the Institute for Wildlife Studies, \$1.3 million for shrike monitoring.

Goodwill Industries (training and employing the disabled, ex-offenders, veterans, and homeless people) is an enormous military contractor. Each entity is a separate corporation, based on state or region, and the total receipt is in the billions. For example, for 2000-2016 (GCW), Goodwill of South Florida had \$434 million and Southeastern Wisconsin \$906 million in contracts. Goods and services provided include food and logistics support, records processing, army combat pants, custodial, security, mowing, and recycling. Similar organizations working for the DoD include the Jewish Vocational Service and Community Workshop, janitorial services, \$12 million over 5 years; Lighthouse for the Blind, \$4.5 million, water purification equipment; Ability One; National Institute for the Blind; Pride Industries; and Melwood Horticultural Training Center.

The DoD does not shun the work of Federal Prison Industries, which sells furniture and other products. A government corporation (and thus not a nonprofit), it had half a billion in sales to all federal departments in 2016. Prison labor, Goodwill Industries, and other sheltered-workshop enterprises, along with for-profits employing immigrant workers, teenagers, retirees, and migrant workers (who grow food for the military and the rest of us), reveal the evolving nature of the US working class, and some explanation for its lack of revolutionary fervor, or even mild dissent from the capitalist system.

The well-paid, and truly diverse employees (including executives) of major weapons makers are also not about to construct wooden barricades. Boards of directors in these industries are welcoming to minorities and women. The CEOs of Lockheed and General Dynamics are women, as is the Chief Operating Officer of Northrop Grumman. These success stories reinforce personal aspirations among the have-nots, rather than questioning the system.

Contracts with universities, hospitals, and medical facilities are too numerous to detail here; one that illustrates how far the blanket stretches is with Oxford University, \$800,000 for medical research. Professional associations with significant contracts include the Institute of International Education, American Council on Education, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Academy of Sciences, Society of Women Engineers, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, Society of Mexican-American Engineers, and U.S. Green Building Council. The Council of State Governments (a nonprofit policy association of officials) received a \$193,000 contract for “preparedness” work. Let us hope we are well prepared.

The leaders, staff, members, donors, and volunteers of nonprofit organizations are the kind of people who might have been peace activists, yet so many are smothered into silence under the vast insecurity blanket.

In addition to all the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the military establishment, many people with no connection still cheer it on. They have been subject to relentless propaganda for

the military and its wars from the government, the print and digital press, TV, movies, sports shows, parades, and computer games—the latter teach children that killing is fun.

The indoctrination goes down easily. It has had a head start in the educational system that glorifies the violent history of the nation. Our schools are full of in-house tutoring, STEM programs, and fun robotics teams personally conducted by employees of the weapons makers. Young children may not understand all the connections, but they tend to remember the logos. The JROTC programs, imparting militaristic values, enroll far more children than the ones who will become future officers. The extremely well-funded recruitment efforts in schools include “fun” simulations of warfare.

There is a worldwide supporting cast for the complex that includes NATO, other alliances, defense ministries, foreign military industries, and bases, but that is a story for another day.

The millions sheltered under our thick and broad blanket, including the enlistees under the prickly part of it, are not to blame. Some people may be thrilled by the idea of death and destruction. However, most are just trying to earn a living, keep their organization or rust belt afloat, or be accepted into polite company. They would prefer constructive work or income from healthy sources. Yet many have been indoctrinated to believe that militarism is normal and necessary. For those who consider change to be essential if life on this planet has a chance at survival, it is important to see all the ways that the military-industrial-congressional-almost everything-complex is being sustained.

“Free market economy” is a myth. In addition to the huge nonprofit (non-market) sector, government intervention is substantial, not only in the gigantic military, but in agriculture, education, health care, infrastructure, economic development (!), et al. For the same trillions we could have a national economy that repairs the environment, provides a fine standard of living and cultural opportunities for all, and works for peace on earth. **CP**

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## Is Trump’s Quest for “Energy Dominance” Behind EPA’s Carbon Neutral Biomass Decision?

BY JOSH SCHLOSSBERG

“[M]y administration will seek not only American energy independence that we’ve been looking for so long, but American energy dominance,” declared President Donald Trump at the Unleashing American Energy Event in Washington, D.C. in June 2017.

According to Trump, energy dominance can be achieved by government “eliminat[ing] the barriers to domestic energy production” and “export[ing] American energy all over the world.” In his speech, he focused on nuclear power, coal, oil, and natural gas, however, a recent policy announcement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proclaiming forest biomass energy “carbon neutral” reveals what appears to be another component of that strategy.

In April, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt released a statement explaining that for future policy decisions the agency will “treat biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from the combustion of biomass from managed forests at stationary sources for energy production as carbon neutral.” What this means is that the agency will assume that any carbon emissions released from burning wood in biomass heating and/or electric facilities will be reabsorbed by future forest growth, and therefore make zero contributions to exacerbating climate change.

EPA stated that the purpose of the policy is to ensure that biomass “plays a key role in addressing the energy needs of the U.S., furthering U.S. energy dominance, in an environmentally and economically beneficial way.”

“Today’s announcement grants America’s foresters much-needed certainty and clarity with respect to the carbon neutrality of forest biomass,” said Pruitt in an April 23 news release.

Needless to say, the biomass energy and forest products industries were pleased with the announcement.

“Long-overdue regulatory certainty on the carbon neutrality of renewable forest-based biomass energy means the paper and wood products industry’s role in a strong renewable energy future for our country is brighter than ever,” said Donna Harman, President and CEO of the American Forest & Paper Association, in an email to Counterpunch.

Harman explained how “clear public policy direction will provide our companies with the ability to more effectively plan for the future and invest in efficient technologies to produce bioenergy.” The biomass industry has long blamed a lack of sector investment on the uncertainty surrounding EPA’s regulation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from biomass.

“Policy uncertainty means uncertain investment in the future of our forests,” said CEO of National Alliance of Forest Owners Dave Tenny in the EPA news release. “Recognizing that forest biomass in the U.S. provides a carbon-neutral source of renewable energy will encourage landowners to replant trees to keep our forests healthy and intact and provide good paying jobs well into the future.”

“Administrator Pruitt’s announcement today reflects the clear scientific consensus on forest biomass,” said President and CEO of Georgia Forestry Association Andres Villegas in the same release.

Politicians also applauded the announcement.

“The EPA’s declaration that forest biomass energy is carbon neutral confirms what we in forestry have long known,” said U.S. Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AK), the only licensed forester in Congress, in a press release. “Trees are a renewable resource and properly managed forests can provide clean energy for decades to come.”

Westerman thanked Administrator Pruitt and EPA staff for “listening to science instead of activists and recognizing the role forest biomass can contribute to American energy policy.”

While the EPA decision may advance economic opportunities for the biomass and forest products industries, does that mean carbon neutral biomass is settled science?

“It’s a pure political decision which has serious global consequences,” said William Moomaw, Ph.D., emeritus professor of international environmental policy at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, in a phone conversation with Counterpunch.

Moomaw, who was a coordinating lead author of the 2001 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) chapter on greenhouse gas emissions reduction and its special report on renewable energy in 2010, insisted the EPA biomass decision is “not based on any science whatsoever.”

Indeed, even the EPA statement doesn’t hide the fact that it’s “not a scientific determination and does not revise or amend any scientific determinations that EPA has previously made.”

Since 2010, the EPA has tried to figure out how to account for the carbon emissions of biomass energy. In 2011, it submitted its draft technical report on the topic to its Science Advisory Board (SAB), made up of 45 scientists, for peer review. In response, the SAB found in 2012 that “carbon neutrality cannot be assumed for all biomass energy a priori,” while acknowledging “circumstances in which biomass is grown, harvested and combusted in a carbon neutral fashion.”

In 2014, EPA released its second draft of the technical report, which included some aspects of the SAB’s review along with stakeholder comments, while laying out a framework for biomass carbon accounting.

However, EPA says final recommendations from the SAB, which hasn’t met since August 2017, “remain uncertain as there is disagreement among the SAB on specific technical elements.” Calling the peer review process a “valuable exercise,” EPA said it’s not “resulted in a workable, applied approach” for dealing

with the issue.

Seemingly washing its hands of the SAB, Trump’s EPA has decided to forge ahead on the presumption that all forest biomass is carbon neutral, a decision Moomaw said is “astounding.”

“There’s a lot of evidence that [carbon neutral biomass] is a bad idea if we really want to address climate change, because forests are in the lead in being the removers of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere,” he said.

In 2016, 65 scientists skeptical about carbon-neutral biomass sent a letter to Congress warning that “burning any carbon containing substance whether biomass or fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.”

They wrote that it can take anywhere from decades to a century for new tree growth to absorb the carbon dioxide released from cutting and burning trees, which doesn’t even take into account potential lack of tree growth due to drought, fire, insects, or converting forests to non-forest use.

Assuming all forest biomass to be carbon neutral could lead to “a significant depletion of US forests,” according to the letter. Meanwhile, other studies have found a “permanent increase” in atmospheric carbon dioxide from biomass energy.

Moomaw noted that the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere doesn’t just depend on how fast we emit it, but also on how quickly the natural world, such as forests, wetlands, and oceans, takes it out.

“We not only put more carbon in by burning trees, but we remove their capacity for decades to a century or more to take it out,” says Moomaw. U.S. forests offset over 11 percent of our nation’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to the EPA.

Some conservationists advise that an expansion of biomass energy can be just as climate unfriendly as fossil fuels, or even worse.

“Per unit of energy generated, biomass power plants produce more carbon than coal plants, and three times as much carbon as natural gas plants,” said Brian Nowicki, California Climate Policy Director for Center for Biological Diversity, in an email to Counterpunch. “Forest biomass promoters try to downplay that huge carbon-pollution problem by layering on various assumptions of the supposed carbon benefits of removing trees from the forest. But when you look at any of these assumptions in detail and in practice, they don’t pan out and, very often, greatly exacerbate the carbon pollution of forest biomass overall.”

On the other side of the aisle, a 2014 letter to the EPA signed by 100 professors and scientists from 80 universities on behalf of the National Association of University Forest Resources Programs (NAUFRP) maintained the long-term climate perks of biomass energy.

“Most debates regarding the carbon benefits of forest biomass energy are about the timing of the benefits rather than whether they exist,” the letter read. In other words, despite a temporary pulse of carbon released into the atmosphere after



burning wood, those emissions will be zeroed out over time.

The NAUFRP letter argued that a 100-year time frame for forest biomass “provides a more accurate accounting of cumulative emissions than shorter intervals.”

However, many climate scientists caution that, if we’re going to prevent runaway climate change, we can’t wait a full century before cutting emissions.

So what does the EPA policy decision mean for the future of biomass energy in the U.S.?

Nowicki said the EPA decision “could lead to the mining of trees in our national public forests, all to advance the most climate-polluting and least cost-effective option for generating electricity in America today.”

Moomaw agreed that the carbon neutral assumption may result in the construction of more industrial scale heat and electricity facilities in the U.S., as well as the possibility of making liquid fuels from trees.

“You look at all these things that trees are going to do, and I think the same tree has been promised over about three or four times,” Moomaw said.

Domestic energy production aside, Moomaw also foresees the possibility of more biomass shipped overseas, which dovetails nicely with Trump’s stated goal to “export American energy all over the world.”

Currently, the U.S. exports wood pellets—mostly from southeastern forests—to the U.K. and some parts of Europe to fuel biomass facilities. Moomaw said the EPA decision will likely result in more of the same, as well as potentially opening up markets in Korea, Japan and China, which he said “could be devastating.”

But it’s not just Trump and Republicans that have been calling for an expansion of biomass energy.

Moomaw pointed out that the U.S. Forest Service under President Barack Obama was—and remains—a prominent biomass booster.

The Forest Service’s Benefits of Woody Biomass Utilization noted that biomass can “reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases” by replacing fossil fuels and is carbon neutral when “woody biomass is regrown.”

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) has for years been one of Congress’ leading advocates for biomass energy. Most recently

in 2017 Wyden introduced a bill called the Clean Energy for American Act that would increase tax credits for biomass energy and other alternative energy sources (the bill has been referred to the Committee on Finance).

In 2015, the Oregon legislature passed a bill exempting biomass carbon emissions from being regulated under certain air pollution laws.

“Counterpunch” reached out to Senator Wyden for a statement on the momentous EPA decision via phone and email, however, staff member Hank Stern responded only by saying,

“Gonna pass on this one, but thanks for asking.”

Both Obama’s Forest Service and Wyden have long been advocates for “wildfire fuel reduction” on public lands, which involves cutting trees in an effort to reduce the severity and spread of wildfire, and using the byproducts for biomass energy.

While some studies have shown fuel reduction to occasionally limit the spread of smaller wildfires, others conclude that large

wildfires are more a product of high temperatures, drought, and high winds than fuels. More studies point out the “needle in the haystack” premise behind fuel reduction, where the likelihood of a treated forest experiencing a wildfire in the decade or so before regrowth is slim.

Additionally, ecologists question whether attempting to stop wildfires is even a good idea in the first place, since fires—particularly large ones—are crucial components of forest ecosystems. Many conservationists point out that the soil, watershed, and fish and wildlife impacts of fuel treatments often do more harm than good.

No matter your take on carbon-neutral biomass, it’s worth considering that the EPA decision isn’t set in stone, as the announcement made clear that the policy “does not represent a final agency action.”

For carbon-neutral biomass to become law, EPA would still need to put out a notice for proposed rulemaking, explain the reason for making these changes, and give the public a chance to comment. **CP**

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*Biomass logging in the White River National Forest in Colorado for Eagle Valley.  
Photo by Josh Schlossberg.*

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# How Capitalism is Working Marx's Alternative

BY PAUL STREET

"The philosophers," young Karl Marx wrote, "have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Today, the founder of "scientific socialism" would hardly be overjoyed at the praise he has received from leading capitalist opinion and news organs like *The Economist* and the *New York Times*, who marked the recent 200th anniversary (May 5, 2018) of his birth by conceding that Marx was right. These establishment authorities admit that global capitalism—the soulless beast described as the handiwork of "the bourgeoisie" in Marx and Frederick Engels' famous *Communist Manifesto* (1848)—generates mass misery, savage inequality, rampant poverty, the pitiless exploitation of billions, and the insidious oligarchic rule of a small number of giant corporations and financial institutions.

## Against False Conflation

But so what? "What," the Russian Marxist V.I. Lenin famously asked, "is to be done?" Not much, answer the system's middle-class opinion-managers. The medicine, the *Economist* proclaims, is worse than the malady. It's either (a) do the best you can under capitalism, with all its "imperfections," or the totalitarian nightmare of Stalin, Mao's, Ceceascau, and Kim jong-Un's all-powerful state, replete with dungeons, conspiracy trials, confessions, stark production quotas, secret police, labor camps and firing squads.

What is left out here is Marx's actual alternative vision which has never really been carried into practice. In his late twenties, Marx, a fierce individualist and romantic humanist, imagined a "communist" future when all would be free to follow creative, self-actualizing pursuits beyond the narrow requirements imposed by "modern" class society's stultifying division of labor:

For, as soon as the division of labor comes into being, each man has a particular exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic and must remain so if he does not wish to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.

Two decades later, near the end of the draft third volume

of his economic magnum opus *Capital*, Marx imagined a post-capitalist and hence (for him) post-class society, one in which the vast majority would be voluntarily and enthusiastically joined as "associated producers" to create a "true realm of freedom" beyond the necessity of onerous toil and in accord with their "human nature":

In fact, the realm of freedom ... can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.

In the "higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also of the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; ... after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly," Marx wrote in 1875, "society [could] inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!'"

Marx's communist vision had nothing to do with a planned central command political economy in which a dictatorial state appropriated and distributed the surplus generated by a giant working-class performing narrow and highly specialized tasks coordinated from above. Marx and his best late 19th century and early 20th century followers (including brilliant thinkers and activists like Rosa Luxembourg and Anton Pannekoek) understood socialism as workers' control, not the top-down reign of government bureaucrats and production-obsessed office and factory managers. Even in its opening phases, when it was compelled phase to retain the bourgeois principle of reimbursement in accordance with labor provided (though now in a society without returns to capital, without profit), the "communist society" the mature Marx advocated was based on collective ownership and cooperative workers' control of production, not state ownership and control.

Marx admitted the necessity of a "political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." But there is nothing in Marx's writing supporting the state command and bureaucratic-collectivist tyranny and class system (replete with a highly specialized, alienating, disempowering, and capitalist-like division of labor) imposed on the Russian working-class by Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union after 1917. There is nothing in Marx supporting the authoritarian state capitalism imposed on the Chinese working-class by the "Communist Party" in

China today.

The supposedly dead old grey dog of Marx's liberating communism has yet to be born. The great neoliberal mantra "there is no alternative" (TINA) is intimately related to Western ideologists' false and slanderous conflation of Marx's liberating vision with the Soviet and Chinese "Marxist" experience. Reading Marx is a useful antidote to that great lie, which helps feeds the hopelessness felt by so many today.

## Against Speaking Truth to Wealth

Another weapon in the capitalist ideological arsenal is the claim that the only serious solutions to contemporary societal difficulties are to be found through better and wiser conduct on the part of bourgeois masters. From this standpoint, persistent problems like poverty, inequality, joblessness, disappearing benefits, over-work, mass alienation, and environmental ruin merely reflect insufficiently enlightened and informed values and behavior on the part of capitalists and their managers. The fix is to have better and wiser, more caring and far-seeing capitalist "elites."

A different capitalist perspective blames the "outside interference" of government, unions, and social and environmental activists and organizations for killing the "golden goose" of capitalism with over-regulation and other forms of obstruction.

Marx would have no patience for either of these narratives. He saw the bourgeoisie's behavior and values as reflections of soulless systemic requirements rooted in the profit-mad accumulation imperatives of capital. By Marx's hardnosed reckoning, there was no appealing to capitalist chieftain's better angels where money and profit were concerned. Capital was driven by competition and its need to extract surplus value (the hidden source of capitalist profit) from labor to degrade and exploit working people, to subvert and pervert democracy, to pillage the commons and generally to assault the common good. "My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history," Marx wrote in the German preface to *Capital*, "can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." For Marx, unlike Charles Dickens, the moral predisposition of bourgeois "elites" was of little concern.

Marx knew that even the most supposedly well-intended capitalists owed their wealth to the exploitation of workers and society. He would have approved left geographer Richard A. Walker's recent take on Silicon Valley's prosperity, which is all too commonly attributed to entrepreneurial genius. "Beyond the myth of immaculate innovation... the success of the region rests on rests on... industrial clustering and urban agglomeration, the base technology of electronics nurtured in the region [with no small state subsidy], and the labor of thousands of skilled workers and millions of others." The "others" include

a vast army of cruelly exploited proletarians across East Asia (especially in "Communist" China), home to more than 500 firms supplying Apple's fabled iPhone. "The global reach of the [San Francisco] Bay Area's tech giants," Walker reminds us in the spirit of Marx, "is motivated by one thing above all: access to cheap labor. Much of that labor works in huge factories, warehouses, and ships under deplorable conditions and at low pay... the Bay area is floating on a tsunami of surplus value produced around the world."

The notion that the profits system would more effectively meet people's needs if it were liberated from government regulation and popular resistance would have been met with well-deserved disgust from Marx.

## Against Diversion and Division

If Marx refused to focus on capitalists as the cause and/or cure for contemporary evils, he would have been positively repelled by the reactionary "populists" (e.g. Marie Le Pen and Donald Trump) who blame racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants for the difficulties of working people in the U.S. Such racist and nativist finger-pointing would have struck Marx as noxious scapegoating meant to divert working-class people from confronting the system of class rule and to prevent them from fighting as one against their real and common, foundational enemy—"the despotism of capital over labour." Rather than bemoan how immigrants depress wages by expanding what he called "the reserve army of labor" (the unemployed desperate for employment) in rich nations, Marx would have implored activists and workers to form powerful working-class organizations joining native and immigrant working people in common struggle against the employer class and its game of divide-and-rule. He would also have called for popular struggle to resist the capitalist dispossession and misery that pushes millions out of poor nations in the first place.

If Marx would have loathed the virulent right-wing white-nationalist racists and nativists—and sexist and homophobes—of our time, he wouldn't have been much more excited by the other side of the ethnic and cultural coin. He would have been depressed by the more understandable but ultimately also divisive "identity politics of the contemporary Western "Left" today. Marx advocated a universalistic movement and activism of class and the commons, not a particularistic politics of ethnic, racial, gender, and/or gender identity. Much of what passes for "Left" politics and culture in the U.S. and Europe today would strike Marx as the divisive and distracting, Machiavellian perpetuation of class rule—a fatal diversion from the essential struggle between "producers" and "appropriators."

Also repellent to Marx would be the national militarism and imperialism that has polluted "left" and labor movements in the West for more than a century. Marx was an internationalist. "The working men have no country," Marx and Engels wrote in 1848. "If the emancipation of the working-classes require their



fraternal concurrence,” Marx said in the Inaugural Address to the International Working Men’s Association in 1864, “how are they to fulfill that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people’s blood and treasure”? That question is no less germane in 2018 than it was in 1864, even before the great wars of the 20th century functioned—in the words of Marx’s reflection on the 1871 Franco-Prussian war—to “disguise... class rule ...in a national uniform” and “defer... the class struggle between the [international capitalist] appropriator and the [international working-class] producer.”

Marx would also look askance at those who point the finger of blame at “globalization.” It is not “globalization” (brilliantly foretold in *The Communist Manifesto*) as such that challenges working people the world over but rather globalization under the command of what he called in 1871 “the cosmopolitan conspiracy of capital.” Capital, Marx, knew, was driven to pit the working people and the natural resources (a category within which he included human labor power) of the world against each other in its perpetual quest for profits and markets. As Marx would point out, the daunting social and environmental devastation wrought by runaway global capitalism in the neoliberal era (really just a period of capitalism returning to its savagely inegalitarian and authoritarian norms after the anomalous “Keynesian” post-World War II decades) is the system of class rule working for its masters: the lords of capital.

It goes almost without saying that Marx would hold modern-day conspiracy theorists of the 9/11 “Truther” and other varieties in special contempt for their obsessive and reactionary habit of turning “left” discussions and debates away from the underlying institutions and structures of class rule.

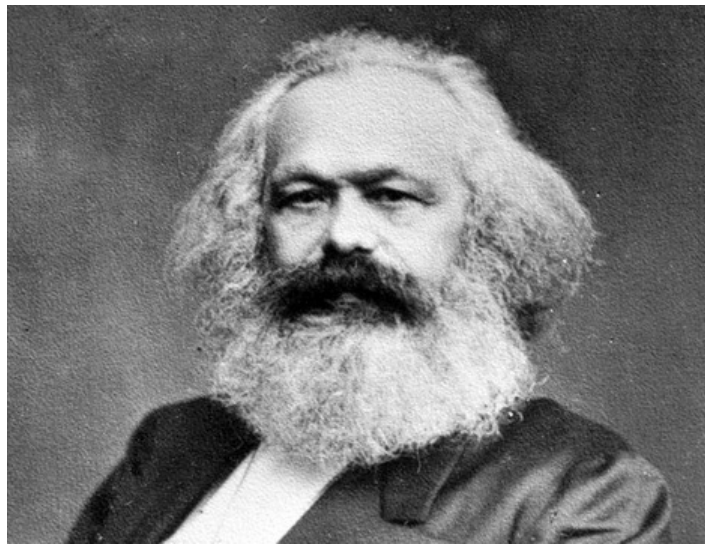
### **Socialism or Barbarism if We’re Lucky**

For Marx, the only way for working people and broad mass of commoners to achieve lasting improvements and a decent society “favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature” is for them to organize collectively. The first aim of such organization was to achieve particular and limited but essential gains like a shortened working day, the abolition of child labor,

decent wages, improved safety on and off the job. By fighting and winning against particular injustices, Marx knew, working people began to see the world in a new way, grasping their own power to change it and seeing higher possibilities—ultimately the “expropriation of the expropriators”—in collective organization and action.

The fundamental, foundational injustice for Marx was of course capitalism itself, a system born in slavery, war, merciless conquest, the ruthless enclosure and theft of the commons. The de facto dictatorship of the bourgeoisie—the brutal reign of capital that lurked behind the façade of “bourgeois democracy” was never freely chosen through a vote or any other purported vehicle of popular self-rule.

The ultimate aim of working-class self-activity and organization for Marx was to overthrow the profits system and take democratic control of what is produced and how work (humanity’s “interchange with nature”) and society are organized. Thus it was that Marx praised the short-lived Paris Commune (March–May 1871) for being designed to “to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundation upon which rests the existence of classes and therefore of class rule. With labour emancipated,” Marx wrote in his great homage



*Karl Marx, circa 1875.*

to the Communards, “every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute.” Marx would have not been impressed by those who talk—like the social democrat and U.S. Empire-backer Bernie Sanders and many of his followers—of a progressive “political revolution” but not of a social revolution reaching down into the “economical foundation” of class rule. “The political rule of the producer,” Marx wrote in 1871, “cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery”—with “Wages Slavery.”

The alternative to working-class struggle and the revolutionary “reconstitution of society,” Marx and Engels prophesied in 1848, was “the common ruin of the contending classes.” That, too, was prophetic, though neither the *Times* nor *The Economist* caught it. The “common ruin” of all is where humanity is now headed after half a millennium under the rule of a system that relies on environmentally unsustainable limitless growth to avert collapse under the pressure of precisely the structural contradictions Marx noted at the height of “the Age of Capital” (Eric Hobsbawm): the tendency of the rate of profit

to decline; the tendency of workers' wages and employment levels to lag behind the consumption power required to realize profits through the sale of commodities; the alienation and resistance of the working-class and broader populace to the relentlessly and inherently rapacious demands of capital; the exhaustion of natural resources and fertility and the poisoning of the natural environment.

"The rich," the French ecological writer Herve Kempf observed eleven years ago, "are destroying the Earth." The 21st century global bourgeoisie isn't doing this because it is loaded with malevolent ecological Scrooges who need to be visited by ghosts of the environmental Christmas past, present, and future. Capitalists are driven to rape the ecological commons by systemic imperatives compelling them to relentlessly commodify everything under the sun and spark infinite growth on a finite planet.

It's "socialism or barbarism" (Rose Luxembourg) if we're lucky.

For all his claim to have discovered natural "laws of history," Marx was an activist and a friend and mentor of activists and workers as well as an intellectual and "theoretician." "Fighting" as Frederick Engels said at Marx's gravesite "was his element." At the same time, the mature Marx surely knew that his younger self's dichotomy between understanding and changing the world was overdrawn. We must understand history if we are to change it along with others in desirable intelligent, effective, and radical ways. Here is a remarkable passage from Martin Nicolaus's May 1, 1972 preface to Marx's *Grundrisse*, a giant and difficult manuscript cobbled together from notes Marx wrote to himself in the winter of 1857–58:

Emerging from a rat hole of an apartment in a London slum, a bearded foreigner in worn clothes makes his way to the British Museum; writes articles all day for a newspaper in far-off New York; read obscure treatises no one else has read; pores over a ton of government Blue Books ignored by all; returns to the slum, works into the night, piling up notes in an illegible script. Hegel? Adam Smith? Proudhon? Who knew or cared? If Marx had died in mid-1858, these seven winter workbooks might well have remained a book of as many seals. Instead, he emerged in 1863 as the only man in London—where working-class leaders from all over the world were in exile or visiting—who could articulate the grounds for the general working-class feeling that the emancipation of wage-slaves required the abolition of slavery in its chattel form; the only man in 1864 who could formulate the elementary principles of unity for the first effective international association of workers; the only man within that association who could refute the narrow reformism of the trade-union leaders and the doctrinaire anti-unionism of the utopians and anarchists, all in one coherent systematic argument. Amidst the enormous welter of sects, tendencies, utopias, and schemes and hair-brained notions which rose to the surface of the early working-class movement like froth in a storm, there was

only one person who had the basic outlines of the entire historical movement firmly and clearly in mind; who had a concept of the whole, of its contradictions and limits, and the road to its overthrow.

Nicolaus's "only man in London" still speaks to us from the grave after all these years. He tells us, among other things, that the bourgeoisie doesn't want to fix the system to make it work for the people and the common good. Their system has no higher ideals beyond the endless accumulation of capital. Capitalism is about profits for the big owners of capital, the increasing concentration of wealth and hence power, and the ruthless exploitation and alienation of the ever more proletarianized many, period. It has nothing to do with democracy and the general welfare.

Five people owning as much wealth as the bottom half of the species while millions starve and lack adequate health care is, Marx tells us, capitalism working. Giant corporations driving the planet past the limits of environmental sustainability is capitalism working. The giant military industrial complex, generating vast fortunes for the owners and managers of high tech "defense" (war and empire) firms while schools and public parks and infrastructure and social safety nets are underfunded—that too is capitalism working. So is abject plutocracy and increasingly open oligarchy in the political process that masquerades as democracy even as elementary policy research shows that the modern day upper-echelon corporate and financial bourgeoisie—the United States unelected dictatorship of money—gets pretty much whatever it wants over and against majority progressive public opinion.

Appealing to our capitalist masters to be nicer and smarter for the common good of all is a fool's errand. Buying into capitalist's call for greater freedom from government and social regulations and checks is even more idiotic: it is a recipe for full and final extermination. Opposing or embracing the competing claims and real or alleged threats or promises of other capitalist or non-capitalist nation states will achieve nothing for workers. Embracing electoral and related identity politics brings no lasting gains for the working-class majority. Neither, of course, of course does the dangerous retreat into self and purely private concerns that is so ubiquitously sold in capitalist "culture."

The only solution, Marx knew, was for the majority workers and citizens to organize collectively to overthrow the chaotic and amoral profits and "Wages Slavery" system and to take control of what they produce and how society is structured and run. **CP**

**PAUL STREET** is the author of *"They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy."*

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# An Interview with Donald Worster

## How We Burned Through a Whole Hemisphere in Just 500 Years

BY STAN COX

*Donald Worster, a pioneer of the field of environmental history, held the Hall Distinguished Professorship Chair in American History at the University of Kansas from 199 to 2012. He is currently a Professor of World History at Renmin University of China. His books have examined the politics and economics of water in the American West, the life of John Muir, the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, and a range of other subjects.*

*In Worster's most recent book, *Shrinking the Earth: The Rise and Decline of American Abundance* (Oxford University Press, 2016), he shows how the great windfall of land, resources, and ecological bounty that greeted Europeans when they arrived in the New World five centuries ago dramatically altered the history not only of the Americas but of the entire Earth. He argues convincingly that to the Europeans, the Western Hemisphere was, in practical terms, a "Second Earth." (Of course, the hemisphere's inhabitants at the time of Columbus regarded it as their Only Earth, and they would lose it.)*

*Worster argues that U.S.-style capitalism and industrialism were made possible by the Second Earth's natural abundance and that over the past two centuries, they have deeply depleted the hemisphere's landscapes and ecosystems. America, Worster writes, is going to have to shift from a culture of abundance to a culture of limits. He covers much other ground as well in the book, in rich detail. I recently asked him about some of that in a May 1 conversation via Internet; he was in Beijing at the time, and I was in Kansas.*

**STAN COX:** You begin the story 500 years ago as Europe begins exploiting the abundance provided by the Second Earth. You cite the scholar William Prescott Webb, who argued, in your words, that Europe "was jolted out of deep historic ruts of poverty and inequality by the unexpected discovery of faraway resources" from the Americas. That's at odds with the well-worn story of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, isn't it?

**DON WORSTER:** Europe is jolted out of the rut, but that doesn't happen until 200 years after Columbus. The Industrial Revolution doesn't take place until even longer after Columbus. You could say that as late as 1800, materially, Western Europe

was not more advanced than East Asia. You could say, and there have been several ways of measuring this, that East Asia was ahead of Western Europe in many, many respects, even though it had fallen into a kind of stagnation itself.

Our image of Europe, from the Greeks on, has been the model for the world, on the cutting edge, and then comes the Renaissance, and it's all a very flattering view. But it doesn't look that way by a lot of the data. Look at Scotland, let's say. People were sitting around campfires, chewing on bones. The poverty of Europe in those days is something we forget. At the end of the Middle Ages, there were, of course, some prosperous cities such as Venice, but a lot of that was wealth was coming from Eurasia. That's why Columbus and the others and their leaders were so eager to go to East Asia, because they saw that as kind of a golden land, and they wanted to get in on the riches that they thought were there and to pull themselves out of stagnation and poverty.

Columbus was part of a much bigger effort of a backward Europe to get in touch with the fabled power and riches of the Orient. But—bingo!—without knowing what he was doing or where he was going, he finds an entire hemisphere.

**SC:** Today among economists, we see unanimous enthusiasm for permanent growth. In contrast, that revered prophet of capitalism himself, Adam Smith, noted in *The Wealth of Nations* that, in your words, "The best that one could hope for was not progress forever but progress for a while—progress that would end with a comfortable stationary state." But capitalism didn't quite work out that way, did it? Was it stimulated by the plenty that the Second Earth provided?

**DW:** Smith was writing in the 1770s. The wealth that would accumulate, the growth, hadn't happened yet. I think there was a tendency among the early political economists to feel that the world was still a place of limits. I don't know exactly when that changed, but my hunch is—and I wrote about this only very briefly in the book—I think the change happened when economics began to develop in the United States.

The American economists' visions of endless abundance were not contemplated by British economists. People like Henry Carey of Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century saw images of wealth that were infinite. And where did they get this? They were basically writing a whole new chapter in the history of economics. But it doesn't even begin to appear as the word 'growth' until the twentieth century when they begin to talk about infinite growth. I don't believe there is anything inherent in capitalism that says there must be a belief in infinite growth. However, I can't imagine capitalism without that belief. But today there are Nobel Prize-winning economists who are saying that we can have capitalism in a no-growth world.

**SC:** But do you think they are right about that? I seriously



**doubt that capitalism could function without the capital accumulation that drives growth. That accumulation is the whole point of capitalism.**

**DW:** I don't think American capitalism can do it. And I don't think the kind of capitalism that is resident now here in China can do it. But I think the Chinese, who have known the limits of their land and soil and water for a few thousand years (much better than Americans) can get back to that way of thinking more easily and readily. But right now, China's leaders are hoping that Southeast Asia and Africa can be their Promised Land. They're borrowing the rhetoric of imaginary abundance from the United States from its experience in living in the New World.

Most economists still aren't reading Adam Smith very carefully. They still think of him as talking only about endless improvements in productivity. As you know, most economists have only two factors in their thinking: number one, capital, and number two . . . sometimes . . . labor. Future changes in economics departments will be very interesting to watch, because I think that belief is already beginning to crack. And when they do change, they may rediscover people like John Stuart Mill and Ricardo, and of course, Adam Smith, have something to offer.

**SC:** Then fossil fuels came along in the nineteenth century at a time when abundance appeared to be hitting a ceiling. Coal and then oil are often seen as having lifted that ceiling, but you say that fossil fuels, while important to the story, were "late supplements" to the Age of Abundance. Later on, you argue that twentieth-century cheap oil was not a "Third Earth" in a class with the Second Earth. Why is that?

**DW:** I am reacting against an ill-founded historical interpretation: that the economic miracle of the last 200 years begins with industrialization and above all with fossil fuels, and before that, it was just poverty. I think that's far too narrow a way of thinking about that miracle. My book is arguing that we've got to start well before the late eighteenth century. You can't attribute everything to energy and energy alone. You have to talk about forests and soils and wildlife, and all of these things are essential to making an agricultural economy or even an industrial economy.

Now, sure the discovery and development of fossil fuels become absolutely pivotal. But this development of fossil fuels depended heavily on the availability of the New World. People had used coal for a long time. But what starts off this whole process of scientific investigation and innovation and capital accumulation comes out of the New World . . . Now they've got money, they've got knowledge, they've even got the plant they need: cotton. This is something about the Industrial Revolution that has been overlooked by so many people. They don't pay attention to the fact that cotton was absolutely essential to the Industrial Revolution—as important as coal. In

the early stages, it was all textiles; they're still central today. Without cotton, they wouldn't have even needed coal. There is a chain of consequences that just gets cut off, ignored.

Even if you say coal has been incredibly important to industry, you have to ask which part of the world ends up having so much of the coal reserves. Where does that development take place? In North America! The United States is the Saudi Arabia of coal. And even oil—although we don't have that much oil, the oil industry was invented by Americans using Saudi resources. The New World was loaded with energy possibilities. And we know that won't last. That's my main point, that no matter where abundance comes from, it doesn't last.

**SC:** You point out a weakness of the U.S. conservation movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: that with its focus on preservation of landscapes and watersheds threatened by activities like farming and logging, it did not recognize the great damage done by industry despite its much smaller geographic footprint. It seems to me that similar neglect is being committed by the so-called "ecomodernist" movement of the past few years, led in this country by the Breakthrough Institute. Its boosters would have humans retreat into super-high-tech, self-sufficient urban areas powered by nuclear energy, allowing much more of the Earth's surface to be turned back over to Mother Nature (and getting their food by magic from somewhere or other.) Have you been following this stuff?

**DW:** Yes, I have. It's this idea that technology can be our Third Earth, that it can just invent abundance. We have begun to swing around to that idea more and more as we are running out of natural abundance. There is a difference between natural abundance that we didn't create but is essential to life and technological abundance that comes out of our brains. But there is this belief that all we need is our brains. Now I don't want to cast doubt on the power of the human brain, but this is a misplaced confidence. So when we put all our eggs into that basket and say we just need more babies that will grow up with more brains, and everything will be OK, . . .

This just ignores the fact that humans have collapsed and failed in civilization after civilization. Brains can't always solve the problem, technology doesn't always arrive at the midnight hour. These people are offering us a utopian vision free of the realism of nature. Now I don't think the early conservationists like George Perkins Marsh could be accused of that. But there were people around who saw deforestation and so on, and thought that by shifting to an industrialized economy, we would solve our environmental problems. And when they did it . . . well, just look at a place like Pittsburgh or Chicago in the nineteenth century. It takes us a while to see the problems in our own dreams and schemes. But of course, we are still going to need innovation and technology.



*Coal power plant in northern Indiana. Photo: IDEM*

**SC:** But how can we sort good from bad technologies? The great environmentalists of the 1970s recognized, as you write, that “The miracle of technology was in fact making the earth a more dangerous place to live.” How can a society discriminate between necessary technologies and ones that are too fragile or destructive to be considered?

**DW:** I think that environmentalists have got to back off from being the voice of gloom and doom and to be more positive about change and particularly change that can be more integrated into preserving this planet. In that sense, maybe I’m sounding a little too much like the ecomodernizers. But they go far, far too far with this. They are bringing us back to a very narrow moral vision. We have to find technologies that allow us to preserve and nourish the soils and plants and animals of the Earth. That’s an optimistic vision . . . in a way. But it’s not as optimistic or as narrow as the Breakthrough Institute’s vision.

**SC:** David Potter and his book *People of Plenty*, published in the 1950s, are featured in your book. Potter argued that abundance was not a gift of nature but a product of capitalist competition and culture, that the factory had supplanted nature as the source of abundance. How did his critics over the years, including you, respond to this idea?

**DW:** David Potter still ranks as one of the greatest historians of the twentieth century. He was a superstar. So there were not too many people who took him on critically. And the spirit behind *People of Plenty* resonated with people in the academic world, the political world, the economic world. There was very little criticism at the time, and the book has been regarded as one of the great classics of the American spirit, character,

institutions, and so on.

With more and more historians of that era becoming critical of capitalism, Potter did not. He just took capitalism for granted. He didn’t even mention it in the book! But when you look at the book critically, you see he is talking about capitalism. But he saw only its extraordinary productivity and none of its failures. He was a kind of fundamentalist. I don’t think a lot of scholars today who read that book would be happy with his sort of genial view of things. They would instead see anticipations of Ronald Reagan, not to mention Mr. Trump. I think we are long overdue for a critique of *People of Plenty* and that’s why I put Potter in my book.

**SC:** In *Shrinking the Earth*, you end up in the present day, discussing the widely followed concept of multiple planetary boundaries, as studied by Johan Rockström and the Swedish Resilience Center. They include not only thresholds for greenhouse-gas concentrations but also ones for nitrogen-cycle disruption, freshwater use, land-use change, and other assaults on the Earth. You point out that recognizing such limits is not the same as calling for non-growth or degrowth. How does the planetary limits argument advance the discussion?

**DW:** First of all, when economists talk about growth, they almost always mean growth in GDP. Even the people like Kuznets who came up with GDP made no claim that it had any relationship to human well-being. I am agnostic on this, but I am open to the possibility that we can have a kind of growth that does not have an impact on those planetary boundaries. In setting the limits that Rockström and others propose,

it's pretty damn hard to get good numbers. Even climate, but almost every one of those other boundaries has its own kinds of problems. If we make them too precise, we may think we can go right up to that limit and stop and we'll be OK. We won't leave a margin of error.

So I don't think that talking about boundaries, instead of just saying we are going to slow down growth, is necessarily a better idea, but it does point out more clearly what we are trying to achieve. Just to achieve no growth without any evidence that it's going to help anybody or the planet doesn't seem to me to be a rational way to think about it. I remain open to the possibility that we can redefine growth in ways that don't involve increased material consumption: human advancement, spiritual growth, etc.

The question, though, becomes, how can the planet's vast numbers of poor people reach something approaching an American standard of living, at least with regard to necessities for a good quality of life, without the ecological basis of their lives being undermined? As I go around China, I think of the hundreds of millions of people who still live in very, very difficult economic circumstances—we know that simply having economic growth doesn't necessarily mean that their lives have improved. How do we address that without endangering the ecosphere? The Chinese government is just as bad as ours and all the others in making growth figures the measure of its success. China has made great advances, but the inequalities that have grown up are enormous in this country, some of the biggest in the world.

**SC: Finally, I hope you are right when you write near the end of the book that our descendants may choose to rework democracy's purpose so that it means not freeing the individual of restraint but rather embracing restraint for all. Same for this sentence: "We may experience a radical undoing of those ideas and institutions that have come to define our life on earth." And I'd like to quote this paragraph from your epilogue, in which you say,**

No people will be more shocked by a turn away from that modern way of thinking than those who have lived longest by it. Nations that have been used to living by the simplest of means right down to the present should not find it so hard to understand that abundance is not endless, whereas people in Western societies, especially the United States, which have been firmly devoted to the ideology of capitalism and so blessed in natural abundance, may find it nearly impossible to adjust.

**So my final question is this: will the small "We", the affluent West, foreclose any chance that the big "We", humanity, might have had to achieve the necessary radical undoing and restraint for all?**

**DW:** Well, of course that is a question of prophecy, not history! But anyway, I don't underestimate the capacity of the United

States and its culture to innovate and change. I think we have the capacity to make lots of changes, especially when it comes to technology, as with shifting energy sources. But we are going through a social conflict now that has its deepest roots not just in immigration and white nationalism but also in a sense of diminishing horizons. There's the feeling that we don't have the opportunities before us that we once had, and therefore we have to be less generous and be critical of some of our policies of the past. Some of that criticism is healthy, but much is radically unhealthy and leads to violence and social chaos.

I don't know where this fracturing of the United States as a society will lead. We have been through periods of conflict before, and I think there is that potential for us to come back together and for people to say, "OK, this is not the world of our grandparents, but we can still live side by side with people, we can still have a generous spirit toward other societies, and we can live in this world and create a better civilization." Nobody at the highest levels in the United States, of either major party, has been talking about this clearly enough.

The Chinese government is talking constantly about building an "ecological civilization"\*. It's all rhetoric, no one knows what exactly it means, and it doesn't seem to interfere with anything they want to do. But it does make people think and talk about it, there are conferences being held, discussing questions like, What can we do to achieve it? The word "ecology" over here has kind of magical powers. If China keeps moving in this direction and taking it more and more seriously, it will be the leader of the world in the next few decades. It will provide moral, visionary leadership that the Americans will not provide.

I'm not ready to say the Americans are out of the game. We have a lot of assets on our side, including openness, critical discourse, a powerful understanding through the natural sciences of where we are, our history in conservation. So people will need to say, "This our future. We have to come to terms with all these things and build a new society different from the old, and we can do it."

\*According to Worster, the term "ecological civilization" was originally articulated in 1978 by Iring Fetscher, a political scientist at Germany's Frankfurt School. It has often been employed by writers associated with the journal *Monthly Review*, including John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff. Foster's view of the ecological-civilization boom in China seems to be largely in accord with Worster's. **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Somebody's Watching You

BY LEE BALLINGER

*"You should pay attention to what happens to us. You're next." — Dorothy Allen, welfare mom*

In her new book, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martins), Virginia Eubanks provides the backstory for her portrait of high tech tyranny. She gives examples of how low-tech, analog methods have been used to identify and track people. Punch card systems allowed the Nazis to more efficiently target Jews and other populations ("The serial numbers tattooed onto the forearms of inmates at Auschwitz began as punch card identification numbers.") Similarly, the South African apartheid regime used data from the country's 1951 census "to create a centralized population register assigning every person to one of four racial categories."

These were forerunners of the computerization of data on public assistance recipients in the United States, which began with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in the 1980s. HEW shared welfare recipients' personal information with the Departments of Defense and Justice, employers, courts, state and local governments. Computer programs were run to find as many people as possible who could be denied benefits, with a few arrests thrown in for the media's benefit. Between 1996 and 2006, nearly 8.5 million Americans were removed from the welfare rolls.

Today, Eubanks writes, "People are targeted by new tools of digital poverty management and face life-threatening consequences as a result."

She came to this conclusion after doing research in three diverse locations.

### Indiana

In 2006, the state of Indiana handed IBM a \$1.3 billion contract to automate and privatize the administration of welfare. It was a disaster, especially for the poor people it was supposed to help. Caseworkers no longer had cases and any semblance of a personal relationship with clients was gone. Recipients had to contact distant call centers to try to deal with the problems of benefit denials, missing documents (283,000 by the end of the program's third year), randomly canceled appointments, and a steady stream of "failure to cooperate" charges levied against innocent people.

"Between 2006 and 2008, Indiana denied more than a million applications for food stamps, Medicaid, and cash benefits."

In 2010, the state of Indiana filed a \$437 million breach of contract suit against IBM as the backlog of unresolved benefit cases soared above thirty thousand. IBM countersued and was awarded \$52 million, a nice addition to their original \$1.3 billion windfall. Cosmetic changes have been made to the system yet the fact remains that when IBM first got its contract, 38 percent of poor families with children received cash benefits. By 2014, that number had shrunk to 8 percent. The inescapable conclusion is that this is what they were hired to do.

### Los Angeles

On the west coast, Skid Row's several thousand residents are strongly encouraged to share their most personal information in a Vulnerability Index Survey. The results are entered in a database supposedly in order to more effectively match them up with opportunities for housing and other services. The data

is shared with 168 different organizations, including the Los Angeles Police Department. What could go wrong? Consider Operation Talon, which went into effect shortly after Bill Clinton's welfare reform bill was passed. Talon was a "joint effort of the Office of the Inspector General and local welfare offices that mined food stamp data to identify those with outstanding warrants, then luring them to appointments regarding their benefits. When they arrived at the welfare office they were arrested."

On Skid Row, an unpaid ticket for sleeping on the sidewalk becomes a warrant, making someone a fugitive until they are arrested, quite likely as a result of the database they so innocently entered. "Those living outdoors," Eubanks writes, "feel pressure to constantly be on the move. Those housed in SROs or permanent supportive housing feel equally intense pressure to stay inside and out of the public eye." Over 20,000 of LA's poorest people are entered in the database, with little hope that the dangling carrot of a place to live will ever be grasped.

### Pittsburgh

In 1984, I helped to connect Local 1397 of the Steelworkers Union with Bruce Springsteen's Born In The USA tour during its Pittsburgh stop. Springsteen made a significant donation to 1397's food bank, whose very existence was an early sign that the "good old days" were coming to a close. The purpose of the food bank was to tide people over until they went back to work. Some did but within a few years the Homestead mill was closed forever, dismantled and replaced by a mall and a water park. Thousands of formerly secure steelworkers struggled to find decent jobs, as their children and grandchildren continue to do today. Meanwhile, despite a great

increase in poverty, the Pennsylvania General Assembly continues to slash its human services allocations.

At the same time, Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) has paid a million dollars for something called the Allegheny Family Screening Tool (AFST). They claim this combination of algorithm and database can accurately predict child abuse and neglect even while a child is still in the womb.

The problem with the AFST is that it equates poverty with neglect. Lack of food, poor housing or homelessness, no medical care, utility shutoffs; all are considered to be an open and shut case of child maltreatment. In fact, 75 percent of child welfare investigations involve neglect rather than physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Ending poverty would eliminate at least three out of four problem situations overnight. And we don't need a computer program to tell us that people born into poverty today will most likely not escape it.

The relentless drumbeat of blame that results from the use of AFST and similar programs in several other states generates a stream of horror stories. Eubanks describes the plight of a woman who was flagged by AFST because of her son's truancy and subsequently had to give up custody in order to "access the basic material resources that would have allowed her to care for him effectively herself." A father was investigated because he couldn't afford an antibiotic prescription for his daughter and then his family suffered a midnight inspection raid. The dad was designated as guilty of child neglect.

Hand in hand with attacks by bullies and algorithms goes an ideological war against the poor. Life-sustaining support is dismissed as an "entitlement," the rich decide who are the "deserving poor," racially charged cries of "Welfare fraud" are just the most poisonous fruit that grows from the slander that poor people are inherently guilty of stealing from everyone else.

In 2014, Maine's Republican governor Paul LePage ordered database informa-

tion to be mined from the use of welfare benefits loaded onto EBT cards, which leave a digital record of cash withdrawals. The result was a list of transactions in which welfare recipients withdrew cash from ATMs in places like liquor stores or at out of state establishments. LePage released the data to the public via Google Docs.

Democratic legislators urged the state's attorney general to use LePage's list to investigate and prosecute fraud.

Yet the transactions flagged by LePage represented only 0.03 percent of 1.1 million cash withdrawals. The governor wasn't fazed by these statistics because it wasn't about the facts. Just as with health insurance corporations, the goal isn't to facilitate connection to services, but to deny them.

Public service bureaucracy primarily functions to investigate whether individuals' suffering might be their own fault.

—Yascha Mounk

Anyone who wants to do anything that smacks of ending poverty has always been dismissed as out of touch with reality or worse. During the 1950s, 4,165 hotel rooms and 1,379 other dwellings were eliminated from L.A.'s Skid Row. Federal low-income housing was proposed to fill the gap but opponents of the proposal worked to have the House Un-American Activities Committee investigate the City Housing Authority on charges of communism. The project never saw the light of day. Instead of old-style redbaiting, today we are told that there is no money to alleviate poverty, even though Amazon's Jeff Bezos has enough scratch to do it all by himself.

The relentless barrage of propaganda unleashed against those at the margins can't cover up the fact that, as poverty continues to grow, the "blame the poor" crowd may be losing at least a chunk of its audience. For instance, in 2005 Colorado voters agreed to give up \$3 billion in taxpayer refunds to stave off cuts in education and healthcare for the

poor. In 2016, Los Angeles several hundred thousand strong voted by a margin of 76 percent to take money out of their own pockets to pay for housing for the homeless. The shift in the prevailing winds is because so many more people now see poverty in their own lives or in the lives of those they know. Eubanks cites sociologist Mark Rank's research, which revealed that 51 percent of Americans will spend at least a year below the poverty line at some point during their lives. Even more striking is an Associated Press study of 2010 census data that revealed that an astonishing eighty percent of Americans now live in poverty or near-poverty.

Welfare, actually the entire safety net, is being eliminated because even though the American people need it badly, the American power elite no longer does. Until fairly recently, the capitalist economy needed most of us to work. Yet that same economy was often a roller coaster, idling millions of people only to bring them back. Those cyclically thrown out had to be kept not just alive but reasonably healthy so that they would be available when needed again. For decades millions of us were given welfare, food stamps, healthcare, etc. to keep us going. Today we are seeing the permanent elimination of labor (next up: the automation of three million trucking jobs). If we are laid off or downsized today, we're not ever going back. They don't need us. They see no need to keep us healthy or even alive.

Tens of millions of people permanently out of work are potentially a threat to the system. They must be kept track of, they must be controlled, they must be kept on the defensive. The welfare state is being replaced by the surveillance state.

Yet the abundant food, clothing, and shelter created by modern technology can easily take care of everyone's needs. How can we make that happen? Virginia Eubanks says that a universal basic income, in which every resident of the U.S. would get a sum of money each year no questions asked, "might be a great first step in dismantling the digital

poorhouse.” Yet as Eubanks herself points out, a UBI could also be used as a way to completely eliminate systems of social welfare.

Whatever the possible flaws may be in a UBI, its inherent value is that it challenges us to envision a world where goods are distributed not because that makes someone else rich, not because we can pay for them, but simply because we are human.

When welfare mom Dorothy Allen warns us to pay attention to what happens to the poor because “You’re next,” she’s right. The National Security Agency already monitors everyone’s phone calls and emails. They just haven’t yet put whatever plans they are cooking up into action against the majority. But they will. Unless we make sure they can’t. **CP**

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## Dreaming in the Cinema

BY ED LEER

On Sundays, Mom would take us to the Christian Science Church in the college town of Broad Ripple, Indiana. Kind, soft-spoken men and women populated the congregation. I usually stuck to the Sunday School downstairs. When I did sit in on the adult sermon, I often found myself daydreaming or dozing off, the pew cushion slipping out from under me. I would chastise myself for my inattentiveness and finally voiced these feeling of guilt to my mother. Mom shrugged and said she used to fall asleep in church when she was young. She then told me what her mother told her; that the sermon is whatever you need in that moment, be it sleep or just some time alone with your thoughts. The sheer empathy of this statement was enough to lodge itself rather firmly in my memory.

Right around the time I was drifting off in church (1997), Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami recorded an interview wherein he describes the type of films he prefers:

I absolutely don’t like the films in which the filmmakers take their viewers hostage and provoke them. I prefer the films that put their audience to sleep in the theater. I think those films are kind enough to allow you a nice nap...Some films have made me doze off in the theater, but the same films have made me stay up at night, wake up thinking about them in the morning, and keep on thinking about them for weeks.

Prior to hearing this, I harbored guilt about falling asleep, or simply not paying attention, during films that was similar to what I felt about not listening to the sermons in church. There was nobody castigating me for it, but by then cinema had become something of a religion for me and I considered vigilance during screenings among my highest virtues. When I failed to take it all in, failed to take in every exchange, I would berate myself for not being attentive. To hear the great Kiarostami endorse cinema naps, I began to rethink what it means to be an active viewer.

In his book *Transcendental Style*, Paul Schrader lays out what he sees as the common withholding techniques used by Ozu, Bresson, and, to a lesser extent, Dryer. He posits that when these filmmakers “withhold” certain elements, such as music, camera motion, or traditional editing, the films pull away from the audience, whereas more commercial films “take the viewer hostage”. If done effectively, when these films lean back, the audience will lean forward, becoming active, rather than passive viewers.

The question is, does sleeping and daydreaming qualify as active viewership for Schrader? What if they can’t lean forward, because they’re slumped over? I recall dozing off during a screening of Bèla Tarr’s seven-hour epic *Sátántangó* and while I wasn’t watching

the film, it certainly had an impact on my subconscious. To this day, it’s hard to separate my dreams from the film and even though I slept through parts, I consider it a great film, perhaps for that very reason.

Unfortunately, the average theatergoer still harbors negative feelings about falling asleep in a film. Many consider it a failure on the part of the film, branding it as boring and uninteresting. For the same reason I felt guilt, they feel animosity, writing off the slow pace as art-house pretention. This is not to decry commercial films that hold the public’s attention or the public that enjoys them, but merely to dispense with the notion that slow-paced cinema is somehow tied with intellectual elitism.

Fortunately, this seems to be occurring on its own. Just look at the Slow TV phenomenon in Norway, wherein the majority of that nation tuned in to watch a seven-hour train ride and subsequently, a 134-hour boat voyage. In the U.S., there is a high online viewership of the *Napflix* viewing platform, which features everything from ASMR-themed videos to watching an hourglass run its course. It’s a far cry from Bresson, but even a new edition of *Transcendental Style* was recently put out, featuring an updated introduction by Schrader, wherein he elaborates on the notion of Slow Cinema and, I’m happy to say, features Kiarostami.

All this is to say: there are as many ways to view as there are viewers. There is no sacred or “right” way to watch. It’s okay to not understand or catch everything on the screen. If we are able to break down these rigid laws about what cinema needs to give us and what we need to give it, perhaps our viewing methods will be allowed to grow. After that, who knows what we could dream up. **CP**

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