

# CounterPunch



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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL BY LAURA CARLSEN

ABBIE HOFFMAN, ENVIRONMENTALIST BY JONAH RASKIN

WHY THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT FAILED BY CRAIG COLLINS



# CounterPunch

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"The Baby Invasion" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Brilliance and Tears

I met one of the friends of the CWP activists murdered in Paris in the winter of 1981-82. He was a Marxist-Leninist demographer. We were some ten to fifteen expats who met at a large protest opposing US invasion of Nicaragua, late that fall. After three meetings we named ourselves, "Americans in Paris opposed to US Foreign Policy". (Shades of Gene Kelly!) An interesting and eclectic sample of leftist radicals from the states. Grad students, I was living in an Anarchist squat of an abandoned Air Force complex/base, in Ris Orangis. 28 K south of the Gare du Nord. A banlieue next to the Seine.

When the Black Panther plane hijacker (along with his several companions) revealed his history at the third meeting, that was a trip. When the West German ultra-lefties came to our fourth meeting and stentoriously lectured us on our responsibility for overthrowing Imperialism. That was another interesting encounter. I thought but did not say, But You're GERMANS? My last meeting, because my Laker Airways return ticket was expiring and I was 'down and out in Paris' after nine months of my sojourn. I remember the news well about the Greensboro Massacre.

*Miles Mendenhall*

## Roaming Victory

Hi Jeff

Enjoyed your writing as always this weekend. Thanks especially for the amazing Sly and the Family Stone version of "Que Sera Sera". Somehow, I had never heard that before. It

stopped me dead. I immediately played it for my (Jamaican) girlfriend who is from a gospel singing background many moons ago. She proceeded to play it 6 times, grabbing everyone around to hear it, marveling all the while at the musical genius that constantly asserts itself thru the black experience of oppression. And It is an awesome phenomenon.

*Cheers, Terry Swinton  
Toronto*

## Nukes Over the Masses

The GAO reports that the US will spend nearly \$500 billion in the next decade modernizing its nuclear arsenal. This reminds me of the line from Orwell about destroying the social surplus on useless weaponry so the peony doesn't go to the masses, with the unfortunate consequence of raising their morale and giving them hope of overthrowing their rulers. The ruling class has always preferenced corporate welfare, military Keynesianism and pentagon capitalism over welfare spending for the poor, more or less for that reason.

*Ben Debney*

## Kings and Banksters

When men were ruled by kings, the kings and their church connived to convince the masses that God had chosen their king and that if the king were bad it was the fault of the people and their wicked ways. Today the banksters have replaced the king and have so cowed our political leaders into believing the end of civilization would be hastened by giving the people what they want if it diminished bankster power that they ef-

fectively rule the world. Deficit spending has come to replace fornication as the deadliest of sins, to be avoided at all costs. I note that my friends and relatives are also given to this false belief, including those who call themselves liberals. I implore everyone to familiarize themselves with modern monetary theory and the ancillary ideas of public banking and sovereign currency. It was ignorance that gave the kings power and it is ignorance that is giving the banksters power. Please educate yourselves. To be clear—universal health care is indeed practical (affordable) and it is a disservice to the public to argue otherwise.

*Rich Domingue*

## Babysitter Wanted

If the babysitters could just come up with some work for Trump to do in Executive Time, something to do to keep him busy. Can't he have a yard sale or try driving part-time for Uber? Maybe he could do some home repairs?

*Sean Mark Miller*

## Is This What They Want

So, confirm something for me, CounterPunch. Democrats want Trump to be re-elected, right? Because otherwise nothing that they do makes any sense.

*Miguel Cruz-Diaz*

## What Conservatives Forget

Conservatives today all conveniently forget the words of their hero, Friedrich Hayek, in *The Road to Serfdom*: "Where, as in the case of sickness and accident, neither the desire to avoid such calamities nor

the efforts to overcome their consequences are as a rule weakened by the provision of assistance—where, in short, we deal with genuinely insurable risks—the case for the state's helping to organize a comprehensive system of social insurance is very strong."

*Jonathan Marshall*

## Were the Nativists Right?

I think that the nativists were mostly right when they blamed American socialism and Communism on immigrants. Americans from the old American families tended to have pretty shitty politics.

*John Emerson*

## Between Pence's Ears

Many people over-think Pence. He wouldn't have been re-elected in my home state and stepped into so many avoidable debacles that some threat of a hyper-efficient Pence Administration seems a mirage. The guy was a radio host, a windbag Congressman, a mediocre Governor, and a VP with nothing between his ears but perfectly fresh air!

*Brett Warnke*

## Time's Up

As a student I was once invited to a private chat with Samantha Power at UCLA. When I asked if R2P applies to Gaza she suddenly had no more time for questions.

*Alci Rengifo*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# Walk and Don't Look Back

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

**N**elson Espinal grew up in a leaky and crowded shack on the violent outskirts of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Espinal turned 28 last summer, but still lived at home with his parents, four sisters and 7-year old son, Yojan.

Like many other young men in his decaying neighborhood, Nelson had struggled for years to find steady work, making him especially vulnerable to recruitment into one of the slum's brutal "maras," the youth gangs that patrol the streets of Tegucigalpa and control much of the drug trade across Honduras. Few men of Espinal's age and state of economic deprivation have the fortitude to resist the lure of gang-life. One study of Espinal's "José Ángel Ulloa" neighborhood estimates that as many as 20 percent of the men his age joined the Barrio-18 gang. But that wasn't the future Nelson wanted for himself or his young son.

Espinal repeatedly rejected the increasingly ominous invitations to join the ranks of the gang, well aware the consequences of saying no could prove lethal, not just for him, but his family as well. Espinal's sister, Patricia, told the *Guardian* that Nelson's rejection of Barrio-18 made him a target. "When they get their eye on someone, they search them out again and again," Patricia recalled.

So with no prospects for work and fearing retaliation from the gang, Nelson decided to join a group of other desperate Hondurans he'd heard about who were gathering in the northern Honduran town of San Pedro Sula in preparation for traveling 3000 arduous miles to the US border. Espinal slipped out of Tegucigalpa with two friends. The

young men believed, with good reason, that if they were ever going to break out of their wretched conditions, the safest way to escape was in a large group. This assemblage of destitute women, children and young men searching for a better life became the notorious "Migrant Caravan" that Donald Trump used to villainize immigrants in a cynical ploy to sway the 2018 congressional elections.

Espinal told his family that when he arrived at the border was going to ask for asylum. He hoped to get a job in the US, send money back to his family and eventually become reunited with his son. Nelson didn't know the odds of his winning an asylum claim or even making it to the border. But he knew there was no future for him in Honduras. It was time to walk and not look back.

Nelson Espinal had every legal right to request asylum at the US border. Under normal circumstances, he would have had a good case to make to an immigration judge. But to grant figures like Nelson asylum would require the US government to assume a measure of moral responsibility for conniving in the political repression that has led to Honduras' current state of violence and destitution.

American interventions in Honduras date back more than a century to the 1911 coup, largely engineered by the American mercenary, General Lee Christmas, which toppled the government of Miguel Dávila, and opened Honduras to predation by American corporations, most notably the United Fruit Company and Dole Food. In a matter of a few years, these two corporations came to acquire more than a

million acres of land and a labor force of indigenous workers paid slave wages. Any troublesome eruption of discontent was vigorously suppressed by death squads armed with weapons provided by the US military.

The immediate crisis in Honduras can be traced to the 2009 coup, when the mildly leftist President, Manuel Zelaya, was seized from his bedroom in an after midnight raid by soldiers, shackled and put on a plane to Costa Rica, while still in his pajamas. The plot was orchestrated by General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, who did his post-grad working in coup planning at the School of the Americas. And darkness soon descended on Honduras again, as political killings, murders and gang violence soared and desperate families began to flee the killing fields.

It would be two months before his family would hear from Nelson again, when he called home from inside a detention prison in the US. Espinal had been arrested shortly after he crossed the border in Arizona. "Tell Mom not to worry, I'm applying for asylum," he told his sister. "We must pray to God that they give it to me. I told them I can't go back to Honduras because if I go back, they're going to kill me."

What Nelson didn't know was that Trump administration had already foreclosed any possibility of him being granted asylum under a cruel order crafted in June 2018 by Jeff Sessions and Trump's homunculus Stephen Miller that instructed immigration judges to deny asylum claims from migrants who allege they are victims of domestic abuse and gang violence.

Nelson didn't linger for long in one of ICE's suffocating desert detention camps. He was booted back to Honduras. Two weeks after he arrived home, he was dead, shot down in the street by members of the gang he refused to join. The fifteen bullets that killed Nelson Espinal may have fired by another wretched kid in the Barrio-18 gang, but the policy that aimed the gun was written by a remorseless political syndicate in Washington. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Lost in America's Virtual Reality

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**O**n January 11, the *New York Times* published a story revealing that in 2017 the FBI had opened a counterintelligence investigation into Donald Trump after he fired the agency's director, James Comey, over the "Russiagate" imbroglio. The probe sought to discover if Trump was actively working for Russian interests in this and other areas.

Needless to say, the story was seized upon by the "Resistance" as yet another addition to the ever-expanding arsenal of "smoking guns" that would surely, finally bring Trump down. (The coffin of Trump's presidency has had so many of these "final nails" hammered into it that you could probably build a battleship with the steel.) These were countered by voices on the more skeptical left who saw the story as just one more blast of noise in the cacophony of charges, spin, distraction, paranoia and opportunism that has characterized so much of the Russiagate narrative.

But although I would generally put myself in the latter camp, I have to admit that *The Times* story was one of the most disturbing things I've read in a long time. It exposed a deep, poisonous and perhaps incurable rot at the very core of our political system, our institutions and our society. This is made searingly clear by direct quotes which *The Times* unearthed from hitherto secret testimony: words that seem to close off all hope for the future, leaving us in a labyrinth of despair. The shattering passage deserves to be quoted in full:

"In the Russian Federation and in President Putin himself, you have an individual whose aim is to disrupt the Western alliance and whose aim is to make Western democracy more frac-

tious in order to weaken our ability, America's ability and the West's ability to spread our democratic ideals," Lisa Page, a former bureau lawyer, told House investigators in private testimony reviewed by *The Times*. "That's the goal, to make us less of a moral authority to spread democratic values," she added.

Are you shattered? You should be. Remember, this was secret testimony, offered to a House probe of the Russiagate investigation as a whole. It was not a public hearing where, as is the usual practice, legislators and testifiers preen in a ritual display of virtue-signalling, disgorging boilerplate about *The Nation's* inherent goody-goodness and special specialness. No, these were observations given in private, with every expectation that they would remain private. (Page had been a minor player in Russiagate, one of two FBI officials who'd been forced out of the agency for the heinous crime of exchanging emails critical of Trump.)

But put aside all the gate-ness for a moment, the various politics and partisanship and poltroonery involved in this specific story, and focus instead on the mindset revealed by Page's private words. (We will do her the honor of taking them as her genuine, heartfelt opinion.) Try to imagine being an adult American holding such beliefs. Much less an educated person working in the circles of power, conversant with current events and having, presumably, a working knowledge of the last half-century of American history. Or hell, try to imagine being an adult American who has lived through just the 21st century alone, and still believing that America is a moral authority seeking to spread

democratic values throughout the world.

Imagine having even the most cursory knowledge, obtained solely from thoroughly respectable mainstream media sources, about, say, the invasion of Iraq; American complicity in the overthrow of democracy in Honduras and Egypt; the murderous American involvement in Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia and Saudi Arabia's invasion of Yemen; the child-terrorizing drone campaigns against rural populations in Pakistan; the unwavering support for Israel's brutal, repressive occupation of Gaza; the unending gusher of American weapons, crowd control equipment and surveillance technology sold to brutal regimes all over ... the list goes on and on, of course, but let that serve as a sampler.

Now imagine knowing even part of this partial list from a small part of recent American history, and still believing that the United States possesses some kind of "moral authority," and that its inherent altruism is in mortal danger from a foreign troll who, Iago-like, is hellbent on malignantly undermining the otherwise perfect comity of our democracy for his own cynical, power-seeking purposes. (Which are so unlike our own benign motives).

This is "jejunosity" on a cosmic—and sinister—scale. The fact that millions of Americans believe this arrant fantasy about the reality of US policy and practice—even in the face of direct evidence from their own most trusted news sources—is just as frightening as the millions who unthinkingly believe Trump's vicious, berserk mendacity.

What we are left with is a polity given over almost wholly to self-delusion, living in a virtual reality landscape that bears almost no resemblance to the world outside. They cannot see what their nation actually is, what it's actually become, what it's actually doing and where it's actually going. They remained locked in hallucination, receding ever further from the real. How then can we hope to move forward to some better, more sustainable—or at least survivable—way of being? **CP**



## BOTTOMLINES

# Same Old Class Warfare

BY PETE DOLACK

**C**lass warfare, as practiced by industrialists and financiers, never goes out of style. One of the more preposterous ideological constructs is the idea of “trickle down.” Give tax cuts to the wealthy and to corporations and they will invest their windfall, providing jobs for working people—the wealth will trickle down.

In reality, of course, this promise ranks on the realism scale somewhat below the idea that we can eat nothing but chocolate cake for every meal for a year and by doing so would enjoy the best of health. The phantasmagoria of “trickle down” has been preached for nearly 40 years now and still hasn’t worked as advertised. Still waiting for money to trickle your way, aren’t you?

Actually, “trickle down” does work—for industrialists and financiers. And so it has yet again, this time in the form of Donald Trump’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Massive tax cuts for the wealthy and for corporations were the actual aim of the act, which could not have passed without the support of congressional Republicans, who were acting on direct orders. The orders not of Trump, but of billionaires who gathered at a Koch Brothers’ “donor retreat” in June 2017, at which Republican leaders were told bluntly to cut their taxes or their piggy-banks would be shut. Republicans did as they were told.

We live in the era of public relations, yet similar to the tactics of denying smoking causes cancer being applied to global-warming denial, little effort was made to invent new excuses for accelerating the upward flow of money. Instead we got the same old nonsense—corporate executives would shower their employees with pay raises. About as likely as instructing a wolf that hasn’t eaten in a

week to not eat the chicken and expecting it to listen. Then again, in a country that elects the likes of Ronald Reagan and Trump, our billionaire overlords likely don’t feel the need to ask economists to dream up something new, given the ongoing gullibility of so many.

So how did it work? No need to hold your breath. Seven weeks into 2018, it had already worked according to the actual plan. “Tax cut scoreboard: Workers \$6 billion; Shareholders \$171 billion,” was the headline on an article published on the CNN web site. By mid-February a year ago, Corporate America had already announced \$171 billion in stock buybacks, more than double the pace of the year before that. Meanwhile, \$5.6 billion in wage boosts and bonuses had been announced.

We didn’t fare better during the rest of 2018. For the year, a record \$1.1 trillion in stock buybacks were announced. A stock buyback is when a company buys its stock from shareholders at a premium to the trading price, which gives an immediate bonus to the seller and reduces the number of shares that divvy up the profits; news of this sort sends financiers into paroxysms of ecstasy.

But that did not end the largesse for speculators. Dividends—cash payment made quarterly to stockholders—totaled \$420 billion for the first 11 months of 2018. Yep, another record.

As to wages, the Economic Policy Institute reported in December 2018 that bonuses had increased by an average of two cents per hour, and even that minuscule increase couldn’t necessarily be attributed to the Trump tax cuts. Further, the EPI reported that direct wages had actually declined seven cents per hour. Or to put this trend another way, real wages (wages adjusted for inflation)

in the fourth quarter of 2018 were 1.3 percent less than a year earlier and nine percent lower than in 2006.

Happy days are not here again.

One more measure fills out this picture. An incredible \$2.6 trillion was spent on corporate lobbying in 2018, and although that figure is only a small amount percentage-wise above recent years, it still represents record spending. OpenSecrets reports 17 companies or trade associations each spent more than \$10 billion on lobbying. The US Chamber of Commerce, a vicious group that will settle for nothing less than outright fascism, heads the list at \$69 billion.

Even in the rare cases where a corporation gave out bonuses, they amount to tokens. One example is American Airlines, as reported by MarketWatch, hardly an opponent of US capitalism. American Airlines said it paid out \$1,000 in bonuses per worker, which amounts to \$126 million. But it made \$2 billion in profits for 2017—before the corporate tax cuts kicked in—and has bought back \$11 billion of its stock since 2014. Gate agents make as little as \$10.67 an hour, which MarketWatch reports is less than what they made in the 1970s, adjusted for inflation.

All this is before we note that housing costs are skyrocketing, rising much faster than inflation and certainly much faster than your wages. Or that layoffs continue as jobs are moved overseas, even by companies like General Motors that wouldn’t still be in business were it not for government subsidies.

Class warfare, alas, remains grossly one-sided. “Trickle down” schemes are part of that war. Will we start to defend ourselves? **CP**





## BETWEEN THE LINES

# Magnet Schools

BY RUTH FOWLER

**S**ome of the loudest supporters of the recent LAUSD public school strike were families earning in excess of 100k a year—families who, for the most part, live in areas such as Beverly Hills, Venice, Santa Monica and Larchmont. These predominantly affluent areas have property taxes which have funded local elementary schools into institutions which rival the very best private schools. A ten year old *Forbes* article examining the habits of the mega-rich regarding education funded Connecticut Firm Prince & Associates stated that: “Nearly two-thirds of the 296 affluent parents who responded to Prince’s survey send their kids to public school, and Prince says many of those families moved into top public school districts to do so. The survey is nationwide, but respondents tend to be clustered on the coasts and in major urban centers, where taxpayer-financed public schools in wealthy communities can compete with the top private schools.”

The consistently ignored elephant in the room is that those who support public schools, and particularly those who choose public school over private school when they are in an economic position to pay the 20-50k a year exclusive schools demand as fees, are people who are rarely in a position to suffer from the very worst of the issues clobbering public schools in less affluent areas. Of course, we do have a system specifically designed to overcome these issues—the Magnet school system. LA’s magnet program was created in the 70’s as part of a court ordered desegregation program that offers specialized themed education and transportation across the county. Cara Mis DiMassa of *The LA Times* said that the schools “designed to be among the best campuses in the

district, mostly are as competitive for applicants as any popular private school.” 54,000 students applied for approximately 35,000 places in Magnet schools for the 2018/19 school year—last year around 1 in 3 students were accepted. Applicants are chosen using a point system—meaning those applicants living in “catchment areas” which have overcrowded, underperforming schools as their locally assigned schools get more ‘points’ and move into a higher position in the lottery. Points are accumulated each year with each rejection.

In addition the magnet schools are ostensibly intended to have racial quotas, based upon the belief that students perform better in desegregated schools. Each school is intended to have 30-40% non-Hispanic white students, 60-70% minority students—roughly echoing the diversity of Los Angeles’ student body.

In LAUSD white kids make up 10.5% of the student body. Latino kids make up nearly three quarters of it—73.4%, with African-American children at 8.2% and Asian kids at 4.2. However, as LAIST pointed out in an article from 2018, “California’s most racially-isolated schools are found in LAUSD”.

The reasons for this are numerous. According to a University of Southern California study from 2017 by the Russell Sage Foundation, white parents want to live in white communities served by white schools. This leads to those families—who are more likely to be in higher wage earning brackets—moving into better school districts. These same families are also more likely to be moving into poorer neighborhoods like West Adams, rapidly gentrifying those areas and increasing house prices while still accumulating more points because the point are attached to their local

school not their socio-economics.

The demographics Magnet schools are aimed at: low income and culturally diverse families from less affluent, less white areas—often don’t even know these programs exist and if they do exist, have no idea that they exist to serve them.

The online site provided by LAUSD to apparently alleviate the confusion from previous years is still, well, confusing and it’s unclear that Magnets have transportation connected to them—why would a low income mother struggling to pay the rent and find money for bus fares deliberately choose to send her child to a school more than a couple of blocks away? LAUSD acknowledges this problem but has yet to specifically address it, although a volunteer advocacy group labeled ‘Parent Revolution’ works with Choice4LA to educate and encourage marginalized communities to apply to the Magnet school system.

On the surface, Magnet schools reflect the diversity of the Los Angeles community with 90% of the overall student body consisting of racial and ethnic minorities. But if you look at the top ten Magnet schools in LAUSD it tells a very different story. These are the schools which have become the free private schools for the rich elite. At an elementary level these are Community school in Bel Air, Open in Westchester, Melrose Elementary, 132nd St / USC—and they are dominated by white and asian students.

In Community Charter school, 40% of the students are white, 30% asian, 15% latino and the rest ‘other’ which does not reflect the diversity of LAUSD at all, but rather points towards a skewed bias when it comes to admitting white and asian students. What this means is that, basically, LAUSD is just as bad as the rest of America for creating systems that create and promote inequality—as if we didn’t already know that. **CP**

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## BORDERZONE NOTES

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# The Wall from the Other Side

BY LAURA CARLSEN

I have trouble responding to the Trump Wall Hoax. First, because it's almost incomprehensible that we're even talking about a "border crisis" that has no relationship to reality (there is no "surge" or "invasion", no increase in crime, no correlation between violence and migrants, no terrorists over the southern border, no threat to national security). Fact-checking these speeches has become a macabre shadow dance, actions that respond to illusions until the real and the projected become indistinguishable to viewers. And that's precisely the distortion of perspective that the Trump administration is counting on.

Second, as a dual citizen (US-Mexico) with close personal and professional ties to both countries, it makes me heart-sick and sometimes despairing. I never imagined that the people who so generously adopted me and became my family would be cast as the enemies of the family I grew up in. The wall is the negation of my life history and of thousands of others'.

Donald Trump brought essential government functions to a grinding halt to take a stand for hatred and racism. Instead of seeking to eliminate the causes of forced migration by responding to the political and humanitarian crisis in Central America—caused in large part by US policies—he cynically uses the desperation of thousands of men, women and children for political purposes.

In the US, this has forced not just a

shutdown, but a showdown over who we are as a people, a duel between fear and compassion, that even though Trump clearly loses on the popular front—just as he did the election—he could still win in terms of advancing his white supremacist agenda. To the point where a significant part of US society no longer recognizes people of color, especially from other countries, as fellow human beings. To the point where this part of society no longer defends basic democratic institutions and law. To the point where fascism finds a home and settles in.

To avoid that scenario, which is the endgame of the Stephen Millers who surround the president, requires a much more vigorous opposition than what we've seen so far. The Democrats sacrificed reason years ago when they bet on a phony trade-off between immigration reform and "border security". As a result of that terrible calculation, "border security" became a bipartisan effort that siphoned off billions of dollars in public funds, as schools agonized and immigration reform was left in the dust of desert wall-building. Even worse than the waste, the useless trade-off contributed to the image of everything south of the border as a threat or a contaminant.

Today, the Democratic leadership rejects the wall, but still falls all over itself to state its commitment to "protecting the border". Drones and barriers and armed guards seek to stop refugees from slipping through the outback,

even as illegal drugs, arms and money routinely pass right under the noses of corrupt US government agents at the legal NAFTA points of entry.

The kind of vigorous opposition we need will have to come from the grass-roots. To build it requires a clear analysis, a strong commitment and essential empathy, with a focus on ending forced migration, protecting people in danger—especially children—, and reuniting families in safe and loving environments. Rather than armed national security that protects only the interests of a privileged elite, it's an attainable vision of human security for all, and in particular for the most vulnerable.

To building a human security response to migrants and refugees, several points are critical to convey and act on:

Migrants and refugees are people seeking to survive and raise their families in a secure environment. On primetime TV and in social networks, there's a battle of images between two sides that are so far apart they never really engage. One side, Trump's side, describes immigrants as criminals, scam artists and, at best, victims of their own device. In his Jan. 8 speech, he claimed "thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our country" who have caused "innocent people to be horribly victimized". Since the midterm campaigns, he has ratcheted up the campaign rhetoric and converted into a wall power play that left 800,000 workers without a paycheck, froze vital functions of US society and demonizes the victims. It also ignores the fact that immigrants commit fewer violent crimes than native born citizens and denies the urgency and the agency of migrant families, many of whom are fleeing imminent death threats from gangs, husbands or state security forces.

The decision to leave is based on untenable conditions in home countries. There is currently a full-blown, internationally recognized political crisis in three of the Central American nations—Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. This imperative fact rarely enters into

the debate in the United States. As the Trump administration blames the exodus on Democrats and migrants who seek to “game the system”, the political crises in these three nations have taken hundreds of lives, in addition to gang violence. Testimonies from migrants in the mainstream media are usually presented as individual tales of woe rather than part of a political analysis that explains why they’re fleeing. There’s a reason for this: putting the pieces together not only reveals the justification for the exodus, but also the responsibility of repressive governments and US support for the status quo.

Around 80% of the people on the caravans are Hondurans. They’ve been fleeing Honduras at a rate of 300 a day at least since the fraudulent elections of November 2017, when Juan Orlando Hernandez was illegally granted a second term as president with the support of the US embassy. The Organization of American States refused to recognize the legitimacy of the elections, while members of the Embassy literally stood beside the Electoral Tribunal as it handed power to JOH, as he is known by his initials. The JOH government, which has assassinated more than 30 protestors in the aftermath of the elections, is a direct successor to the conservative, hyper-capitalist governments established following the 2009 military coup. Faced with international censure, the coup regime retained power after kidnapping the elected president thanks to the machinations of the Obama administration.

As another caravan makes its way north, a solution in Honduras must include a return to rule of law. Sixty-seven members of the US Congress have signed the “Berta Caceres Act” named after the indigenous environmental leader assassinated by army officers and representatives of the dam-building company she opposed the Berta Caceres, calling “to suspend all security assistance to Honduran military and police until such time as human rights violations by Honduran

state security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice.” Since the 2017 elections, it is critical to keeping the pressure on the Honduran government.

In Guatemala, a simmering crisis exploded on January 7 when Pres. Jimmy Morales announced he was ending the mandate of the Commission Against Impunity (CICIG). The commission has uncovered corruption scandals that involve individuals close to the president. When the Constitutional Court ruled that Morales could not terminate the CICIG, the president launched an attack on the court, in an all-out power grab just months before the June elections. A letter from US human rights organizations calling on the State Department to support the CICIG states, “In the face of the Guatemalan government’s blatant defense of corruption, which fuels migration and constitutes a direct attack against a US-funded anti-corruption body, it is crucial that the United States take a strong stand for human rights, rule of law, and an end to corruption and impunity in Guatemala.”

But Trump has not mentioned corruption and the move toward authoritarianism in Guatemala or the history of corruption being uncovered in El Salvador—including the historic sentencing of rightwing ARENA ex-president Tony Saca—as root causes of the migration mainly because most of those cases involve US allies.

Although relatively few Nicaraguans have joined the caravans so far, refugees to the US and Costa Rica have increased since the political crisis of the Ortega government began April 18, 2018. Most flee to Costa Rica—the United Nations reported 23,000 asylum requests in the first three months of the crisis—but more are heading north. National and international human rights groups report some 325 killed in clashes, the vast majority by government security forces. A Nicaraguan trans woman migrant in the first caravan told me that under the Ortega government (whose slogan is “Christian, Socialist, Solidarity”), “for

people of my gender, it’s a crime to be who we are and every day we struggle against assassinations, homophobia... And now in Nicaragua, it’s like a war. Adolescents of 14, 15, 16 years old are being killed in the streets.”

## **The right to asylum**

Asylum is a right and an obligation of states under international law and no wall can stop people from fleeing danger or deny their rights. Instead of \$5.7 billion or one single dollar more for a wall, we should:

1. Increase asylum processing and broaden, not narrow, the criteria.  
The US has ample capacity to accept refugees and has done so for years. People flee due to political persecution, domestic and gender violence, gang violence, racial and ethnic persecution, and state violence in multiple forms and that must be recognized. The cost of additional asylum officers is a fraction of the cost of soldiers at the border or building a wall.
2. Prioritize family reunification.  
Recognize the rights of children, basic humanitarian precepts and a common-sense investment in our shared future.
3. Stop generating forced migration.  
US programs to finance Central American development through neo-liberal reforms and private investment incentives repeat failed models of “development” that support transnational corporations at the cost of indigenous and peasant communities, which are attacked and violently displaced. They exacerbate the structures of inequality and patriarchal violence that fuel migration.

The US’s toxic foreign policy, including colonial exploitation that lasted long after independence, serial military interventions, the creation of death squads and dictatorships, corruption, incarceration and deportation, and drug wars and continues today. In the interests of profit and geopolitical control, US

policies have been creating private hells for Central Americans for decades. The caravans just made them public.

The bright spot on the horizon is that that thousands of US citizens abhor the Trump policies and have donated time and resources to help refugees. From the good citizens of El Paso who

went to the aid of asylum seekers after ICE dumped them at a bus station on Christmas night, to the San Diegoans who lend a hand in Tijuana shelters, another United States shows its sense of shared humanity to the world, defying walls and the cruel mentality that builds them. **CP**

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## EUROZONE NOTES

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# The Politics of Venality and Violence in Europe

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

**I**n his 1995 essay “Ur-Fascism” Umberto Eco describes fourteen characteristics of the phenomenon but his crucial point is that only one trait needs to be present for “fascism to coagulate around it”. To sum up, the Ur-fascist makes a cult of tradition, rejects rational modernism, loves mindless action-for-action’s-sake, calls disagreement “treason”, fearmongers about difference, panders to a frustrated middle class, is hypersensitive to plots and enemies, is ambivalent towards elites, intones the dogma of “permanent warfare”, despises the weak, nurtures the “great leader” hero cult (but “sends other people to death”), flaunts machismo, engages in “selective populism” in which he interprets the voice of the People and, as required by all the above, jabbers in the numbing dumbing-down language of Newspeak. “Ur-Fascism,” Eco warns, “can come back under the most innocent of disguises.”

A year earlier, Hunter S. Thompson had written his anti-encomium for Nixon: “You don’t even have to know who Richard Nixon was to be a victim of his ugly, Nazi spirit. He has poisoned our water forever.” At the time, well at

home in this cesspool, a sleazy forty-nine-year-old was declaring a \$916 million loss on his income tax returns. Twenty-four years later, a fully-fledged version of—not just one but all—Eco’s traits, he is occupying the White House. Hunter S. Thompson wasn’t “irreverent”, as the language police accused. He was prophetic. And Eco not only presciently portrayed President Trump. He understood the longevity and sludge-congealing power of fascism. Many Benito-come-latelies fit his identikit. Whether self-declaredly fascist or not, Europe’s neo-Nazi, xenophobic, nativist, racist, anti-immigrant, white supremacist, identitarian, Islamophobic, misogynistic, homo- and transphobic, ultra-populist... political parties are on the rise.

Fascism isn’t new in Europe. Il Duce first used the term in 1915 and, even when dormant, it’s always had its supporters. What is new is that, in recent years, parties touting the same old myths, beliefs, and doctrines, duly revamped, of course, are gaining widespread support in elections around Europe, to such an extent that analysts are drawing comparisons with the 1920s

and 1930s. Elections are allowing ultrarightists to become respectable “conservatives” and the more power they gain, the more hirelings in the media, academia, and business schools will keep polishing that image.

Most European states have one or more far-right parties. In tidy Switzerland, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the country’s largest political force after the 2015 elections, is now very democratically using referendums to spread its message. One, in 2016, asked citizens if foreigners should be expelled on grounds of minor offences but the real aim was to change the constitution into a two-tier justice system that would permit automatic expulsion. A grassroots opposition group called Operation Libero seized on this and challenged the SVP on grounds of rule of law, and other opponents released ads showing 2016 Switzerland next to 1933 Nazi Germany. That was the crux of the matter: the specter of Hindenburg’s arbitrary wielding of Article 48 (on public security and order) of the Weimar Constitution and the subsequent collapse of the Republic. This time, rule of law won the day.

The babble of far-right politics tends to drown out what they’re really orchestrating so, elsewhere, the lesson was lost. By November 2018, Donald J. Trump, had signed 86 Executive Orders and ordered missile strikes against Syrian government installations without authorization from Congress or the UN. His Justice Department claimed that he was acting within his broad constitutional powers. The “broadness” of the powers delivered into the hands of a deranged president remain intact because a supine Congress has abdicated its constitutional responsibilities, including that of impeachment. Who needs an Enabling Act?

Far-right parties are gaining ground in Europe and, behind all the bluster, there is vicious general anti-democratic intent. The Danish People’s Party (DPP) won 21% of votes in 2015 and it wasn’t long before the Social Democrat leader

Mette Frederiksen publicly acknowledged moving closer to the DPP in anti-immigrant, anti-Schengen policies. The Swedish Democrats party (17.6% of votes last September) holds the balance of power in parliament and—after substantial rebranding—is pushing for fast-track deportation and a crackdown on “criminal immigrants”, goals that will require a legal makeover. The Finns Party, after a split which saved the right-wing coalition in 2017, is cozying up with other hard-right groups whose overseas contacts include white supremacist Jared Taylor and Marcus Follin, the Swedish “golden one”. However loopy these groups look, they’re getting plenty of air-brushing media attention and are being slid into the mainstream where debate seems more concerned with whether they should have a platform than what the platform actually is.

In the 2017 German elections, Alternative for Germany (AfD) obtained 13.5% of the votes. Unofficially but closely linked with AfD, the pan-European Generation Identity, the “new right” working in publishing, civil society and business (but also militaristic), is extremism with “a friendly face”. In Greece, battered by the EU’s austericidal impositions, the openly fascist Golden Dawn is the third-largest political party in parliament; in France, the National Front made the second round in the 2017 presidential elections with Marine Le Pen as its candidate; and, in Italy, the xenophobe Matteo Salvini (cheerleader for crimes against—immigrant—humanity) is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. In football stadiums, hatred of the Other (team) is played out with accessories like swastikas, Celtic crosses, the Wehrmacht eagle, and the Nazi salute. “Jew” is a common taunt. Benito Mussolini 2019 calendars are on sale in newsstands in Rome. The Freedom Party of Austria is in government while the ultra-religious, ultra-nationalist Law and Justice Party (PiS) is in power in Poland and, as journalist Ewa Jasiewicz writes, using “courts, police, public prosecutor and

threats of fines ... to intimidate journalists.” In Hungary, Fidesz, the far-right Hungarian Civic Alliance, now in government with the Christian Democratic People’s Party, is using crony judges to tamper with the constitution.

The latest outbreak of the malaise is in Spain. In the Andalusian elections at the end of 2018 Vox, an avowedly pro-Franco party, got 11% of the votes. “Spain is different” but not as the Franco regime’s tourist-bait slogan suggested. Unlike what happened in Germany, Italy and Portugal—fascism, personified by Generalísimo Francisco Franco, was never really routed. Mussolini was hung head down in Milan, Hitler opted for suicide before the Soviet troops got him, and Salazar, incapacitated after a stroke and removed from power was, in his lucid moments, duped into believing he was still in charge. But Franco died in his bed. In power. So much so that he named King Juan Carlos as his successor. And in the following “democratic transition” the Amnesty Law (1977), guaranteed impunity for his torturing, baby-snatching, murderous henchmen as tens of thousands of their victims lay in unmarked mass graves. Neither the police, nor the Civil Guard, nor the army, nor the legal system was overhauled. They are still strongholds of Franco devotees. In 2018, the government (now headed by the social-democratic PSOE) decided to continue the Duchy of Franco which was invented by King Juan Carlos in homage to the dictator. A Duchy of Hitler? No. Not because he was a republican but because he was defeated.

Since Franco’s death, his diehards have been cocooned in some sections of the People’s Party (PP) waiting to spread their wings again. And now, one of the old party militants is leading Vox. Then there is the supposedly “center-right” Ciudadanos. As Spanish writer Suso de Toro notes, “We used to say there’s no far-right party in Spain because it’s inside the PP. Now we have three ...” And we have our very own Article 48, except it’s called Article 155.

Vox’s and other electoral successes are normalizing retrograde, antisocial, planet-destroying ideas with preposterous promises of silver-bullet solutions and appeals to nativist dignity. New ideologues appear, especially among media and academic opinion makers, think tanks, and consulting firms. Alt-right leaders like Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen are writing op-eds for the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. And election-minded (or not wishing to rock the U-boat) center-right and some center-left parties are doing deals with far-right parties. Far right politics is not the exclusive domain of far right parties.

Every election affects the state of global democracy. Now Brazil, the world’s fourth-largest democracy looks set to show how democracy can be anti-democracy, suicidal, ecocidal and, as far as tribal peoples are concerned, genocidal. Alt-right programs that will bring down other democracies include anti-immigrant policies, ethnically based denial of rights, ignoring gender violence (unless by immigrants), “traditional-values”, hating feminism, LGBTphobia, aggressive state nationalism, suppression of freedoms (except for “the market”) and especially freedom of expression, and everything else these goals entail. All of them will require quashing judicial independence and meddling with constitutions.

A possible weak point of alt-rightness is that wealthy elites can get twitchy about the people to whom the message is directed. Until Hitler gained the support of Krupp, Flick, Vöglér, Tengelmann, Quandt, etc. in 1933 his victory wasn’t assured. And it wasn’t until the eve of his march on Rome in October 1922 that Mussolini (who, incidentally, made his start in politics in 1917 with a £100 weekly wage from MI5) extracted some fifty million lira from the Nationalist Confederations of Industry, Agriculture, and Banking. Then he grabbed power. Franco had support from rich Spaniards. Some big money is still wary about Europe’s extreme right, but more and richer sympathiz-



ers are seeing it as their best protection. Once again, we need to look back to the 1920s through the 1940s when American corporations, banks, and prominent wealthy businessmen (including George W. Bush's grandfather, Senator Prescott Bush, a director and shareholder of companies that profited from involvement with Nazi Germany) were supporting Europe's fascist regimes. You don't have to be a true believer. War and state security are profitable. Today's fascist creep embraces a whole milieu from rabble-rousers through to silent financiers like Robert Mercer, Peter Thiel, and Daniel Loeb. They don't talk. They act.

The multifarious forms of the alt-right are setting the political agenda, drawing attention away from real, basic issues affecting their own and other populations, as they dismantle institutions that once protected citizens' rights. Of course, there is resistance: gilets jaunes, feminists, radical municipalism, big demonstrations, and citizen initiatives. But we mustn't get distracted by all the Blut und Boden and its disorienting paraphernalia, and must focus on issues like inequality, the power of the very rich (who will burn the whole planet rather than share it), the climate catastrophe, universal human rights, and protecting all democratic institutions. Latter-day Enabling Acts are seeking to further entrench the already enabled who wield this self-endowed license to batter, mutilate, and kill any living being that gets in their way. **CP**

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## Robert E. Lee, Now & Then

### Master of the Lost Cause

BY LEE BALLINGER

When I was in fifth grade, my best friend's first name was Grant. Mine was Lee. In the pseudo-military games we played every day at recess, he was in charge of one group of boys and I was in charge of another. We gave no thought to the significance of Grant versus Lee. It was just a game, with a winner and a loser each day. We had no idea what Robert E. Lee had actually done other than lead some army from the back of a horse.

Who was Robert E. Lee? Was he a traitor or a hero? The answer is obvious—Lee led a slaveholders rebellion that cost 800,000 lives in a country of 31 million people. But it's not clear to everyone. John Reeves begins his excellent new book, *The Lost Indictment of Robert E. Lee: The Forgotten Case Against an American Icon* (Rowman & Littlefield) by establishing that sad fact.

"Woodrow Wilson believed General Lee was a 'model to men who would be morally great.' Douglas Southall Freeman, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his four-volume biography of Lee, described his subject as 'one of a small company of great men in whom there is no inconsistency to be explained, no enigma

to be solved.' For well over a century across America, monuments were raised in his honor, and schools were named after him. There was even a stained glass window devoted to Lee's life at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC."

Reeves goes on to administer an antidote of truth serum to these sanitized portrayals. Robert E. Lee was the General in Chief of the Armies of the Confederate States, the supreme military leader in a war in which one in three households in Lee's supposedly beloved South lost at least one family member. It was Robert E. Lee who put down the attempt of a real hero, John Brown, to incite a slave rebellion at Harper's Ferry, Virginia in 1859. Brown was found guilty of treason against the state of Virginia and quickly hanged after a jury deliberated for all of 45 minutes. On the other hand, Lee was indicted for treason on June 7, 1865 but was never punished for it.

He was also a successful investor in banks and railroads who owned or managed two hundred slaves. According to former slave Wesley Norris, Lee frequently egged on his overseers as they whipped Lee's slaves.

"The painful discipline they are undergoing," Lee said, "is necessary for their instruction as a race," adding that "the blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa.

Does this sound like a "morally great man"?

The abolitionist Wendell Phillips condemned Lee as the "bloodiest and guiltiest" of all the rebels, while the *New York Times* argued that Lee had waged war against the United States "more strenuously than any other man in the land." Two months after the surrender at Appomattox, a Norfolk, Virginia grand jury indicted Robert E. Lee for treason. In his instructions to the grand jury, Judge John C. Underwood declared that the leaders of the rebellion had "hands dripping with the blood of slaughtered innocents."

Yet on Christmas Day 1868 President Andrew Johnson granted complete amnesty to all participants in the rebellion, included those who, like Lee, who had been indicted for treason. This was one of the first steps in the makeover of Lee, the shift from zero to hero.

Robert E. Lee remained an unrepentant Confederate until his death in 1871, but this didn't stop the press from championing him (the *New York Tribune's* pro-Union editor Horace Greeley put up the money to bail out Jefferson Davis, Lee's partner in crime). Frederick Douglass noted at the time that "We can scarcely take up a newspaper...that is not filled with nauseating flatteries of the late Robert E. Lee."

The purpose of the "nauseating flatteries" was to obscure the fact that slavery (and slave owners) caused the Civil War. This was part of an instant revisionism in which the war was reduced to a "sectional conflict" with no more inherent morality than a sporting event. The ideology of the Lost Cause began to gain traction, with its noxious notions of a genteel South and happy slaves.

Despite the relentless efforts of many powerful men, that

medicine did not go down easily.

According to *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* by Barbara A. Gannon: “Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) members fought attempts by Lost Cause advocates to advance their version of Civil War history.... Grand Army men repeatedly invoked the idea that the rebels seceded from the Union to protect slavery. Veterans argued that slavery caused the war and that their victory saved the Union and freed the slaves.”

This resistance to the whitewash of history increased as the Grand Army of the Republic, locked in a bitter fight with Congress over veterans pensions, grew to become the largest organization of Union veterans, with over 400,000 members by the early 1890s.

“Black veterans were the political and social equals of white

to national politics. The only change was, as W.E.B. DuBois famously observed, that it was now controlled by Wall Street.

The cleansing of the past continued. Lee’s family estate, Arlington, became a federal memorial in 1955, at the same time that President Eisenhower hung Lee’s portrait on the wall of his White House office. In 1975, Gerald Ford granted a formal presidential pardon to war criminal Robert E. Lee.

One result of the distortion of history was that the Lost Cause and its primary symbol, the Stars and Bars, came to be thought of as expressions of a monolithic white South. But as Keri Leigh Merritt demonstrates in detail in her new book *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge), the South was anything but that. Merritt made an exhaustive study of the existing literature. She immersed herself in everything from court records to contem-

porary newspaper accounts. She made surprising finds: massive and extreme white poverty in the run-up to the Civil War (up to a third of the Southern white population), a police state specifically designed to keep it that way, and a fair amount of unity between a section of the white poor and black slaves. *Masterless Men* gives the lie to the concept of the South as an idyllic rural retreat, where everyone was in their proper place and happy to be there. Without mentioning him by name, it reveals what Robert E. Lee stood for—a savagely brutal class society not defined solely by color.

As the Civil War drew near, a growing mass of poor Southern whites was pushed to the margins of antebellum society. They had no land, inadequate food, and little education.

“On the eve of secession, slaveholders continued to jail poor whites for small

amounts of debt, publicly whipping thieves, and auctioning off debtors and criminals for their labor to the highest bidder.”

The post-Civil War vagrancy laws that were later used to compel the labor of blacks were actually first developed before the Civil War to control poor whites. The same was true of the South’s infamous penitentiary system. “The guardhouses and jails in every county seat, town, and city were built with a main purpose,” Merritt writes, “to deprive troublesome or suspicious poor whites of their liberty.” Former Mississippi slave Dempsey Pitts confirmed that “There weren’t no jails, except for the poor whites.”

Poor white children were forcibly “bound over” to work as unpaid apprentices while white adults were often sold at court.

Alabama and Mississippi required every county to build a jail with a whipping post and stocks for the punishment of poor whites. Thirty percent of South Carolina white prisoners were sentenced to whipping or branding, while throughout



Silent Sam statue, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Photo: Kevin Amirehsani.

Americans,” Gannon notes, “in one of the most prestigious organizations in the United States. In an era in which race trumped virtually all other social identities, black and white veterans created an interracial organization at both the national and local levels.” Grand Army of the Republic posts formed in thousands of small towns and cities across the United States, most strikingly in the South.

While the fabrications and fairy tales about slavery and Robert E. Lee have taken on a life of their own, the history of the GAR, as popular as it was, has been lost. Most Americans don’t know that it ever existed.

As Jim Crow tightened its grip on the country in the early twentieth century and Lost Cause propaganda such as the film *Birth of a Nation* flourished, the United States was moving outward around the world commercially and militarily. National unity was the order of the day. This meant the uncritical return of the Confederacy, defeated only militarily,

the South white prisoners were frequently sent to chain gangs.

“Stories of vigilance committees, minutemen organizations, and local mobs lynching and killing poorer whites abounded in the late antebellum period. The majority of those brutalized were accused of abolitionism of some sort—whether they were distributing reading materials, talking to other non-slaveholders about workers rights, or simply too friendly with African-Americans.”

Poor whites often had no food and slaves stole food from plantation stocks and shared it with them. Since only men of property could vote, poor whites and slaves at times had to come together in open rebellion, such as the 1860 Alabama uprising which demanded a redistribution of “land, mules, and money.” The Friends Z. Society was a good-sized group of poor whites in Alabama and Mississippi which promoted the abolition of slavery.

The gavel of the powerful came down heavily on both

passionately before his state legislature about “the need to seize the estates of Southern aristocrats and dole out their land to loyal soldiers, poor Southern whites, and freed slaves.”

This call for revolution was amplified by similar proposals made by Judge John C. Underwood, who presided over the grand jury which indicted Robert E. Lee, General Benjamin Butler, Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, and many others.

Such propositions, never tested in practice, long ago disappeared from the national discourse and national memory. We can understand why they never had a chance by comparing two peas in a pod—Robert E. Lee and Donald Trump.

Lee was, like Trump, a diehard racist but racism wasn’t why he eagerly served as one of General Winfield Scott’s chief aides when the US Army marched from Veracruz to Mexico City during the Mexican-American War. He did so in order to expand and protect the system of slavery and the profits of

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## The promotion of Robert E. Lee as a heroic figure was meant to obscure this nascent racial unity in the South and to distract everyone from the radical proposals put forward in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.

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blacks and whites involved in rebellion. A single 1860 edition of Anderson, South Carolina’s *The Intelligencer* described four different instances of white men being lynched for interacting with blacks.

But when the war came, it was poor whites who were forced to fight while 150,000 wealthy Southerners purchased substitutes so they could avoid military service with its risk of death from combat or disease. During the war, planters continued to raise cotton and tobacco instead of growing food, while poor white soldiers and their families were left to starve. By late 1863, almost half of the Confederate army had deserted.

In *Desertion During the Civil War*, Dr. Ella Lyon writes: “In Arkansas a hybrid group of deserters, Negroes, women, and Federals banded themselves together; in Tennessee the same bands showed deserters, jayhawkers, and Indians; in Florida deserters, occupying the country held for many years by Seminoles, gathered runaway slave bands to commit depredations upon the plantations and crops of Southern loyalists and to run off their slaves, even threatening the cities of Tallahassee, Madison, and Marianna.”

The promotion of Robert E. Lee as a heroic figure was meant to obscure this nascent racial unity in the South and to distract everyone from the radical proposals put forward in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. John Reeves writes about Indiana Congressman George Washington Julian, speaking

Southern plantation owners. Trump makes clear his hatred of Mexicans but the real reason he has sent US troops to the Mexican border, a border they may cross at any time, is to protect a similar system of privilege and exploitation while generating multi-billion dollar subsidies for his corporate friends.

Alive or dead, Trump and Lee both play the role of the populist hero, promoting the absurd idea that the little man has friends in high places. Pliant political entities and the media sow this confusion in order to prevent the unity of those who truly do have fundamental interests in common.

The ongoing veneration of Robert E. Lee, the flouting of the Stars and Bars and the spread of Lost Cause propaganda are not harmless cultural relics. They are dangerous because they can cause people to look at enemies as friends and potential friends as enemies. The true class nature of the Confederacy and the slave South needs to be clarified because it is still with us.

Take the example of evictions, which fast-track people not just out of their current home but quite likely into homelessness. Recent exhaustive studies of evictions show that, of the 900,000 eviction judgments issued in 2016, the percentage for black households is twice as high for whites but, in raw numbers, twice as many white households have been evicted. Numbers and ratios aside, there is clearly a basis for unity re-

ardless of race. Some of the strongest roots for this coming together are in the states of the former Confederacy.

Nine out of the ten cities with the highest eviction rates are in the Deep South. The city with the highest rate of evictions is North Charleston, South Carolina, which is eight miles from Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began. The city with the second highest number of evictions is Richmond, VA, the former Confederate capital.

Similarly, the Deep South has seen a wave of twenty-first-century protests against Confederate symbols. For example, last summer protestors toppled the Confederate statue known as “Silent Sam” at the University of North Carolina. In early December, the university announced a proposal to build a five million dollar “education center” that would house the statue, cost nearly a million dollars a year to run, and likely feature paeans to Robert E. Lee. This in a state which refuses to address the severe poverty of blacks or whites, the direct legacy of plantation slavery.

The university’s announcement was immediately met by a protest march of several hundred people on the campus. If the anti-Confederate movement can be linked to the needs of all for hearth and home, it can move from the margins to the center, from mere protest to empowerment. The dustbin of history has plenty of room for the Robert E. Lees of this world. **CP**

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

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## The Terror That Isn’t Televised The 21st Century War on Africa

BY NICK PEMBERTON

The United States has a military presence in 53 out of 54 African countries. The basis for us being there, officially, is terrorism. The Authorization for Use of Military Force, passed shortly after 9/11, allows wars to be fought on this basis. The act was passed with only one dissenter: Barbara Lee. Ms. Lee has tried several times to repeal the act, without help from her colleagues. If there is one consensus in Washington it is this: permanent war.

And more specifically, permanent war in Africa. A murder of an American journalist has finally moved the United States Congress to speak up about Yemen. But if the country was just across the Red Sea, outrage may have taken longer, if it happened at all. A military operation in Africa is no big deal to any of us precisely because it is assumed.

In many ways, the story of Africa mirrors that of African-Americans in the United States. Living in the age of post-colonialism is much like the age of post-Jim Crow in the US. The system was dismantled, but it has been smoothly

pieced back together by the ruling class. Just like slavery, independence for African nations meant starting far behind and remaining indebted to the master class.

African economies still run primarily on cash crops and natural resources to be consumed by richer countries. Political independence has proven to be far different from economic independence. And in the age of neoliberalism, one has to wonder if there is any political independence without economic independence.

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), facilitated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) has kept the colonial structures in place. Rather than reparations for the colonial rule of Africa, the world has imposed predatory loan programs. For all the grumble about the Clinton-Obama trade deals suddenly making people racist, let’s not forget that neoliberal policies are global in their devastation.

SAPs, at least in theory, are supposed to save a country in the short-term, even if the long-term effects are severe. But the countries on the receiving end of SAPs really have no other options. If your people are starving, of course, you have to take the loan. The justification for SAPs is rather backward as well, seeing that it is the victims of the colonialism who are blamed, while it is the perpetrators who make a long-term profit off of playing the savior.

Along with any loan must come an agreement to make an economy more “market-oriented.” That means privatization, deregulation and it means cutting social services to the most vulnerable. Free up as much money to trade with the big boys is the argument. It’s basically trickle-down economics.

Countries aren’t even allowed to use SAPs on health, development or education programs. One has to ask a serious question. If the government isn’t allowed to spend on health, development, or education, what is the goal of giving at all?

One of the traps of SAPs is that economies in developing countries now must be focused on exports. A ridiculous rule states that SAPs can only be repaid in hard currency! Therefore, you have to export goods to the lenders to ever receive money to pay them back. Economies then are no longer based on what local people consume, but what the imperial nations consume. Such a system, when implemented on so many countries at once, brings down the price of exports themselves, plummeting the revenues for the exporting countries. Turns out competition is good for capitalists.

SAPs create austerity policies which result in cuts to social services in order to pay off debts. It seems odd that people like George W. Bush are given credit for taking on AIDs when in reality cuts to health care are the sort of thing that causes AIDs in the first place.

Overall, SAPs force governments to not only cut social services in the short term but hand over power to multinational corporations in the long term. The policies determine what is to be sold, but also who is to profit off of it. They relocate

all money that would have been spent on social programs and workers into investment into the Western economy. They are completely undemocratic in form, devised by an economist in an office far, far away. They rely entirely on short term “freeing” of the market—which has deadly long-term consequences on the safety and health of Africans.

For all the sweet-talking socialists out there, there is hardly a peep about Africa. Much is ado about neoliberal politics—but never is neo-colonialism brought up. As long as the left remains this white, liberalism will continue to have legitimacy.

That’s the economic war. But there is also a military war. It seems fitting, that as the war on Africa surges on without a peep, that the song Africa by Toto would top the charts again, thanks to a cover by Weezer. In the jungle, surrounded by dogs, full of ancient folklore and mystique, Africa appears as a savage wonder for a new audience.

For such a supposedly developed nation, our understanding of Africa remains quite primitive. Mention of this fine country (yes, many believe that one too), is scarce in the mainstream media. But when we do hear of Africa, we hear solely about the latest outbreak of disease, war or famine. At best, it is the hub of culture and rhythm, a key into the abandoned Western soul. When Africans post pictures on social media it is not rare to find the caption “This is not the Africa you see on TV.”

The licentious tweeter and sometimes President Donald Trump called African countries shitholes, but he merely lacks the vocabulary to do any better. This conclusion about Africa is the consensus, whether we manifest our feelings through war, charity, or both.

A lot was supposed to change when Barack Obama, whose father was Kenyan, shocked the world and became President of the United States. Obama appeared to be a radical departure from the traditional understanding of Africans. Here was a man who could not only dance, he could talk. But I am not so sure anyone who liked Mr. Obama ever saw him as an African. Rather, he was seen as an extension of the white ruling class; a problem solver.

Donald Trump excited some of the anti-establishment folks by his anti-interventionist talk on the campaign trail. And the American people fell for it, just as they fell for Obama’s lofty locutions eight years prior.

Here are some of Donald Trump’s moves in Africa so far. On the basis of fighting al-Shabab, Trump expanded the number of boots on the ground in Somalia. Obama’s drone war—the definition of a passive-aggressive and scrupulous war—has only been expanded by the gunslinger Trump in Somalia. Trump’s signature move is to take away Obama-era protection as if that makes Trump a bigger man. Trump’s petty racism against his predecessor has proven to be just as costly as the structural racism he oversees, as his seemingly arbitrary anti-Obama measures have deadly consequences. Trump has loosened the targeting rules of Obama’s drone war.

The *New York Times* reported that Trump is also set to

expand the drone war from a base in the Sahara desert in Niger to a tune of \$110 million. *The Times* reports that in Niger the amount of US troops have doubled under Trump. How much is going on in secret is hard to know, as every time a story is cracked, it appears to be a secret. As was the case with the four airstrikes done by the US between September 2017 and January 2018. Trump also sold 593\$ of military equipment to Nigeria, on the basis of fighting Boko Haram.

This entire piece could continue with specific policies, but details are hard to find, and are deeply obscured. There is a military presence, in one way or the other, in every African country, and the actual attacks by the United States, while too often, appear to be rarer than the money spent indicates. What we are left with is a confusing and hidden network of groups armed and trained by the United States, sometimes in our name, and often not. The United States has a vested interest in the results of each conflict—and perhaps more importantly, a vested interest in weapons being bought for each conflict.

How much thought goes into any of these policies under Trump is unclear. There is a very designed profit-motive, surely. But the President’s blatant disregard for human life is striking. It is entirely possible that Donald Trump is the biggest player in Africa and simply has no idea what he is doing or what effect he has on the people in Africa.

Along with the continuing status quo of expanding imperialism in the region, Donald Trump shows a blatant disrespect for the region. This is the sort of thing that gets headlines in the liberal corporate media, as covering any of Donald Trump’s real political moves would jeopardize their bottom line.

Trump, while claiming to be the antithesis of Barack Obama, cannot seem to escape his predecessor’s worst flaws. The war on terror in Africa was planted by George W. Bush, but cemented by Barack Obama. Obama learned some things from Bush’s very clunky presidency. Bush’s wars in the Middle East, while originally met with typical American fervor, soon became exposed as costly to the American people. Terrorist attacks remained few and far between, while American casualties in the Middle East mounted.

Barack Obama knew that the American people couldn’t take these kinds of wars forever. We simply cared too much about ourselves to deem any terrorist threat, real or imagined, worth our own bloodshed. More covert and precise forms of warfare became necessary and in came Obama’s drone programs. When Bush went to war, it was stupid. Now that Obama was doing the killings, war was smart. War is not stupid and war is not smart. War is just evil.

Obama’s policy in the Middle East really didn’t differ much from Bush’s. The war on the Middle East was Bush’s to own, for better or worse. As long as there was no new news, America just let the Middle East lie as a region of permanent, if regrettable, war. Opportunity for a slicker operation presented itself in Africa, a region just beginning to adopt the unique 21st-century war on terror label. This was Obama’s chance to really





*US military advisors in Niger. Photo: US Army.*

get in on the ground level. Bush's wars may go on for centuries, but he hardly snuck in. Obama could accomplish something extraordinary: sneak into a continent of over a billion without a peep.

The plan was this: Americans plan and control the military missions inside of Africa, but do so under the names of the countries they are occupying. What is presented as advising actually becomes full-blown intervention. See Wesley Morgan's reveal in *Politico* for a good story on this. Better yet, American troops need not die. Send in the African troops, as long as the US remains the army in command.

These programs are largely classified and completely unaccountable. Morgan reveals eight countries where this arrangement is made: Libya, Somalia, Kenya, Tunisia, Cameroon, Mali and Mauritania and Niger. Throughout Africa, raids, drones and surveillance by the United States keeps the region under the thumb of the United States.

The logic and justification for war in Africa is much the same as the wars in the Middle East. It's a war on terror (by terror and for terror, while we're at it). Distrust of the foreigner in the age of mass refugee displacement, a decline in the United States economic power, and an increasingly corporate media help to leave the American public misinformed or even in favor of these developments.

Obama's war on terror feels like less of an embarrassment than Bush's, even if the consequences for the average person was just as severe. The secrecy of Obama helped, one must conclude. Marching like an idiot into war with blatant jingoism works on many Americans, but this I think, was never

Obama's card. He was always more of an internationalist (by that, of course, I mean Western European). He was a sort of animal whisperer to the savages in Africa. He could paint what appeared as a confusing part of the world with dignified strokes.

There is some merit in the liberal approach to Africa, even if it is barely implemented under Democrats. Despite rapidly rising rates of hunger and thirst due to climate change, Trump cut foreign aid to Africa by 35%. He is replacing aid with military expansion and tax cuts to the richest segments of the United States population. Foreign aid, no matter the amount, has been at less than 1% of the federal budget. Compare that to the 54% of the federal budget spent on the United States military.

Donald Trump has also cut aid for charities that provide abortion, which cuts aid to just about any family planning organization. An insane policy often put into place during Republican Presidencies. Trump has expanded the gag rule to include all health-related charities, whether that be family planning, or anything else. Additionally, any charity that advocates for legal abortions in their own country will be blocked from aid. The World Health Organization concludes that 3 out of every 4 abortions that occur in Africa are unsafe. Africa accounts for 62% of abortion deaths.

Most of the criticism of Mr. Trump here in the United States revolves around either his racist attitudes towards Africa or his policy on foreign aid. While both may be concerning in their own right, Mr. Trump is only criticized because he appears to be breaking the mold of a benevolent United States policy. In

the diverse melting pot of the United States, open racism is frowned upon. Yet when it comes to changing the economic disparity in our racial caste system, few are willing to act seriously. Likewise, charity is seen as a backbone of the United States, a central component of our superior values. As soon as the charity is taken away, military stands alone, and the United States feels naked. We must have the 1% of the budget for aid to combat the 54% of the budget for the military. If we don't, who are we? Honest?

The left cannot completely escape either. We cannot escape what Zoé Samudzi calls an anti-blackness. She notes when speaking to the incredulous Chuck Mertz, that while there has been some pushback on war in the Middle East, there is no real pushback to the war on Africa. Violence becomes an assumed fate in the region, according to Samudzi. The only real way to slow a US war is for an American to die, as we see in the Jamal Khasahoggi case. But there were similar scandals in both Niger (Tongo Tongo ambush) and Libya (Benghazi). And other than some neocons whining about “soft” female neocon Hillary, what exactly did we get from those blunders?

For those on the left who see Donald Trump as a revolutionary, as either catalyst or accident, think again. Trump has spurred a sentimental and innocuous vision of America, that is as unworldly as Trump himself. Donald Trump, while despised in America and Europe, has retained relative popularity in Africa, according to the limited polls available. One reason may be that when it comes to Africa, all American leaders are bad. Every single one. Another reason may be that the strongman Trump may resemble many of the leaders imposed on Africa by the West. The horror upon having a fascist come home to roost should be met with some sense of divine irony or cruel justice.

The only way Americans know how to explain fascism is through Adolf Hitler's Germany. The reason we only see that fascism is because it is the only fascism Americans have been against. Notwithstanding our refusal to take in refugees, our financial ties with the Nazis, our role in World War I or any of the real ways that America helped caused the Holocaust. But I think you can understand the general assumption in America: we (through imperialism) stopped Hitler's fascism.

Therefore, we can see Hitler's fascism, be afraid of Hitler's fascism, and say, without sounding like complete hypocrites, that we want to stop Hitler's fascism. We cannot so easily see the history of fascism in our own country: genocide of Native Americans, mass enslavement of blacks, internment of the Japanese, the war on terror, etc., etc. The amount of novels, museums and general cultural zeitgeist around the Holocaust in comparison to similar episodes in Africa—well it's just absurd.

The one time we went to war against fascism is the time that fascism was real. All other times (including in the act of war itself) fascism is forgotten. We must not become Hitler, we warn. But we never say we must not become, well, ourselves.

Genocide only became an international crime, let alone an international disgrace, after the Holocaust. The word genocide, created in 1944, has a Greek root (genos: race, tribe) and a Latin root (cide: killing). Genocide though did not begin then, and it did not begin there.

As the planet warms, and the sun (metaphorically) sets on what we know as modern civilization, it seems likely that despite the interminable ways to discover the self in this cultural apex, we will, never, have understood Africa. As climate change looms, the end appears to be in a generation or two or three. Among the many astonishing shortcomings of our final days will be that we never figured this one out.

That has to be part of the alarm about living in these Trump days, with the world set to end in the near future. What is believed to be true now, may be true until the clock runs out, barring some drastic changes. How bewildering a thought! And yet, perhaps this is not about us. Perhaps, as all “great” civilizations come and go (never to be made great again), perhaps it is not about whether or not Africa is real to us. Maybe the fact that Africa never formed proves just how cretinous our modernized society is. And for all one knows, after the world has burned to a crisp, the human race dies off, and a gentler, less imperialist race forms, they will (assuming they find any merit in the cumbersome English language), find that the history books' negation of Africa says more damning things about us than the motherland itself.

Finding a place for peace in Africa seems to be near impossible for America. However, it seems to be an even grander hurdle to rewrite the story of Africa—as one that is not just tragedy, but real. Every American, even Donald Trump, claims to be interested in ending the horror story that is Africa. In reality it is both this statement and this sentiment that ends up creating this horror story in our minds—and too often, outside of them.

From *The Heart of Darkness* to *The Lion King* to Kony 2012, there is no story about Africa that is not a horror story, often draped in romanticism. Whether the romantic part is the dead Africans themselves, or simply what could have been, is hard to tell. What is clear is that the American left, center and right have left Africa for dead. Never having solidified in our consciousness, when SAPs invaded 34 countries economically, and AFRICOM invaded 53 countries militarily, who was there to stop it?

And yet these tragedies, only accelerating under climate change and an irrational Empire, become the only thing we hear. It becomes impossible to imagine the African subject as a conscious figure, with the same goals, thoughts, faults, worries, joys and heartbreak as the rest of us, even if US policy has too big an impact on their lives.

Knowing no other way, an American cultural product to close. The question of our times could be raised by The Killers (the band, not the United States). They ask in their song Human: “Are we human or are we dancers?” And brilliant

dancers aside, this question will determine whether or not we continue to tolerate imperialism and austerity across Africa. American policy in Africa can become anything, anything at all, and it will cease to register. I am less concerned with the various actors, whether they be Obama or Trump, as I am in the fact that Africa, if she makes an appearance at all, is clad in darkness, unable to assert herself in any meaningful way in our political lives, and therefore, remains at the mercy of dirty capitalists, who can at least see that Africans are people, even if their only intent is to exploit them. **CP**

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## Alexander Dugin

# The Politically-Correct Fascism Gaining Ground on the Left

BY DAN GLAZEBROOK

Alexander Dugin is quite possibly, after Steve Bannon, the most influential fascist in the world today. His TV station reaches over 20 million people, and the dozens of think tanks, journals and websites run by him and his employees ultimately have an even further reach. You, dear *Counterpunch* reader, will almost certainly have read pieces originally emanating from one of his outlets.

His strategy is that of the ‘red-brown alliance’—an attempt to unite the far left and far right under the hegemonic leadership of the latter. On the face of it, much of his programme can at first appear superficially attractive to leftists—opposition to US supremacy; support for a ‘multipolar’ world; and even an apparent respect for non-western and pre-colonial societies and traditions. In fact, such positions—necessary as they may be for a genuine leftist programme—are neither bad nor good in and of themselves; rather, they are means, tools for the creation of a new world. And the world Dugin wishes to create is one of the racially-purified ethno-states, dominated by a Euro-Russian white power aristocracy (the ‘Moscow-Berlin axis’) in which Asia is subordinated to Russia by means of a dismembered China. This is not an anti-imperialist programme. It is a programme for an inter-imperialist challenge for the control of Europe and Asia: for a reconstituted Third Reich.

Dugin represents a strain of fascism known as National Bolshevism, which first emerged in the years following the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent civil war. Some of the defeated remnants of the white army began to believe that if Bolshevism could not be overthrown by force, then perhaps its authoritarian currents could be developed and gradually pushed towards right-wing ultranationalism. This was a classic infiltration strategy of taking over the left and destroy-

ing it from within. Under the leadership of Stalin, some of the National Bolsheviks were allowed to return to the USSR, and were partially rehabilitated in an effort to bring nationalist and patriotic credibility to Stalin’s government; essentially, both sides were using each other to legitimize and expand the appeal of their respective projects.

The current remained relatively marginal, however, until the Brezhnev era. Then, in the 1980s, the National Bolsheviks joined forces with other ultranationalist trends to form ‘Pamyat’, an anti-Semitic and monarchist association which blamed a Zionist-Masonic plot for the Russian revolution, and indeed for pretty much all of Russia’s problems. Dugin joined its central council. But he apparently found it too ‘modern’, and sought to develop a more mystical and ‘traditionalist’ form of fascism. Following his expulsion from Pamyat in 1989—after a failed attempt to change its direction—he embarked on a tour of western Europe, where he became influenced by French fascist Alain de Benoist’s *Nouvelle Droite* and developed close relationships with leading figures such as Jean-Francois Thiriart, Robert Steuckers, and Benoist himself. These figures had been instrumental in developing a strategy of whitewashing and rehabilitating fascism by appropriating the slogans and concepts of the left and even liberals (see my piece in the last edition of *Counterpunch*), and were to be hugely influential on Dugin’s own political trajectory. De Benoist had advocated stepping back from the overt promotion of a fascist programme in order to focus instead on cultivating the intellectual terrain in which such a programme would again become acceptable. To this end he created a think-tank, GRECE (the “Research and Study Group of European Civilisation”) to wage a long-term ‘cultural-ideological struggle’ he termed ‘metapolitics’, based on a strategy originally advocated by the Italian communist leader Gramsci. Dugin, following some abortive attempts to enter politics directly (receiving less than 1% of the vote when he stood as a candidate to the Russian State Duma in 1995, for example), soon began to employ a similar strategy. His first journal, *Elementy*, founded in 1993, praised the Nazis and the Conservative Revolutionaries which preceded them, and published the first Russian translations of esoteric interwar fascist Julius Evola. Since then, he has founded or developed dozens of journals, think tanks, publishing houses and web platforms to spread his ideas, including *Katehon*, *Geopolitika*, *Arktos*, *Eurasia* journal, *Editions Avatar*, *Voxnr.com*, *Arctogaia*, *Fort-Russ*, the Centre for Syncretic Studies, the Duran, New University, *Vtorzhenie* (invasion), *Eurasianist Review*, *Evrazia*, *info*, *Russian Time* journal, the Global Revolutionary Alliance, *The Green Star*, *New Resistance/ Open Revolt*, the Centre of Conservative Research at the Faculty of Sociology of Moscow State University, the St Petersburg Conservative Club at the Faculty of Philosophy of St Petersburg State University, and the *Amphora* publishing house. A worrying number of them have gained traction amongst some on the left, their articles shared and posted unsuspectingly on social media by people

who would never have dreamed of circulating material by more overt white supremacists like the KKK.

Much of this work is financed by the Russian billionaire Konstantin Malofeev, and the various platforms cover a wide base in terms of their appeal and intended audience. Some sites are more traditionally right-wing, whilst others appropriate more anarchist and workerist imagery and language. The US-based New Resistance is a case in point. New Resistance was founded by James Porazzo, previously leader of the more

the demands for ethnic purity and segregation become more apparent. Elsewhere, Gramsci's understanding of 'organic intellectuals,' rooted in the working class, gets twisted into support for a 'New Aristocracy.'

Alexander Reid-Ross explains how these Duginist sites and think tanks then amplify their influence across the rest of the web: "Dugin's thought pieces are read by journalists and editors with other sites like Fort-Russ, which claims to receive some millions of views per month. RT and Sputnik pick up stories



*Alexander Dugin. (Youtube.)*

openly white supremacist American Front (modelled on the UK's National Front) who once described Jews as "a filthy, evil people the world would be better without", and is clearly part of Dugin's global network, frequently republishing Dugin's pieces, and with links to the site prominently displayed on Dugin's Centre for Syncretic Studies and in his books. New Resistance issues classically leftist-sounding phrases like "Too often we in the working classes internalize the zero-sum, dog-eat-dog 'logic' of capitalism" and "Workers of all nations are cynically pitted against each other by the ruling classes, forced to wage military and economic warfare that is contrary to our own class interests" and even publishes stickers of communist freedom fighter Leila Khaled for its supporters to download. Their 11 point programme is a classic fascist mish-mash of traditional socialist wishlist, return-to-the-land tribalist nostalgia and right-wing dog whistles like gun ownership and overpopulation, and it is only when you get deep into the manifesto that

and writers from sites like Fort-Russ and Katehon, elevating the Kremlin's "spin" to more and more users. They then bring on leftist journalists from North Atlantic countries in order to make that spin more attractive to larger audiences in the West." Fort-Russ's own website confirms this strategy: "With 3 million readers a month, we have often featured 'uncomfortable truths' which 'mainstream' Kremlin-backed sources like RT and Sputnik were unable to. We gave the raw story to readers before RT and Sputnik found the right angle to couch it in. As a result, many of our features and breaking stories have been featured by both of these outlets later on." In December 2013, Dugin compiled a list of hundreds of politicians and intellectuals he sought to cultivate through involvement with RT, entitled "Countries and persons, where there are grounds to create an elite club and/or a group of informational influence through the line of Russia Today". The list included rightwingers like Viktor Orban and de Benoist as well as leftwingers such

as Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras.

At the same time as following this ‘metapolitical’ strategy, Dugin also had a role in developing and influencing almost every far-right Russian formation that now exists. After co-founding the National Bolshevik Party in 1993, he went on to write the programme of the (grossly misnamed and deeply anti-Jewish) Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), and served as advisor for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s (similar misnamed and fascistic) Liberal Democrat Party. Subsequently, he has been advisor to the Speaker of the Duma and has established the Eurasia Party (2002) and the Eurasian Youth Movement (2005), whilst also briefly a leading member of the overtly fascist Rodina party. In 2008, he gained a professorship at the prestigious Moscow State University, and his textbook “Foundations of Geopolitics” is apparently required reading in Russia’s military academies. He has close links to the American far right—he has links to former KKK leader

traditional European culture Duginists support. Indeed, a key strategic aim of the Duginists appears to be the morphing of the antiwar movement into an anti-refugee movement, portraying war refugees as a weapon employed by Jewish financiers such as George Soros to dilute and weaken European culture.

Nevertheless, this hostility towards migrants as an impure degenerate influence on pristine European cultural tradition is matched with flattery towards other ‘traditional cultures,’ Islam in particular. Dugin has had some major successes in co-opting Muslims to his cause, his close collaborator (and fellow former Pamyat member) Geydar Dzhemal having set up his own fascist think-tank the Florian Geyer Club. Dugin’s 2014 book Eurasian Mission also claims that Sheikh Talgat Tadzhuddin, Chief Mufti of the Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate, is a supporter. Whereas the mainstream hard right have shifted, post 9/11, to a superficially ‘pro-Jewish’ (or at least pro-Israeli) position of unity against Islam, the Duginists appear to want

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## **Dugin’s geopolitics is little different from those of Kissinger, Brzezinski, Clinton or Trump: the sowing of division between Russia and China. The only difference is which of the two they flatter and which they attack at any particular moment.**

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David Duke; one of his disciples, Nina Kouprianova, is married to leading US fascist Richard Spencer; whilst him and Alex Jones feature on each other’s TV shows, for example—but also seemingly with left groups such as Syriza, whose former foreign minister Nikos Kotzias invited him to give a lecture on Eurasianism at the University of Piraeus in 2013 according to the Financial Times. Dugin even appears to have a role as ‘unofficial envoy’ of the Russian government, allegedly helping to broker the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia following Turkey’s shooting down of a Russian fighter jet in 2015.

Dugin’s outlook essentially boils down to a combination of “ethnopluralism” and what he disingenuously terms Neo-Eurasianism. Both ideas lend themselves well to the building of a ‘red-brown’ fascist-led alliance, as both have elements which are superficially appealing to the left whilst in fact providing theoretical cover for genocide and imperial war.

Following de Benoist, ethnopluralism purports to be based on a respect for the unique cultures of all peoples, urging an end to the high-handed universalist arrogance of imperial liberal modernity. Politically-correct fascists in the Benoist-Dugin mold often claim to support ‘Black Power’, ‘Red Power’ and so on, along with White Power: Africa for the Africa; Europe for the Europeans. The corollary of both, of course, is that non-Europeans should get the hell out, and immigration is presented as a threat to, or even a plot against, the essentialized

to return the far right to its pre-9/11 tradition of courting right-wing Muslims into a joint anti-semitic programme. Ethnopluralism is, by definition, antisemitic, for what Dugin calls “subversive, destructive Jews without a nationality” are, by their very existence, a threat to its conception of racially-purified, culturally homogenous, ethno-states. This does not, of course, rule out support for Israel as the potential basis of such a state itself, and Dugin’s Arctogaia has indeed cultivated links with ultranationalist Zionist groups whose conceptions of cultural purity resonate with his own.

What Dugin calls ‘Neo-Eurasianism’, meanwhile, builds on US fascist Francis Parker Yockey’s advocacy of a grand coalition against ‘Atlanticism’ and US power. Again, this is, at first sight, appealing to genuine anti-imperialists; after all, what could be more anti-imperialist than a policy to isolate and weaken the world’s leading imperial power? On closer inspection, however, Dugin’s Eurasianism amounts to a crude attempt to form a Russian-led white power bloc aimed at destroying China and preparing for grand inter-imperialist world war. Dugin’s Manichean and occultist view of world history posits an eternal struggle between a degenerate ‘sea empire’, a ‘Leviathan’ represented today by the Atlanticism of the US and UK in particular, and a Russian-led ‘land empire’—a ‘Behemoth’ upholding traditional Slavic and European culture, and defending it against the Muslim and Chinese hordes un-



leashed by Atlanticist globalization. Dugin's "Foundations of Geopolitics", whilst advocating a propagandistic focus on the USA ("the main 'scapegoat' will be precisely the US", as he succinctly puts it), sees the real enemy as China, which, he writes, "must, to the maximum degree possible, be dismantled". Thus, despite its apparent hostility to the US, Duginism's immediate goal is in fact precisely the same as that of US imperialism—the destruction of China.

In fact, Neo-Eurasianism is a euphemistic misnomer for this project. The original Eurasianists of the interwar period—who, like the National Bolsheviks, arose from the remnants of the Russian white army in exile—were inspired by the Mongol Empire, and sought in some ways to recreate it. Dugin's project, however, as Edmund Griffiths has pointed out, is essentially the reconstitution of the territories of the Third Reich (including the parts of Russia it never conquered) under joint German-Russian tutelage (the 'Moscow-Berlin axis' as he terms it). In this, he is close to his mentor Thiriart's conception of a 'white-power bloc' from Lisbon to Vladivostok (and excluding all of Southwest and Southeast Asia). The real inspiration Dugin appears to have gained from classic Eurasianism was its strategy of the infiltration and colonization of the left rather than direct confrontation with it.

Like Hitler, Dugin's model for his future 'Eurasian empire' appears to be the British empire. Following the First War of Indian Independence of 1857—the largest anti-colonial uprising of the nineteenth century, which took the British three years to quell—Britain began to focus more on cultivating 'traditional' (and preferably sectarian) leaders for the outsourcing of some of Empire's dirty business, with the ruling families of much of today's Arab peninsula a still-existing product of this period. In the same fashion, Dugin's vision for 'Eurasia' appears to be a vast collection of cultural-nationalist bantustans controlled by Russian-anointed gangsters (or representatives of the traditional, patriarchal natural hierarchy, to use Dugin's own formulations) under overall Russian control. At the same time, Dugin's flattery of Islam has a geopolitical corollary in his advocacy of a "continental Russian-Islamic alliance"—with Iran in particular—based on the "traditional character of Russian and Islamic civilization". None of this flattery, it should be noted, has prevented Dugin from applauding a US President who has made the strangulation of Iran a defining feature of his foreign policy, just as it has not prevented Putin from collaborating with this strangulation of his supposed 'ally', both by greenlighting Israeli airstrikes on Iranian forces in Syria, and by pumping extra oil to allow Trump's blockade of Iranian oil. Far from it; indeed such actions only increase Iran's dependence on Russia, illustrating the chauvinist nature of the 'alliance', both as it appears in Dugin's philosophy and its realpolitik manifestation today.

Where 'Neo-Eurasianism' really reveals its compatibility with its supposed Atlantic enemy, however, is in its attitude to China. The dismemberment of China—identified in

"Foundations of Geopolitics" as Russia's chief regional rival—should begin, Dugin suggests, with the Russian annexation of Tibet, Xinjiang and Manchuria (as well as Mongolia) as a "security belt". The 'metapolitical' cultivation of hostility towards Russia's supposed rival is subtly but clearly underway throughout Dugin's networks, as even a cursory glance at the Katehon website reveals. One article, entitled "China is on the warpath: who will be the first victim?", tells its readers that "the Chinese army [is] preparing for war...breaking the delicate balance that has developed in the world after the Second World War" as "One by one it pinches off the territories of the countries of the former USSR—Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan". Its "aggressive aspirations" are also apparently revealed by its role in the South China Sea, though the article completely airbrushes out of the picture the increasingly belligerent US military encirclement and attempts to gain control over crucial naval 'choke holds' which are the obvious context and cause of China's defensive actions. As such, the piece, with a little sub-editing for grammar, could easily have been a straightforward US neocon oped. Another piece—"Is there an alternative to the Chinese New Silk Road?"—attempts to discredit China's Belt and Road Initiative as against the interests of the partner countries, and openly salivates about opportunities for Russia opened up by Trump's economic war on China. In this sense Dugin's geopolitics is little different from those of Kissinger, Brzezinski, Clinton or Trump: the sowing of division between Russia and China. The only difference is which of the two they flatter and which they attack at any particular moment.

Thus, 'Neo-Eurasianism' is far from being the anti-western, even pro-global South, initiative it is sometimes falsely seen as. It is the polar opposite of the 'tricontinentalism' of the 1960s and 70s, seeking not to unite Russia with the global South in a challenge to western imperialism, but rather to unite with one section of western imperialism (Europe) whilst actually fulfilling the geopolitical goals of the other (the destruction of China). Furthermore, even Russia itself is not necessarily served by such a strategy. Indeed, the same fascist militias now waging war against ethnic Russians in the Donbass were but a few short years ago part of Dugin's 'ethnopluralist' networks, attending his conferences in Russia.

Given the lack of a social base for genuine socialism (anti-imperialist and internationalist) in the west, leftists can be utilized by fascism without fear. By helping to delegitimize liberal democracy, leftists can inadvertently help lay the basis for fascism, which is, I believe, the natural home of the western masses in eras of crisis. Dugin is in this way in some ways similar to Trotskyist groups such as the British Socialist Workers' Party (SWP)—harnessing anger at the injustices of capitalism and imperialism but using this anger to actually further imperialist aims, whilst never challenging, and in fact perpetuating colonial attitudes. In the case of SWP, for all their revolutionary spiel, when push comes to shove, they support Brexit, campaign for imperialist parties at election time, oppose

all successful third world revolutions, etc. With Dugin, meanwhile, his programme amounts to a geopolitical attack on the USA's chief rival combined with the scapegoating of migrants for the cultural depredations of capitalism. Duginism is a classic fascist blend of 'anti-elite' rhetoric, demands for ethnic purification, and an imperial foreign policy agenda, all dressed up in politically-correct appeals to cultural distinctiveness and anti-western tubthumping. Its particular danger comes from the deep inroads it has made into anti-imperialist and leftist circles.

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## Red, White, Blue—and Green All Over Abbie Hoffman: American Environmentalist

BY JONAH RASKIN

### Riots Are Environments

When Abbie Hoffman took his own life on April 12, 1989, *The New York Times* ran an obit titled, "Abbie Hoffman, 60's Icon, Dies; Yippie Movement Founder Was 52." No mention was made of his work as an environmentalist. Indeed, in the mass media, which he regarded as friend and foe, he was remembered for his role during the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, and for his confrontations with Federal Judge Julius Hoffman during the "Conspiracy Trial" when he and seven other defendants, including Bobby Seale, Jerry Rubin and Tom Hayden, were charged with crossing state lines with the intent to riot.

At the Chicago trial, which climaxed a decade-long series of clashes between the state and the insurgents, Black Panther Seale was severed from the other defendants, but not before he was bound and gagged in the courtroom. "A black man chained and gagged because the court refused him the lawyer of his choice, then refused to let him defend himself... Nothing in our trial... could match the power and truth of that moment," he explained. On another occasion, he and Jerry wore black robes over the uniforms of the Chicago police. When Judge Hoffman sentenced the defendants, Abbie shouted, "You're a disgrace to the Jews. You would have served Hitler better."

The obits said little if anything about Abbie the environmentalist, though he led a battle for the environment while he was underground and a fugitive in the 1970s. Oddly enough, or perhaps not, he didn't promote himself as an environmentalist. In fact, he didn't want to be known as an "ist" of any kind, except "artist." He didn't care for "isms," either.

Still, during his time as a gadfly, misfit and existential warrior, he regarded the environment as a stage for political protest and guerrilla theater where he could massage the

message. "We have learned to manipulate media," he boasted even before the birth of Yippie in January 1968. It didn't matter if it was the streets of Chicago, Judge Hoffman "neon oven," the Merv Griffin show or the St. Lawrence. They were all ecological niches to be inhabited, deconstructed and recreated.

Hoffman never taught at a university, as did Bill Ayers and Todd Gitlin. Never worked nine-to-five for a newspaper like Berkeley radical Robert Scheer who joined *The Los Angeles Times*, and not like Juan Gonzales, the Young Lord who became a columnist at *The New York Daily News*. Nor did he turn to electoral politics as Tom Hayden did. Nearly all his adult life, Hoffman was a cultural revolutionary who reinvented Tom Paine's style of pamphleteering for the electronic age. In the end, the mass media offered the last words on Abbie. But for a decade and more, he thumbed his nose at CBS, Random House, the Justice Department and the FBI, which gathered over 17,000 pages about him.

In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, his classic of Sixties "agit-pop," he explained that riots were "Holy" and that they were also "environmental and psychological." In part, he was borrowing from Marshall McLuhan who wrote in *Understanding Media* (1962)—one of his bibles, along with Saul Alinsky's *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and Che's *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961)—that, "technologies have created a whole series of new environments... that provide us with a means of perceiving the environment itself."

In McLuhan's sense of the word, Abbie was an environmentalist long before the first Earth Day in 1970, when many speakers, including Rennie Davis, who had been on trial with Abbie in Chicago, aimed to radicalize the event. "Arrest Agnew and smash capitalism," Davis told an Earth Day crowd. I.F. Stone added that to make Earth Day meaningful it was essential to "end American imperialism." Abbie wanted to jail Agnew and smash imperialism as much as anyone else in the counterculture.

He was also a utopian who aimed to imagine the impossible. In his 1968 seventeen-point program for a "free society," which he signed "A. Yippie," he called for the creation of "alternative communities" and for "ecological development that will provide incentives for decentralization of our crowded cities and encourage rural living!" Environments, he explained were internal, external and socially constructed.

Hoffman's role as an "environmentalist" in the traditional sense of the word culminated in the late 1970s, when he took on the Army Corp of Engineers, the federal agency housed in the Department of Defense that ran roughshod over lakes, rivers, watersheds and more. The Corps wanted to dredge and expand the Saint Lawrence River and make it navigable for commercial shipping in winter. US Steel lobbied for the project because it meant more jobs, more shipping and more profits, or so corporate lawyers argued. When Abbie took on the Corps, he also took on US Steel. The bigger the foe the more he relished the fight.



*Abbie Hoffman on campus. (Photo: Wright State Archives.)*

The campaign to “Save the River,” as he dubbed it, was political. It was also personal. Indeed, he aimed to save himself and his reputation and demonstrate to fans and followers that he was the same Abbie who helped create the Yippies and who had protested at the New York Stock Exchange, the Pentagon and elsewhere.

Jay Levin, a former *New York Post* reporter and the founder of *The LA Weekly*, said, “Having the river to save, save him.” Ed Sanders, who owned and operated the Peace Eye Bookstore in New York, and a member of the Yippies, added, “Purifying the water was a way of simultaneously purifying himself.” By the time that Abbie aimed to protect the Saint Lawrence, Pete Seeger had made the cleanup of the Hudson a personal and a political priority.

The battle for the Saint Lawrence and the people who lived along it and loved it, required patience, dedication and the kind of community organizing on the grassroots level that Abbie had not done since the mid-1960s, when he lived in Worcester, Massachusetts, his hometown, where he was born to a conservative, middle class, Jewish family. Above all else, his father told him, stay off the streets and don’t get into trouble.

Married in 1960 at the age of 24, and employed as a trav-

eling salesman for a pharmaceutical company, he gravitated toward the local civil rights movement, which was led by lefty Catholics who adored Dorothy Day. From Worcester, he catapulted himself onto the Lower East Side where he identified hippies as the core citizens in the world he called “Woodstock Nation.”

In Manhattan in 1973—after a decade of protesting against the House Un-American Activities Committee, capital punishment, Wall Street and more, and after a summer in Mississippi—he was arrested by undercover cops and charged with possession of cocaine and intent to sell.

### **Enter Barry Freed**

Under the Draconian Rockefeller drug laws, he faced a minimum of fifteen-years in prison. Rather than go on trial and run the risk that a jury would find him guilty, he jumped bail and went underground, a new environment for him that tested his wits. Some things were relatively easy. He changed his appearance, dropped his trademark Massachusetts accent and adopted the alias “Barry Freed.” (As a Yippie he called himself “Free.”) What was hard was that he couldn’t capitalize on his fame as Abbie or reveal his identity. Still, he traveled

widely in the US, Mexico and Europe. In the late 1970s, he settled in the town of Fineview on Wellesley Island, one of the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence, where his companion, Johanna Lawrenson, a lefty fashion model, owned a summerhouse.

Island-by-island, Abbie fomented a grassroots rebellion against the powers-that-be and forged an organization called “Save the River.” “Save the River” was also the slogan and the name of the cause. From the start, Abbie insisted that the organization had to be called “Save the River,” not “Save the St. Lawrence,” as locals suggested. He had a vision of a nationwide organization that would save all the polluted and endangered rivers of America, from the Hudson and the Mississippi to the Rio Grande.

Beginning in the winter of 1978, he tilted rapidly toward the burgeoning environmental movement. Indeed, he was outraged when the story broke that Love Canal, a working-class town near Niagara Falls, sat atop tons of toxic industrial waste that had been buried by a local company in the 1940s and 1950s. From Love Canal until his suicide in 1989, he went from one environmental battle to another, including a stint with the anti-nuke movement and the protests that sprang up after the catastrophic meltdown at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in Pennsylvania.

I first met Abbie in New York in 1970 when he lived on East 13th Street. I joined the Yippies, linked Abbie to the fugitives in the Weather Underground and in 1971 protested with him and thousands of others at the Mayday demonstrations in Washington D.C., who were energized by the slogan, “If the government doesn’t stop the war, we’ll stop the government.”

In 1974, I aided and abetted him when he became Barry Freed and went underground. The following year, we traveled across Mexico, where he was writing his autobiography, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*, and I was writing *My Search for B. Traven*, an adventure story about the enigmatic author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. In 1980, G.P. Putnam’s Sons published Abbie’s autobiography with an Introduction by Norman Mailer who wrote that he was a “bona fide American revolutionary.”

Five-years earlier, in Mexico, Abbie and I wrote a treatment for a fictionalized account of the life of “B. Traven”—the pen name for Ret Marut, a World War I-era German pacifist and anarchist—who escaped from prison, traveled across Europe incognito and arrived in Mexico in the mid-1920s, where he recreated his identity.

By the late 1970s, when he settled on the St. Lawrence, Abbie had a keen sense that, like Ret Marut/ B. Traven, he could rewrite his own story and cast himself as a character in a real life movie. Nearly everything that he did on the St. Lawrence has the makings for a motion picture. When Karen Lago, the director of Save the River, repeatedly asked the man she knew as Barry Freed, “Who the hell are you?” and “What do you really do,” he wouldn’t give her a straight answer. Then, one day

he broke down and said, “I’m Abbie Hoffman.” Lago still didn’t believe him. “Yeah, and I’m Angela Davis,” she replied. When the Save the River softball team trounced a rival nine made up of agents from the US Border Patrol, he quipped, “No wonder you guys can never catch anyone.” He was hiding in plain sight.

After Abbie committed suicide in 1989, I went to the St. Lawrence and met the local environmentalists, including Lago and Rick Spencer. The University of California Press published *For the Hell of It: the Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman*, in 1996. If I had the opportunity to rewrite that biography, I would add information about Barry Freed and Save the River. After all, the organization still exists, and the project the Corps proposed has been dead in the water for forty-years. In the rewrite, I would parse the speech he delivered in person before the US Senate Field Hearing in Alexandria Bay, New York on August 27, 1979. Eight hundred local citizens from all walks of life heard his testimony.

New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan chaired the hearing. After the close of the session, he and Abbie posed for photos. “Everyone in New York State owes Barry Freed a debt of gratitude for his organizing ability,” Moynihan said. New York State Governor, Hugh Carey, wired a telegram in which he thanked Mr. Freed for his “keen public service.” He praised Save the River for its “excellent accomplishments to preserve and protect the environment and economic resources of the North County.” *The Watertown Times* described Freed as the “fast-talking, ambitious public relations chairman of Save the River.”

Before the hearing, Freed led a delegation of citizens to the state capitol in Albany, New York where they talked to their elected representatives. After the hearing, he led another delegation, this time to visit Republican Congressman, Robert McEwen, in Washington, D.C. On both occasions, he resisted the impulse to reveal his identity. He also kept the delegations on message.

Martin Kenner knew Abbie well on the river and off the river. In the late 1950s, they were both students at the University of California, when Lenny Bruce was Abbie’s hero and Fidel was Kenner’s years later, Abbie would become a standup comedian and Kenner would edit and publish *Fidel Castro Speaks*. An SDS member, he worked in the national office in Chicago. Later he and his wife, Camilla Smith, lived on Rhinestone Island not far from Wellesley Island where Abbie and Johanna Lawrenson. They attended Save the River functions, including a fund-raiser called, “the Booze Cruise” that took place on a speedboat.

“Abbie didn’t like organizations, but he started Save the River that has lasted forty-years,” Kenner said during an interview with me in November 2018. “He told people, ‘You have to do democracy.’”

Kenner added that, “While Abbie moved from issue to issue, he wasn’t fickle. Politics was in his bones.” In the early-1960s, it took the civil rights movement, the Student Non-Violent

Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", to lift him out of his humdrum life and turn him into him an actor, an anarchist and more and morphed from one role to another.

## Abbie's Comeback

One of Abbie's mantras, Kenner remembered, was "different times, different costumes." In 1979, at the Alexandria Bay hearing, he wore a tweed jacket, a beard and glasses and looked professorial. "My name is Barry Freed," he began. "My wife and I are property owners in Fineview, N.Y., on Wellesley Island." A decade earlier, he had quoted French anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, insisted that, "property is theft," and aimed to confront, polarize and shock. When he testified at Alexandria Bay, he aimed for a kind of "United Front," as it might have been called in another era.

He used his Alexandria Bay talk, as he had used his testimony at the conspiracy trial, to educate the public: "school teachers, sailors, housewives, children, senior citizens, small businessmen, 'river rats' and others," he called them. He traced the evolution of Save the River and he described the alliances that it forged with the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society the local Bass Fisherman's Club and the North Country Bird Society. He wasn't thinking and acting globally, but he was certainly thinking nationally as well as locally.

Abbie's goal was to expose the project "as a boondoggle" that might have boosted profits for US Steel, but that was a bust for the local economy. "The environmental damage would hurt our sixty-four-million-dollar tourist industry," he said. "Winter navigation would turn resorts like Alexandria Bay into ghost towns." He added that, "The Ministry of Transportation in Canada studied winter navigation and concluded that the project was not worth a single Canadian investment dollar." He had done his homework.

In his concluding remarks, he appealed to emotions and morality. "We have succeeded in uniting river people as varied as the thousand island themselves," he said. "We've united everyone in a single voice that says NO to breaking up the ice and YES to a vigorous local economy and healthy river, not just for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren to come."

Soon after his Alexandria Bay testimony, he surrendered to the authorities in New York City. Four months later, he appeared in court, pled guilty to possession of cocaine and was sentenced to three-years in prison. He served two months at the Downstate Correctional Facility, a minimum-security prison in Fishkill, New York, a stark environment, indeed, where he went on a hunger strike when he learned that IRA member, Bobby Sands, had died in prison in Northern Ireland.

After two months at Fishkill, Abbie was moved to the Lincoln Correctional Facility in Manhattan, where he was allowed to work during the day as a drug counselor at the Veritas Therapeutic Community, a treatment center for heroin addicts. At the conclusion of his work-release program, he

went on a speaking tour and addressed thousand of college students who laughed at his jokes but who, he complained, "Were cynical and despairing."

The politics of the Reagan 1980s depressed him. Plus he was diagnosed as clinically depressed. His own internal environment dragged him down; the side effects of medication sapped his spirit.

In Los Angeles in 1979, Dr. Oscar Janiger, the first of several psychiatrists with whom he conferred, examined him and concluded that he was "suffering from Biopolar Disorder, Depressed." Janiger prescribed Lithium and recommend that he "continue psychiatric care for a yet undetermined period of time."

For the rest of his life, Abbie was on and off anti-depressants, which slowed him down, but didn't stop him from writing and protesting. Despite the political climate of the Reagan era—"The Ice Age," he called it—and his own mood swings, he co-authored, with Jonathan Silvers, *Steal This Urine Test*, an extended pamphlet and how-to-beat-the system guidebook meant to undermine the mandatory drug testing of workers that had spread across the country.

In the last decade of his life, he wrote for *The Nation*, took on Jerry Rubin in the Yippie/Yuppie debates, battled the Philadelphia Electric Company and protested, with Amy Carter—the president's daughter—CIA recruitment at the University of Massachusetts. His slogan: "What's so intelligent about the CIA?" He and Amy were arrested. They went on trial and were found not guilty. He appeared on 20/20 with Barbara Walters, in Oliver Stone's movie, *Born on the Fourth of July* and in *My Dinner with Abbie*, a film by Nancy Cohen that was made before and then released after he committed suicide in Solebury, Pennsylvania where he took 150 capsules of phenobarbital and washed them down with a glass of Glenlivet. That's what the coroner concluded after an autopsy.

## In Retrospect

Forty years after Rick Spencer first met Abbie on the river, he remembered him "as a great fucking community organizer." Born in 1946 and a decade younger than Abbie, Spencer graduated from Ohio State, became an anti-war activist in the 1960s, fell in love with the Thousand Islands and settled there. For much of his adult life, he worked for Save the River and for The Natural Wild Life Foundation where he lobbied for clean water.

"I think that Abbie did his best work when he was underground on the St. Lawrence," Spencer said during an interview with me in November 2018. "At first, he didn't appear in public; he was afraid he'd be arrested and go to jail." Spencer remembered that Abbie "delegated responsibilities and taught the ABC's of organizing: the importance of talking to the media; and devising a strategy that would fit the community. Also, that we had to get the facts straight, and that just because we were doing serious work didn't mean that we couldn't have



fun.” Spencer added, “He changed my life.”

Abbie’s brand of environmentalism inspired activists who aimed to save rivers, protect wetlands and provide citizens with clean water and clean air. Still, in 1978, he was a kind of outlier. American leftists were slow to join the environmental moment and even slower to make it more responsive to the needs of people of color and the working classes. Rue Mapp does that now at Outdoor Afro, the organization she created in 2009 in Oakland. Every since then she has brought African Americans into the wilds and has linked civil rights with the right to enjoy nature. In 1978, that fusion of causes that are often “siloe” was largely unheard of.

Looking back, it’s not difficult to understand why radicals were leery of environmentalism. Many of the environmentalists of the 1960s, who lobbied for the 1964 Wilderness Act, were well-off white males who hunted, fished, camped in the wilds for weeks at a time and didn’t think about the needs of Native Americans. Moreover, until the War in Vietnam ended in 1975, young radicals rightfully focused their energies on the withdrawal of US troops, the end of bombing and support for the National Liberation Front. Very few anti-war activists talked explicitly about Vietnam as an environmental disaster, though it clearly was that.

In 1980 came Ronald Reagan and the “Reagan Revolution” which aimed to roll back the gains of the civil rights era and the environmental movement that had helped create and protect national parks. Reagan’s Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, favored blatant commercial development and private property over preservation of forests and prairies. Watt was so bad that he helped to invigorate the environmental movement and push it toward the left.

Earth First! arrived on the scene in 1980, though the books by Edward Abbey (1927-1989), including *Desert Solitaire* (1968) encouraged the kind of “direct action” that became a tactic for Earth First! in the Reagan Era. Tree sitters followed; Julia Butterfly Hill brought national attention to logging in northern California. By then, former members of the Weather Underground—who had real experience with sabotage—had given up “direct action,” though many of them still endorsed it. Abbie’s manic depression sidelined him from environmental battles. Jerry Rubin became a capitalist; Bobby Seale wrote a book about barbecuing, and several generations of protesters and activist recycled the tactics of Abbie and the Yippies at Occupy and elsewhere.

In the ongoing epic in which corporations and governments pillage the Earth and human beings resist, rebel and aim to survive, Jeff Jones is a remarkable figure. An SDS member in the 1960s, and one of the leaders of Weatherman and later the Weather Underground, he connected with Abbie when they were both fugitives. In the 1980s, Jones became an environmental activist.

These days, he calls himself “a political strategist and lobbyist for environmental and clean energy groups.” In an

interview with me in November 2018, he remembered that, “The organized, militant ideological left largely missed the first Earth Day.” He added, “I saw Earth Day as a distraction from the immediate task of ending the War in Vietnam.”

Prairie Fire, the one-hundred-and-fifty-four-page-book that the Weather Underground published in 1974 and that Jones helped to write, says a lot about imperialism, racism and sexism, but almost nothing about the environment. One sentence stands out: “The plunder for sources of power is emerging as a major threat to the survival of rural areas of this country and to the continued culture and community of people who live there.” In fact, plunder and genocide had been going on for nearly five-hundred-years.

Jones, who lives and works in Upstate New York, thinks of Abbie as a fallen comrade who ought to be remembered. “If he were alive today, he would support the people-of-color-led environmental justice movement that’s growing,” Jones said. “He would also recognize “that the people who suffer the worst consequences of climate change bear the least responsibility for climate collapse.”

Jones added, “We miss Abbie’s humor, energy and organizing brilliance.” Indeed, we do, whether we were Yippies, Weathermen, members of the peace, civil rights and women’s movements, as well as the early supporters of Earth Day that’s now about to reach its forty-ninth year, and as worthy of honoring as ever before. **CP**

**JONAH RASKIN** is the author of *For The Hell of It: The Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman*.

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## John Thorne in the Lion’s Den An Unsung Hero

BY RON JACOBS

November 20, 1969, Olympia, Washington. Four days earlier, members of the El Salvadoran military had murdered six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper in cold blood. Farabundo Marti Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) forces had been engaged in a country wide offensive against the US funded and trained Salvadoran military and its death squad allies (some were members of both). FMLN fighters had taken over part of the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador, the capital city. This hotel was where much of the US diplomatic corps, CIA spies and mainstream media stayed, partied and met with Salvadoran military and government officials. The FMLN fighters were naturally met with some resistance. To their surprise, among those fighting their intrusion were US Special Forces troops—who were there in contravention to US law. Hundreds of Olympia residents had gathered in front of the Olympia Federal Building to protest the US involvement in the war and to protest the murders of the Jesuits and thousands

of other civilians. Some of us wanted an FMLN victory, others just wanted a ceasefire and negotiations.

Members of the Olympia chapter of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) had been planning this protest for a few weeks. We had been coordinating our efforts with the national CISPES organization and its regional organizer, a young man from Tacoma, Washington. The planning involved the usual: contacting the media, printing up leaflets and posters, arranging speakers and marshals for the parade and rally. In other words, getting out the word in the hopes of getting a decent crowd. To be honest, the actions of the US government and its Salvadoran allies had helped that process a lot. People were genuinely angry at the murders of the priests and presence of uniformed US troops engaged in battling the FMLN. They wanted to do something to register that anger.

Some of us intended to more than just hold signs and chant. We planned on occupying the building. Naturally, we did not

a couple dozen cops and security officials showed up. Then we sat on the steps leading up to the Federal Building. After a short while, we were told our assembly was illegal and that the steps needed to be cleared immediately. Only a couple people left. Law enforcement continued making their plans. A bus with police in riot gear pulled up and so did a couple more police vans. The bus emptied its cargo of cops and parked in one lane of the street. Protesters sat on the steps and milled around in front of them. After one more warning, the cops began moving toward the steps and started arresting people. The bus began to fill up with arrested protesters. One of the organizers broke away from the police and ran. A couple cops ran after him but failed to catch him. As the final protesters were removed from the steps, placed in plastic cuffs and put on the bus, those of us working the support/legal function of the protest began to strategize the next moves. Obviously, the first thing was to get the people out of jail. It was then that John Thorne volunteered his services. Thorne was an attorney who

had worked on many well-known cases from the 1950s through the 1980s. Those cases included fighting the McCarran Act and House of Un-American Activities hearings, doing legal work for the Mississippi Freedom

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## People stood on desks inside the Capitol building chanting: “Fight the Power!”

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let our intentions be known at the planning meetings open to the public. I don't even remember if we talked about our plan with the CISPES organizer. Our plans were simple. A half dozen would enter the building while the protest was going on outside. We would find an open office with windows facing the front of the building, enter it, and announce our intention to stay there to the workers in the office. Those in our group who were not in the building would announce the occupation to the protesters outside when the occupiers were inside the office and considered their situation secure. These folks would encourage others to join the occupiers while the rest of the folks in the “clandestine action” group would keep an eye out for police activity. We hoped to coordinate the inside and outside activities via walkie talkies (this was before cell phones were as common as car keys). To this end, a fellow organizer and I visited the Federal Building a few days before the protest. In short, we were casing the joint.

As it turned out, the Federal Building was locked down the day of the protest. I don't think our security was breached. I just think it was a harbinger of a time in the near future when the federal government would be enhancing security in all of its buildings, not because it necessarily made them more secure but because it separated the people further from the government they were led to believe was theirs. Since we couldn't get into the building, we considered other forms of direct action. We attempted blocking the street in front of the Federal Building but were thwarted in our efforts when

Party, the Soledad Brothers, George Jackson and Angela Davis, the American Indian Movement defendants after the 1973 Wounded Knee takeover and for Iranian students opposed to the Shah.

After I asked if he could help, Thorne reminded me that he wasn't licensed to practice law in Washington State. I asked how much that mattered. He said it shouldn't matter much in terms of getting the people out of jail, but he would probably not be allowed to represent them in court. We agreed that we could cross that bridge when we came to it. John headed over to the jailhouse and I stayed with the remaining protesters talking with the media, quelling rumors and chilling out.

I had met Thorne a year or so earlier at a meeting concerning the protest movement against the US wars in Central America. He had approached me after the meeting to talk about legal strategies. He never let on that he was the same John Thorne who had been on George Jackson's legal team, although I wondered as soon as he introduced himself. Sure enough, when I went home after that meeting I found his name in a book I had on my bookshelf titled *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Right there in the opening sentences for the entry dated May 22, 1970 is the first mention. After that first meeting, I would see John around town. Our conversations were friendly and brief.

The protester who ran eventually turned himself in. Thorne accompanied him and got him released immediately after processing. If I remember correctly, John ended up providing legal

counsel for that protester and three others who were arrested on the Federal Building steps. His work helped them all get off with no jail time or fines.

On January 15, 1991 the Olympia Antiwar Coalition held a rally against the buildup of US military forces in the Middle East and the imminent possibility of war. The Coalition had been hastily formed after President George HW Bush had announced he was sending military forces and equipment to the Middle East to oppose Saddam Hussein's military occupation of Kuwait. It appeared that his intention was to invade Iraq. Most people agree that over three thousand people attended that protest. After the rally was over, we marched up the same street we had hoped to block at the November 1989 protest to the Washington State Capitol building. We held another brief rally on the Capitol steps which ended with long time antiwar activist Peter Bohmer urging people to enter the building and continue the protest. Although the legislature was supposed to be in session, they had decided not to meet that day, most likely because of the protest. At least a thousand protesters entered the building and began to chant "No War!" and other slogans underneath the dome. News agencies sent their video and text out to national feeds to join the news about other antiwar protests taking place around the country that same day. While the police and building security scurried around trying to control the loud and rowdy crowd, a group of a couple dozen protesters (mostly students) found an unlocked door to the legislative chambers and entered. Soon hundreds of others had joined them. People stood on desks and chairs chanting the slogan "Fight the Power!" from the Public Enemy song popularized in the then current movie *Do the Right Thing*. After a few minutes, the scene calmed down and those who had originally entered the chambers asked for quiet. They then announced their plans to stay in the chambers until the Washington legislature issued a statement opposing any military attack on Iraq. A few more people joined them. The rest of the protesters began to slowly file out while cops and media watched. By this time, state police had called for reinforcements and, as I looked out a window in the chamber, I saw numerous police vans and cars pulling up to the building and unloading their uniformed passengers. There were also more media trucks parking in the lot nearby. I found a pay phone and called John Thorne. We were going to need some legal assistance and someone with negotiating skills who the cops would listen to. That wasn't me or any of the other organizers. The cops would blame us for letting the protest follow its own course and as far as they were concerned, get well out of hand. Personally, I dug the direction the protest was taking.

I don't remember if Thorne answered the phone or if he was already on his way. I do recall that in the next half hour or so most of the protesters left the legislative chambers and the Capitol building, leaving hundreds of antiwar signs scattered around. Some had taken the time to tape them on the wall and in the windows of the rotunda. I also remember talking briefly

to a dozen or so media folks explaining that yes there were people occupying the chamber, yes they planned on staying the night and yes they were urging the legislature to issue a statement opposing military action in Iraq. Did I think they would be arrested and thrown out? I replied I wasn't going to speculate about police plans, but I hoped not. Then we talked for a few minutes about the protest, the imminent war and who I was exactly. I kept my comments brief and let the press move on to another organizer.

I was communicating with the occupiers by passing notes through the now-locked doors to the chambers. It was evening. The Olympia Food Co-op had arranged to get some food brought to them and I was trying to convince a police lieutenant to pass the food on to them. He was not being very cooperative. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Thorne appeared. I stopped talking to the lieutenant, telling him that someone else would be continuing the conversation. John waved hello. I told him what was going on. He introduced himself to the lieutenant and within minutes had got him to agree to letting the occupiers have some food. When the food did arrive, there were a couple boxes of sandwiches. The occupiers took one and suggested to the police that they could have the rest. I like to think that gesture helped ease the tension, which was quite thick. Except for the lieutenant, most of the cops were in their riot gear, with their helmets hanging off their belts. They were in a room by themselves and I could only catch glimpses of them when the door would open. John told me he was going into the lion's den, smiled and knocked on the door of the room where the police were preparing their next move.

It took an hour or so, but when John came out of the room, he had negotiated a plan where the cops would not remove the occupiers during the night and would even provide them with the blankets some college and high school students had brought to the Capital for them. The next morning, the occupiers left, after Thorne had negotiated a promise that no charges would be brought against them. The legislators did not pass a statement, although a fair number of them issued a statement supporting the demands of the protest (but not the protest, of course).

That evening we were back in the streets protesting the war, which began less than twelve hours after the occupiers had left the building. I had John's phone number on the 1991 version of speed dial—it was written in magic marker on my wrist.

I ran into John a few more times in the next couple years. He would almost always offer to buy me a beverage and a sandwich. I almost always got him to tell me a story or two about the trials and work he had been involved with.

John Thorne died in 2002. **CP**

**RON JACOBS** is the author of *Daydream Sunset: Sixties Counterculture in the Seventies*.

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## Endangered Species Act Noah's Ark or Titanic?

BY CRAIG COLLINS, PH.D.

Terrifying is the only way to describe the mounting scientific evidence that insects are rapidly vanishing from our planet. In just 30 years, nearly eighty percent of Earth's insect biomass has disappeared. And, no matter what you think of bugs, we can't live without them. Insects are at the heart of every food web. They pollinate most plant species including our crops; they keep our topsoil healthy; they recycle nutrients and control pests. In addition, they provide food for all the birds, fish, reptiles and other creatures further up the food chain. Sooner or later, if bugs go, so do we.

Climate disruption, habitat loss, and pesticide poisoning are causing insect extinction. But this drastic die-off is just one of the flashing warning signs that we are in deep trouble. The malignant spread of profit-driven, fossil-fueled globalization has unleashed a planetary extinction holocaust. Earth's most biodiverse ecosystems are failing fast. Coral reefs are dying from climate change and pollution; mangrove swamps are being uprooted for shrimp farms and beachfront development; and rainforests are being torched for soybeans, palm oil, and cattle ranches.

In theory, the collapse of global biodiversity was supposed to be prevented by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered (CITES). But in reality this has amounted to trying to stop a raging wildfire with a squirt gun.

When Congress passed the ESA and signed on to CITES back in 1973, it was responding to intense public pressure to save a growing number of species from extinction. Groups like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund raised public awareness and sympathy by showcasing the plight of a small group of cute or charismatic creatures—like pandas, bald eagles and blue whales—whose survival was threatened by human encroachment. This campaign was so effective that the media still portrays the struggle to preserve biodiversity as an altruistic endeavor pressed upon society by tree-hugger environmentalists who want to protect endangered wildlife from extinction.

This was a fairly accurate perception back in the 1970s when the rate of extinction hovered around 100 species a year. At that pace, it seemed reasonable to craft a law that sought to identify and list species for protection one at a time. But those days are over. Today, some biologists estimate the rate of extinction at 100,000 species a year and climbing! At this rate, preserving biodiversity has gone from an altruistic enterprise to a matter of human survival. Vital species and the ecosystems they call home are under assault by the relentless incursion of human civilization.

Most biologists believe we have instigated the sixth major extinction episode in our planet's history. The renowned paleo-anthropologist, Richard Leakey, says this sixth extinction crisis, "means the annihilation of vast numbers of species. It is happening now, and we, the human race, are its cause... Every year, between 17,000 and 100,000 species vanish from our planet. For the sake of argument, let's assume the number is 50,000 a year. Whatever way you look at it, we're destroying the Earth at a rate comparable with the impact of a giant asteroid slamming into the planet."

Using Leakey's figures, the global rate of extinction has accelerated about 500 percent since the ESA (and CITES) became law. The implications of these statistics are staggering. Already, humans consume about 40 percent of the plant energy available for all terrestrial life, and this figure will only grow as our population leaps from 7.5 to 10 billion inside the next half-century. At this pace, Leakey predicts that half of the Earth's species will vanish within 100 years. But this die-off could accelerate rapidly if greenhouse gases wreak havoc with the Earth's climate.

Without nature, we're toast. We really need to "get this" before it's too late. Disappearing butterfly species and the mysterious collapse of bee colonies around the world threaten all the crops they pollinate. The massive die-off of North American bats is wiping out a major insect predator that prevents our harvests from becoming bug food. The acidification and warming of the oceans jeopardizes the survival of corals and the tiny zooplankton that form the foundation of the marine food chain.

We have to stop thinking of "nature" as something we visit when we go camping or watch on the Discovery channel. Without nature, our supermarkets would be empty. Nature is the fresh water, sunshine and rich topsoil (teeming with trillions of beneficial microorganisms) that nurture the plants and animals that fill our refrigerators and our bellies. Nature is the vast blue oceans that regulate our climate, supply most of our oxygen and provide the tons of seafood we consume every day. Nature purifies our water, pollinates our crops, recycles our wastes and provides us with clothing, medicine, and shelter. We simply can't do without it. Preserving biodiversity is essential to our survival.

While the ESA cannot be expected to save imperiled species outside our borders, has it reduced the rate of extinction within the United States? There are 1,618 species officially listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA. However, these "listed species" are only a small fraction of all the species whose survival is actually imperiled. The exact size of this fraction is difficult to determine because there are thousands of plants and animals we know little or nothing about. Estimates of the actual number of species in jeopardy of extinction in the US range from 6,480 to 165,000. Therefore, the 1,618 species listed for ESA protection are somewhere between 1 and 30 percent of all US species actually facing extinction. Consequently, 70 to



Grizzly bears. Photo: USFWS.

99 percent of all imperiled creatures in the US receive no legal protection from the ESA because they aren't listed.

The arduous listing process is one of the ESA's most onerous defects. Listing species for protection one by one, instead of preserving the integrity of entire ecosystems, is an expensive, rigorous, time consuming ordeal constrained by scientific ignorance, bureaucratic intransigence, political pressure, partisan politics and budgetary shortfalls. Species designated as "candidates for listing" wait an average of 20 years to get listed. Meanwhile, many go extinct.

But even species lucky enough to be listed have a slim chance of survival. Of the 1,618 species protected by the ESA, only 34 have recovered enough to make it off the list. This is a 2 percent recovery rate! Only 10 percent of all listed species are considered improving, 30 percent are considered stable and 60 percent continue to slip toward extinction.

This abysmal record is the result of several legal loopholes. For example, the ESA requires every endangered species to be designated a critical habitat and a recovery plan. But this seldom happens because the Interior Department and the other agencies in charge of ESA enforcement are compromised by their incestuous involvement with the powerful mining, timber, oil and gas interests, which oppose any restrictions on their exploitation of public lands. Agency officials misuse minor exclusions in the law to avoid critical habitat requirements altogether or limit them so severely that species cannot

possibly recover. Consequently, over 80 percent of all listed species have no critical habitat protection and 40 percent have no recovery plan.

The overriding weakness in the ESA is that no legal barrier can possibly halt the relentless juggernaut of economic growth at the heart of our extinction crisis. Human activities like urban sprawl, deforestation, road and dam building, industrial agriculture, grazing, mining, oil drilling, over fishing, marine pollution, poaching, harvesting and hunting wild species for food, sport and profit all continue to decimate the web of life we depend on for our survival. And now, climate disruption is magnifying the potential for widespread extinctions.

The ESA's inability to preserve biodiversity and slow the pace of extinction simply reflects the fact that we are caught up in a cancerous global economic system. An economic machine so driven by the demands of growth and profit that it must devour, exploit and expand at the expense of the living biosphere that sustains us. Reversing this unfolding calamity is beyond the scope of any law or single country. It requires the transformation of our entire economic system to bring it into balance with the planet.

**CRAIG COLLINS** is the author of *Toxic Loopholes* (Cambridge University Press). He teaches political science and environmental law at California State University East Bay and was a founding member of the Green Party of California.

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Michel Houellebecq, Trump and World Order

BY CHARLES PIERSON

Michel Houellebecq has been called many things: a nihilist, a misanthrope, a sexist, an Islamophobe...about the only thing Houellebecq hasn't been called is an optimist. Yet he has just published an optimistic take on Donald Trump. Too bad the Trump described doesn't exist outside Houellebecq's imagination.

That's a pity. In "Donald Trump Is a Good President" in the January Harper's magazine, Houellebecq readily admits that "On the personal level, [Trump] is, of course, pretty repulsive. If he consorted with a porn star, that's not a problem, who gives a shit, but making fun of handicapped people is bad behavior." Houellebecq "empathize[s] with the shame many Americans ... feel at having such an appalling clown for a leader."

Houellebecq isn't concerned with Trump's personal shortcomings, however. Instead, Houellebecq wants Americans to "consider things for a moment from a non-American point of view." As Houellebecq sees it, the US is no longer trying to remake the world in its own image ("The Americans have stopped trying to spread democracy to the four corners of the globe."). Instead, "The Americans are getting off our backs. The Americans are letting us exist."

This is only a "non-American point of view" in the sense that Houellebecq is French, not American. You would have a hard time finding many Europeans, Asians, Africans, or Latin Americans who think the US is getting off their backs.

Houellebecq is a satirist, so I can't

be sure Houellebecq isn't kidding. Houellebecq didn't invent despair, but he has come close to perfecting it. Houellebecq's novels take place in a bleak, loveless, post-Christian Europe of alienated men and women who have no deeper meaning to their lives than the pursuit of the next joyless orgasm. The best Houellebecq's characters can hope for is to be replaced by a new species of post-humans. This happens in Houellebecq's unsettling breakthrough novel *The Elementary Particles* (1998) and in *The Possibility of an Island* (2005). "Donald Trump Is a Good President" may simply be Houellebecq taking a needed holiday from melancholy.

embraced dictators. Trump, they say, is destroying the rules-based world order that the US itself engineered following World War Two.

These observations are largely accurate, but they do not mean that the US is "disengaging" from the world. That conclusion confuses unilateralism with isolationism. I am all for isolationism, but Trump is, sadly, no isolationist. Trump likes the US being top dog, but he is afraid that the US has slipped from its position on top. (Whether Trump's policies will put the US back on top is the question.) What Trump doesn't like are what he perceives as "globalist" institutions. Trump despises the UN, NATO,



Predator drone. Photo: US Air Force.

Houellebecq's intriguing thesis is that President Trump is "disengaging" the US from its global dominance. I think US disengagement would be a good thing. But is there anyone who thinks that this is what is happening?

Actually, there is. Since Trump came into office, the foreign policy establishment has been in a panic about America's supposed abandonment of "global leadership" (the polite phrase for "What we say, goes"). Both liberal interventionists and neoconservatives accuse Trump of tarnishing America's image abroad. They say that Trump has alienated allies and

and the European Union. He believes that America's allies drain the US by allowing the US to pay for their security. Trump has said that he prefers bilateral trade agreements to multilateral trade pacts. He took the US out of the Paris Climate Accord, the INF Treaty, and President Barack Obama's nuclear deal with Iran. He has spoken with administration officials about withdrawing the US from NATO.

It's worth noting that the rules-based world order was a whole hell of a lot less benign than its outraged defenders let on. Writing in *The American Conservative*,

Andrew Bacevich observes:

[A]mong the items failing to qualify for mention in the liberal internationalist, rules-based version of past US policy are the following: meddling in foreign elections; coups and assassination plots in Iran, Guatemala, the Congo, Cuba, South Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, and elsewhere; indiscriminate aerial bombing campaigns in North Korea and throughout Southeast Asia; a nuclear arms race bringing the world to the brink of Armageddon; support for corrupt, authoritarian regimes in Iran, Turkey, Greece, South Korea, South Vietnam, the Philippines, Brazil, Egypt, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and elsewhere [Saudi Arabia, anyone?]—many of them abandoned when deemed inconvenient; the shielding of illegal activities through the use of the Security Council veto; unlawful wars launched under false pretenses; “extraordinary rendition,” torture, and the indefinite imprisonment of persons without any semblance of due process ... [T]he actions and episodes enumerated above do not suggest a nation committed to liberalism, openness, or the rule of law.

Bacevich believes that “the 45th president does not subscribe to the imperative of sustaining American hegemony...” I respect Bacevich, but I disagree with him here. If Trump actually were scaling back the exercise of US power, I’d join Houellebecq and Bacevich in rooting for him. The evidence proves otherwise. Consider:

Trump has continued Obama’s policy of helping the Saudis destroy Yemen.

Defense budget for FY 2019: \$717 billion

US overseas bases: 800

US troops deployed overseas: anywhere between 200,000 and 400,000 in nearly 150 countries

From 2017 to 2018, US troops were in combat in 14 countries, more than half of them in Africa.

US drone strikes: Obama conduct-

ed more killer drone strikes than did President George W. Bush. President Trump is poised to beat Obama’s record. In May, Mother Jones magazine estimated that drone strikes under Trump are “killing five to ten times as many civilians as Obama did.”

The US is a superpower that has no intention of retiring.

What about Trump’s announcement in December that he would withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan? Let’s just say that Trump will withdraw from Syria and Afghanistan if John Bolton lets him.

Speaking of Bolton, if Trump’s aim was “disengagement,” would he have appointed the walrus-mustached uberhawk John Bolton as national security adviser? For decades, Bolton has argued for attacks on Iraq, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Iran—and for all we know, Greenland. In mid-January, the Wall Street Journal revealed that Bolton had asked the Pentagon for options to strike Iran after Iranian-backed militants had fired on an empty field situated on the grounds of the US Embassy in Baghdad. While the attack did not exactly rank up there with Pearl Harbor, Bolton welcomes any excuse for a war with Iran.

So, how did the myth that Trump is “disengaging” the US from the world get started? I think that many people have concluded incorrectly that Trump

is an isolationist because of the slogan “America First.” Yet when have things been otherwise (at least, if “America” means the interests of its wealthiest citizens)? Unlike his predecessors, Trump is merely being blunt. (Maybe that’s why the establishment hates the phrase: Trump is giving the game away.)

Houellebecq is wrong to think that the US is stepping back from the rest of the world. But Houellebecq has many odd ideas. Houellebecq writes that “an authentic Christian conservative—which is to say, an honorable and moral person—would have been better for America.” Houellebecq is encouraged by the fact that in six years, Senator Ted Cruz will “still be comparatively young.” (This may not be the time to mention that Cruz the Christly wanted to destroy ISIS by nuking the Middle East.) Houellebecq gets plenty of things wrong, but his mistakes are fascinating. Houellebecq is more interesting when he’s wrong than many other pundits when they’re right. The last thing I want him to do is shut up. But at the end of the day we need to remember that Houellebecq is a fiction writer. Donald Trump is Houellebecq’s most vivid, most outlandish character. **CP**

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