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ISSUE 218

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

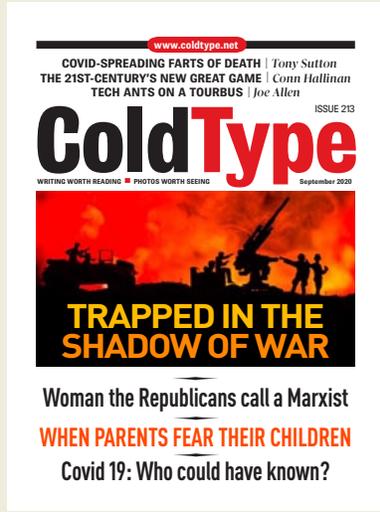
January 2021

America's long march to disaster

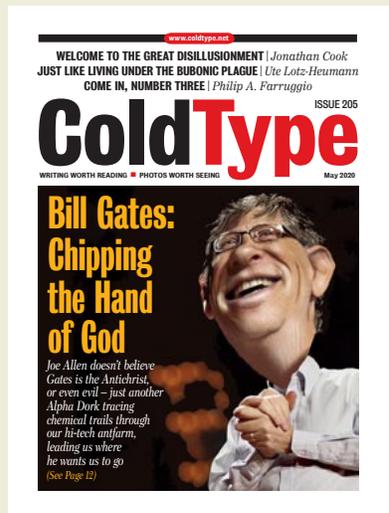
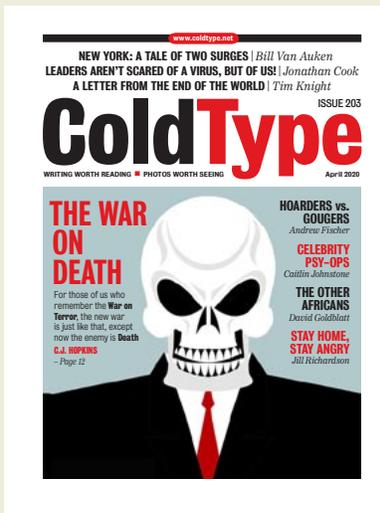
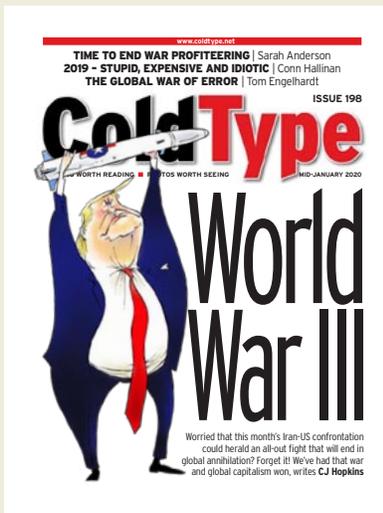
It's been almost 20 years since 9/11, but military victory is now more elusive than ever for the United States as the cost of endless war becomes increasingly unsustainable

– Rebecca Gordon / Page 14





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Issue 218 January 2021

Contents

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

Insights

- 5 **Ghosts from an apartheid gone by** / *Ronnie Kasrils*
- 7 **Pulp fiction and the Vietnam war** / *W.J. Astore*
- 8 **Why Vera is my favourite detective** / *Sue Turnbull*
- 10 **Public Enemy 1: Media propaganda** / *Caitlin Johnstone*
- 11 **The Covid Horrors: A love story**
Thomas S. Harrington
- 12 **'Herd immunity' gets a new definition**
Kit Knightly

Issues

- 14 **America's long march to disaster** / *Rebecca Gordon*
- 18 **Hurwitt's Eye** / *Mark Hurwitt*
- 20 **Country music's obscured black roots**
Liam Kennedy
- 22 **Coughs across America** / *Joe Allen*
- 26 **Scottie and Virginia: 80 years on** / *Trevor Hoyle*
- 30 **Gun Crazy** / *Gabriele Galimberti*
- 34 **The most lethal threat isn't Covid. It's War!**
John Pilger
- 37 **The myth of the youngest self-made billionaire**
Sam Pizzigati
- 40 **12-star blues** / *Michael Goldrei*
- 44 **The high price of the new high ground**
Conn Hallinan
- 48 **GloboCap Year Zero** / *C.J. Hopkins*



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The assault on free speech within Britain's Labour Party speaks like a ghost from my past. I was banned from public speaking in apartheid South Africa almost 60 years ago. My crime, aged 23, was advocating votes for all. The apartheid government accused those like me of undermining the safety of whites.

When all avenues of peaceful change were blocked, we had no option but to turn to armed struggle. We argued that there was no equivalence between the state violence of the oppressor and the resistance of the oppressed. International solidarity helped bring about the demise of the apartheid system.

Ronnie Kasrils

Ghosts from an apartheid gone by

We empathise with those in the Labour Party today, who are being victimised by a double agenda: for their socialism and for defending Palestinian rights. It is astonishing and deplorable that a witch hunt is under-

way within those ranks – as elsewhere.

I was invited to address a BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) event in Vienna over a year ago which the city council quickly banned. A couple of months ago I was involved in a planned event with Palestinian freedom fighter Leila Khaled, at San Francisco State University, which was blocked.

Then attempts to have our discussion broadcast via Zoom, Facebook and Youtube were obstructed. The voice that opponents of free speech were desperate to gag was Khaled – the Palestinian narrative being the primary target.

Those who attack human

Insights

rights, whether in advanced capitalist countries or feudal tyrannies, simultaneously attack Palestinian rights. They follow violent precedents and consequences.

Repressing freedom of speech in South Africa paved the way for the emergence of a terrorist state.

Ruthless suppression was instrumentalised in Europe's colonies and by US imperialism on the back of slavery and genocide – and in the colonisation and dismantling of Palestine. The context was the project to counter the national-liberation upsurge of the 20th century.

The Apartheid regime's use of anti-communism as a blanket device to smash opposition, along with Joe McCarthy's witch hunting, is mirrored in manipulating "antisemitism" as a shield to protect Israel. It is an umbrella formula to delegitimise the Palestinian cause and BDS campaign.

Upholding Palestinian rights has been reflected in United Nations resolutions and statements by Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Tutu, Angela Davis, Arundhati Roy, Noam Chomsky and, back in time, Jewish scholars such as Eric Fromm and Martin Buber.

Apartheid alleged that the South African struggle was about sweeping whites into the sea and handing the country to Russia. This echoes the claim that giving in on human and national rights of the dispossessed Palestinians means the extinction of the Jewish people.

Those linking freedom of ex-

pression and Palestinian solidarity articulate the same goals as we did in South Africa's struggle – the objective is about changing a system, not destroying a people.

Criticising Zionism, an exclusivist ethnic-based political doctrine, is not anti-semitic. It is the valid criticism of a reactionary political theory. Zionism, not the Judaic religion; Israel, not the Jewish people is the focus of criticism.

The anti-communism of apartheid South Africa and charges of antisemitism against Israel's critics are terms of Machiavellian elasticity stretched by charlatans to stifle opposition. This is the new taboo. The untouchable holy cow shamelessly peddled in Western countries that preach freedom of expression.

Those who fall prey, who are deceived by the confusion sown, should note the lesson of the boy who cried wolf. When the real monster of antisemitism strikes, the most steadfast of opponents, have been on the left of the political spectrum.

False allegations of antisemitism weaken the fight against the real demon. This is exactly the pitfall of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) treatise conflating criticism of Israel with hate speech. It is biased and fatally flawed: a dubious, non-internationally represented Eurocentric document, devised by a hand-picked cabal of sophists seeking to be referee and player at the

same time. With a veiled attempt at "objectivity," Israel is given umbrella-like cover, impunity for its crimes and a cudgel to beat its opponents.

In 1948 when Menahem Begin visited New York to raise funds for his party – later to become Sharon and Netanyahu's ruling Likud – Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt labelled him a "fascist." After cold-blooded massacres of Palestinians that year, an Israeli cabinet minister, Aharon Cizling, declared "now we too have behaved like Nazis and my whole being is shaken."

In terms of the IHRA's guidelines they would be labelled anti-semitic. Jeremy Corbyn's "crime," stating that accusations of antisemitism within the Labour Party have been exaggerated, is miniscule by comparison.

Manufacturing mountains out of mole hills characterises the sophistry of medieval inquisitors, hitching Labour to the Blairite anti-socialist bandwagon. Unopposed, this witch hunt will escalate, attacking popular protest wherever humanity opposes injustice.

We say to the deceit of Labour Party leaders, Starmer and Angela Rayner, who misappropriate a sacred trade-union principle: yes, "an injury to one is an injury to all" – but in your denialism you ignore the millions of Palestinians facing the bullets and bombs of Israeli aggression.

The recent statement of prominent Palestinian and Arab figures with regard to the IHRA's false strictures eloquently attests

Insights

to how the issue of antisemitism should be formulated. They declare: “Antisemitism must be debunked and combated. Regardless of pretence, no expression of hatred for Jews as Jews should be tolerated anywhere in the world.”

The left and human-rights movement, including Black Lives Matter and formations such as the African National Congress of South Africa, should join those Palestinian and Arab

voices in formulating genuinely international guidelines regarding defence of free speech and in combatting the scourge of antisemitism and all forms of racism. **CT**

Ronnie Kasrils is a former ANC freedom fighter and was Intelligence Minister in South Africa. This article is based on an address to a London online free speech rally last month.

Magazines. Daddis is quite convincing in showing how this pulp fiction advanced a view of Western, and specifically American, chauvinism in which war served as an adventure, an opportunity to demonstrate the innate superiority of the American male over various foreign, often Asiatic, opponents, while getting the girl, of course, with the girl usually scantily clad and stereotyped as vulnerable and/or duplicitous and/or sexually available.

W.J. Astore

Pulp fiction and the Vietnam war

Growing up, I watched a lot of James Bond movies. That super-tough, super-sexy, British secret agent, played with such brilliance by Sean Connery, always seemed to have great fun as he saved the world from various dictators, terrorists, and megalomaniacs. I wanted an Aston Martin like Bond had in *Goldfinger*, tricked out with all the latest gizmos and gadgets provided by Q Branch. But more than anything I wanted Bond's competence, his swagger, his ability to win the day while getting the girl as well. Such movies are harmless male fantasy flicks – or are they harmless?

While Ian Fleming was writing his Bond books and Sean Connery was breathing life and fire into the character, another

sort of male fantasy was being promulgated and promoted in men's adventure magazines with titles like *Stag* and *Man's Life* and *Man's World*. These pulp magazines appeared at a time when men's masculinity was threatened (then again, when hasn't masculinity been under threat?), in the 1950s and 1960s, a new nuclear age in which America seemed stuck behind the Soviet space programme and stuck fighting wars (Korea, Vietnam) that ultimately proved unheroic and unwinnable.

It's easy to dismiss such men's magazines as a simplistic variety of pulp fiction, but we'd be wrong to do so, argues historian Greg Daddis in his new book, *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure*

Daddis is careful to say that such magazines, with their often violent and sexist fantasies, didn't drive or determine US behaviour in places like Vietnam. But they most certainly reflected and reinforced the idea of American martial superiority and the notion that foreigners, and specifically foreign women, were both inferior and exploitable. The book is well-produced and well-illustrated, including colour plates of a representative sample of these magazines. “I'm not afraid of World War III,” “Castration of the American Male,” and “Beat it Sister, I've Got a War to Fight!” are a few of the article titles that caught my eye from these pulp covers.

For me, Daddis hits a home run as he compares the harsh realities of the Vietnam War to the bizarre fantasies of these adventure magazines. If there were US troops expecting lots of easy victories and easier women in 'Nam, they quickly learned that pulp fiction had nothing to

Insights

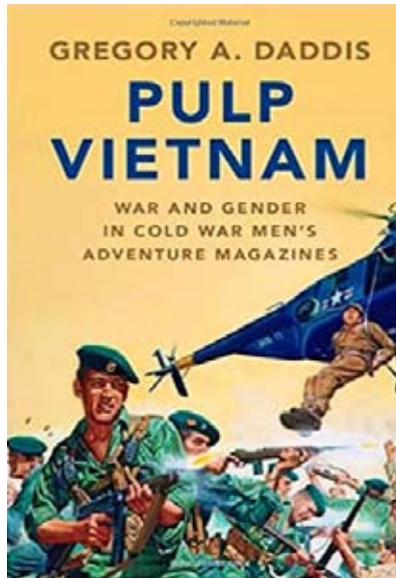
do with hard reality. In Daddis's words:

"In the macho pulps, brave warriors had fought for honour, for their comrades, for a sense of triumph. In Vietnam, GIs simply wanted to leave the fighting behind ... The gaps between truth and fiction seemed insurmountable.

"The undiscovered adventure thus generated a lingering sense of anxiety that Vietnam might not be the man-making experience as publicised in the macho pulps. The modern battlefield engendered a sense of helplessness, not heroism ...

"[M]ore than a few discouraged American soldiers in Vietnam took advantage of wartime opportunities to behave aggressively toward the very people they were there to protect ... the pulps played an outsized role in contributing to a portrait of a manly warrior, conquering enemy forces in alien, savage lands, and, frequently, the women who resided there as well. For the men who were schooled by the Cold War pulps, actual experiences in Vietnam proved nothing like what they expected from stories of adventure and domination ... [A] climate of deep frustration ... might have contributed to violence against Vietnamese people in general and women in particular. After all, had not the macho pulps for years been promising them the sexual rewards of an exotic Orient?" (Daddis, pp. 172-73.)

I'd wager that most men recognised the fantastic elements of



Pulp Vietnam, by Gregory A. Daddis, is published by Cambridge University Press. Price \$29.62 (Amazon).

the pulps – even laughing at some of the more outrageous stories and exaggerated illustrations. But on some level fantasy has a way of informing the reality that we construct out of the cultural

material that surrounds us. Sure, I know I'm not James Bond, and I know that real spy work isn't an adventure-filled romp as in a Bond flick like *Thunderball*. But I still prefer a martini that's been shaken, not stirred.

The fiction sold by these men's adventure magazines glorified war and the warrior even as it marginalised and stereotyped and demeaned foreigners of various sorts. Read enough of this stuff (or watch enough Bond flicks) and you're bound to be influenced by them. Daddis is to be congratulated for writing a highly original study that sheds new light on why Americans fight the way they do, and for what reasons, fictions, and compulsions. **CT**

W.J. Astore blogs at www.bracingviews.com where this review was first published.

Sue Turnbull

Why Vera is my favourite detective

Vera stands on a wind-swept headland contemplating the disgruntled North Sea. She's clad in her usual garb; the battered hat, the annoying scarf and the tent-like mac that swirls around her stocky legs and scruffy boots.

When I first met Vera Stan-

hope in the crime fiction of Ann Cleeves, I liked her, but not so much. It wasn't until Brenda Blethyn brought her to life in the 2011 ITV series *Vera* (seen on PBS TV in the US and Canada) that I became truly enamoured.

Ten seasons later, with series 11 already commissioned,

Insights

Blethyn has made Vera well and truly hers through a variety of mannerisms that are easy to mock but hard to get right.

Emily Takeny recently had a go on Sean Micaleff's *Mad as Hell* but didn't quite get there. Vera is much more than the hat, the Columbo mac and the attitude.

Blethyn's version of Vera includes a wide range of audible "hmmphs", the interrogative "hmmms?", and a chesty cackle. Blethyn also does a lot with her eyes. There's Vera's hawk-like gaze that can spot a lie at a hundred paces. There's the evasive sidelong glance when she's got something to hide, usually her drinking or a sugar fix.

And let's not forget Vera's walk, that determined short-legged stride that somehow gets her where she wants to be faster than anyone else.

In terms of genre, Vera sits within the tradition of the elderly female sleuth. This would include Miss Amelia Butterworth who first appeared in Anna Katherine Green's *That Affair Next Door* first published in 1897. Thirty years later, Miss Marple picked up her knitting and nosed onto the scene of crime.

The key difference is that Vera is no amateur, but a Detective Chief Inspector in charge of a major team whom she routinely berates like recalcitrant school pupils who haven't done their homework.

No doubt about it, Vera can be rude and impatient. She's also partisan, favouring her young male colleagues over her female



TYNESIDE'S CRIME QUEEN: From the moors to council flats, Vera evokes a strong sense of place.

ones, while torturing Detective Constable Kenny Lockhart (Jon Morrison) with endless boring routine investigations. Sometimes she's hard to like.

But Vera also has extraordinary empathy with the hard done by in an area where people have been doing it tough for a very long time. The North East of England is a region of spectacular beauty, deeply scarred by the effects of the industrial revolution that ended with the closing of the mines and the shipyards in the 1980s. It's also my home, although I left it a long time ago.

One of the now well recognised pleasures of reading crime fiction or watching a TV crime drama is the sense of place. Whether the location is evoked on screen or on the page there is always a significant relationship between the

characters and the environment that has shaped them.

In a fascinating essay on the phenomenon of the TV detective tour— <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1474474009349998> – cultural heritage professor Stijn Reijnders outlines the difference between two sorts of places: the *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory, as described by Pierre Nora) and his concept of *lieux d'imagination* (places of imagination).

While the former are “real” locations that serve as places of pilgrimage to memorialise past events (think Gallipoli), *lieux d'imagination* are the places we visit that are associated with fictional happenings, such as the Morse tour of Oxford or the Wallander tour of Ystad.

Such forms of cultural tourism enable readers, or indeed viewers, to pass from the real world into the fictional one and back again on a journey of the imagination. As convincing as Reijnders' argument might be, it doesn't quite encompass how I relate to the landscape inhabited by Vera which evokes my own *lieux de mémoire*.

Vera's stone cottage on the moors reminds me of our family holidays in Northumbria where I would ride the moors on a grumpy, rotund, Shetland pony that might well have been called Vera. Every time Vera goes to Newcastle, I'm fascinated by how much cleaner the quayside looks since I last stood on the sooty pavement and contemplated the

Insights

mucky Tyne bridge, the junior sibling of the Sydney harbour bridge: two bridges that connect where I was then with where I am now. And I'm particularly delighted when Vera ends up in South Shields, my home town, and has an intense conversation with a witness or a suspect on the foreshore when there's no reason to be outside except to capture the view.

Although I take great delight in the familiar locations, I'm constantly arguing with the geographic logic of the series while being surprised that it's not raining – although in my memory it always is.

And so I oscillate, between the fictional and the remembered, with Vera as the character who tethers me to both through a narrative that takes me to another time and place where the answers will always be found by a smart, dumpy, older woman in a rain-coat. **CT**

Sue Turnbull is Senior Professor of Communication and Media Studies, University of Wollongong, in Australia. This article, part of a series in which writers pay tribute to their favourite fictional detectives, was first published at www.theconversation.com

oligarchs. People aren't taking the media-owning class to the Supreme Court for brazen election interference. People aren't taking to the streets protesting it. But they could – and should!

In terms of the effect it has on society, no control tool comes remotely close to advancing as many interests of the powerful against the interests of the people as domestic plutocrat-sponsored propaganda. Nothing will change until people start noticing and resisting this.

Theories about elite conspiracies to shore up more control over the population tend to greatly underestimate how much control they already have.

Wanting the US government to have a "competent leader" is like wanting a serial killer to be skilled at evading detection.

A new report says China will overtake the US as the world's biggest economy by 2028. This is the real reason your leaders need you to hate China right now. Mentally replace all their carefully manufactured narratives with this.

The Democratic Party is what leftism would look like if you stripped it of every single thing that could possibly inconvenience plutocrats, intelligence agencies, or the military-industrial complex in any way.

It's not just that Democrats will ignore all the evil things Biden is going to do, it's that they ignored all the most evil things Trump did while in

Caitlin Johnstone

Public enemy No. 1: Media propaganda

Our rulers' most Orwellian tool, the one that does the most damage and affects the most lives is not surveillance, nor police militarisation, nor government secrecy, but domestic mass media propaganda. It's also the most overlooked. Yes, it's good to protest the other mechanisms of authoritarian control, but propaganda is surely enemy number one.

You don't need the ability to spy on dissident groups if you can control public thought enough to prevent those groups from form-

ing in the first place. You don't need the ability to quash public uprisings if you can propagandise people away from rising up at all.

The ability of the plutocratic class to manipulate public thought at mass scale is the single most overlooked and under-appreciated aspect of our society. It warps the entirety of our political spectrum, all our thinking, all our discourse, and what we perceive as normal. And you just don't see people fighting it. The ACLU isn't protecting people's mental sovereignty from the manipulations of sociopathic government-aligned

Insights

office as well. It's not merely a partisan thing: they really do just see murdering foreigners as normal American presidential stuff.

A lot of Biden criticism is going to consist of, "If Trump had done this Democrats would be screaming!" And it will just be false; they wouldn't. Not if it advanced the interests of oligarchs, war profiteers, or sociopathic intelligence agencies. We know this because they didn't.

As things heat up with Iran again, please remember that there is never, ever any reason to treat unproven US claims about aggressions by an unaligned nation with anything other than derision and dismissal.

First show me verifiable proof that the accused nation did what the US government says. Then show me proof that what was done wasn't a valid response to what the US is doing. Then show me proof that interventionism would help. Then fuck you, because you won't do any of the above.

People who say the world is controlled by space reptilians have more credibility than reporters from high-profile news outlets who uncritically repeat unproven government claims about aggressions by unaligned nations.

It will never not infuriate me that when the time came for women to start claiming a human-sized amount of space in our society, the solution we came up with was for

us to start acting more like men. Which was the exact opposite of what the world needs.

Cynical closet shitlibs can make anything sound woke. Regime change in Syria. Cold war escalations against Russia and China. Assange smears. Attacks on Glenn Greenwald's marriage. Anything. A little cleverly-diddled lefty jargon and suddenly it can be leftist to support the CIA.

When humans first showed up it was the strong brutes who led the tribe. Later on it became the clever manipulators who led, because they could manipulate the strong brutes into doing their bidding. Now the manipulators are work-

ing on making even their brute armies obsolete via technology, so it will just be clever manipulators at the top and everyone else at the bottom. This is the real revenge of the nerds.

The way to get what you want is to keep courageously jumping down inner rabbit holes of self-exploration, learning what makes you tick, clearing your illusions and healing your psychological wounds. Also, you'll wind up wanting completely different things from when you started. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Read more of her work at her website, www.caitlinjohnstone.com

Thomas S. Harrington

The Covid Horrors: A love story

If you can take your mind off the hot-knife-through-butter destruction of basic liberties currently taking place in the name of the fight against Covid, you can actually learn interesting new things the thought processes of your fellow human beings.

For example, most reasonably well-educated citizens of Europe and North America believe that while organised campaigns of propaganda might in fact exist, they themselves are certainly

among those least susceptible to their charms. They know, in the same way they know that all their children are beautiful and smart, that mistaking a plutocratic pussy-grabber for a working class champion stems from ignorance, an error of judgement they can effortlessly avoid thanks to their long years of schooling.

I recently took a dance with the Covid bug. When we hit the floor, she did step on my toes a bit, but far fewer times than that

Insights

jitterbugger named Flu who took me out for a twirl on the hardwood last February.

When I was sure she had left the building, I told some smart friends about the experience, and added, “Since I had actually read statistics about the chances of dying from the disease, I was never really worried during the process”.

Well, you might have thought I had just joined “Pussy-Grabbers United”. I was swiftly told – despite the clear and unassailable fact that some 90+ percent of the people who get Covid (even those past the age of 70) experience it more or less as I had – that I was indeed “very lucky”.

When I asked why they insisted on portraying my experience in this way, I heard, in buckshot succession, about a cousin, the nurse friend of a friend, and, of course, all the people seen in media reports who had suffered much more than me. And all my smart friends all seemed agree that these decontextualised anecdotes had much more to say about the true threat posed by the disease than my tired old set of verified statistics.

Somewhat exasperated, I finally responded:

“You regularly get on planes to fly because, on one level or another, you know it is quite statistically safe for you to do so.

Imagine if, during ten months, you were treated to anecdote after anecdote about the lives lost in air crashes, complete with graphic reconstructions of the

excruciating last moments of the ill-fated passengers. The stats wouldn’t change, but I suspect new doubts would be generated in many of you about the safety of flying.

Would it be your right to change your disposition about flying after hearing these stories? Certainly. Would the stories be real? Yes. Would they actually change your chances of dying in an airline crash? No. Those chances would remain exactly the same.

So, then it would be your choice as to which part of your brain you were going to listen to when it came to flying.”

Silence. And in typical, conflict-averse bourgeois custom, the swift end of the conversation.

You see, today’s smart people clearly can’t be propagandised. Rather they simply assemble the disconnected anecdotes that are

fed to them by other smart and oh-so-obviously disinterested people provide them and rebottle it as Reality®.

And after having demonstrated their passionate and enduring love for Reality® for all to see (after all, you never want to be caught out as being insensitive or obtuse!), they muse superciliously about those poor souls who still believe that charting a sound course in public policy and many other important areas of life can and should revolve more around analysis of the available facts than the telling of evocative tales. **CT**

Thomas S. Harrington is professor of Hispanic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. His most recent book is A Citizen’s Democracy in Authoritarian Times: An American View on the Catalan Drive for Independence (University of Valencia Press).

Kit Knightly

‘Herd immunity’ gets a new definition

The World Health Organisation has changed the definition of “herd immunity” on the Covid section of their website, inserting the claim that it is a “concept used in vaccination”, and requires a

vaccine to be achieved.

Both of these statements are total falsehoods, which is demonstrated by the WHO’s own website back in June, and every dictionary definition of “herd immunity” you can find.

Insights

To quote the WHO's own original definition: "Herd immunity is the indirect protection from an infectious disease that happens when a population is immune either through vaccination or a natural immunity developed through previous infection".

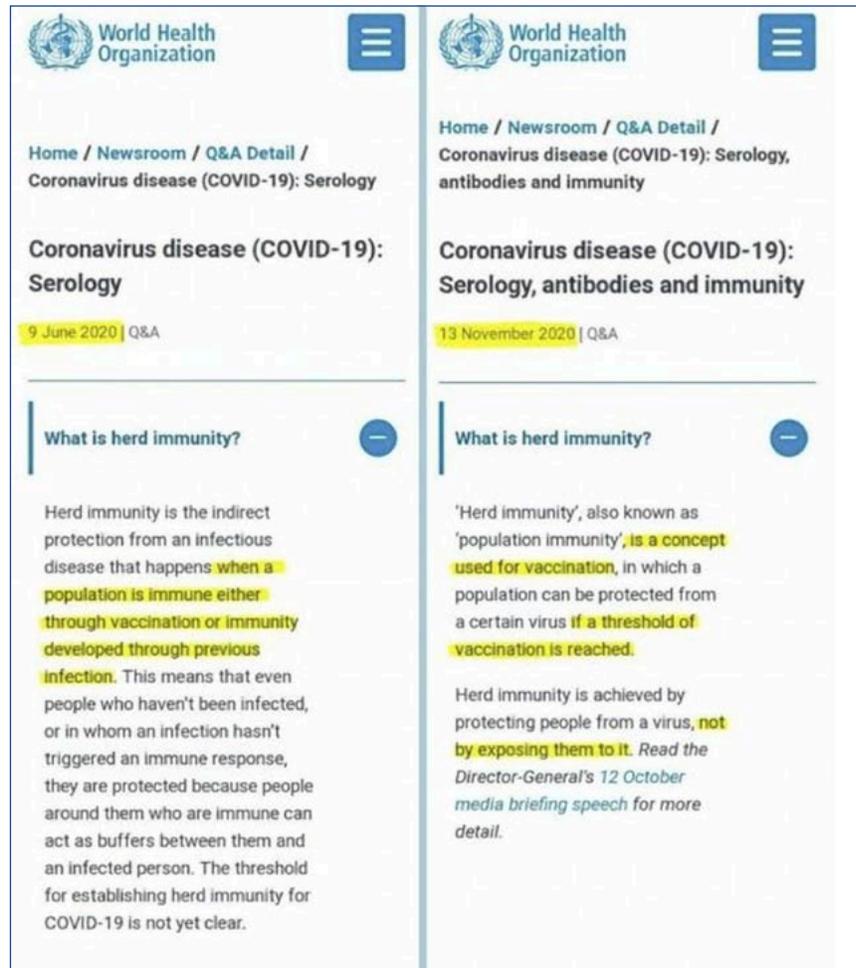
This definition was posted on the WHO's website on June 9 last year, and conforms with the general usage of the term for generations.

Then, on October 15, we woke up to find the words on the side of the barn had changed. The definition has been altered to this: " 'Herd immunity', also known as 'population immunity', is a concept used for vaccination, in which a population can be protected from a certain virus if a threshold of vaccination is reached".

No explanation is offered for the change, in fact note of the change is made on the website at all. Indeed all the previous versions of the website have been totally wiped from the wayback machine. A telling thing to do, in and of itself.

We're only aware of the change because screengrabs of the original exist.

The new definition, aside from being inaccurate and off-handedly disposing of decades of epidemiological research, is also contradictory. It includes the phrase: "Herd immunity is achieved by protecting people



Changing definition: Screenshots show how the WHO adjusted its definition of herd immunity between June (left) and November 2020.

from a virus, not by exposing them to it."

Which is newspeak doublethink nonsense. The entire point of vaccination IS "exposing" people to the virus.

This revised, inaccurate and contradictory definition of "herd immunity" was first expressed in a speech by WHO Director General Thedros Adhanom on October 12, 2020. Within three days that speech had been added, word for word, to the website.

And within a month of the change, the UK had approved the first commercial vaccine for Sars-Cov-2 infection.

We're truly in an Orwellian timeline, where the powers that be can simply change the meaning of words and phrases to suit their purpose. **CT**

Kit Knightly is co-editor at the UK-based website www.off-guardian.org, where this article was first published.

Rebecca Gordon

It's time to end America's long march to disaster

It's been almost 20 years since 9/11, but military victory is more elusive than ever as the cost of endless war becomes increasingly unsustainable

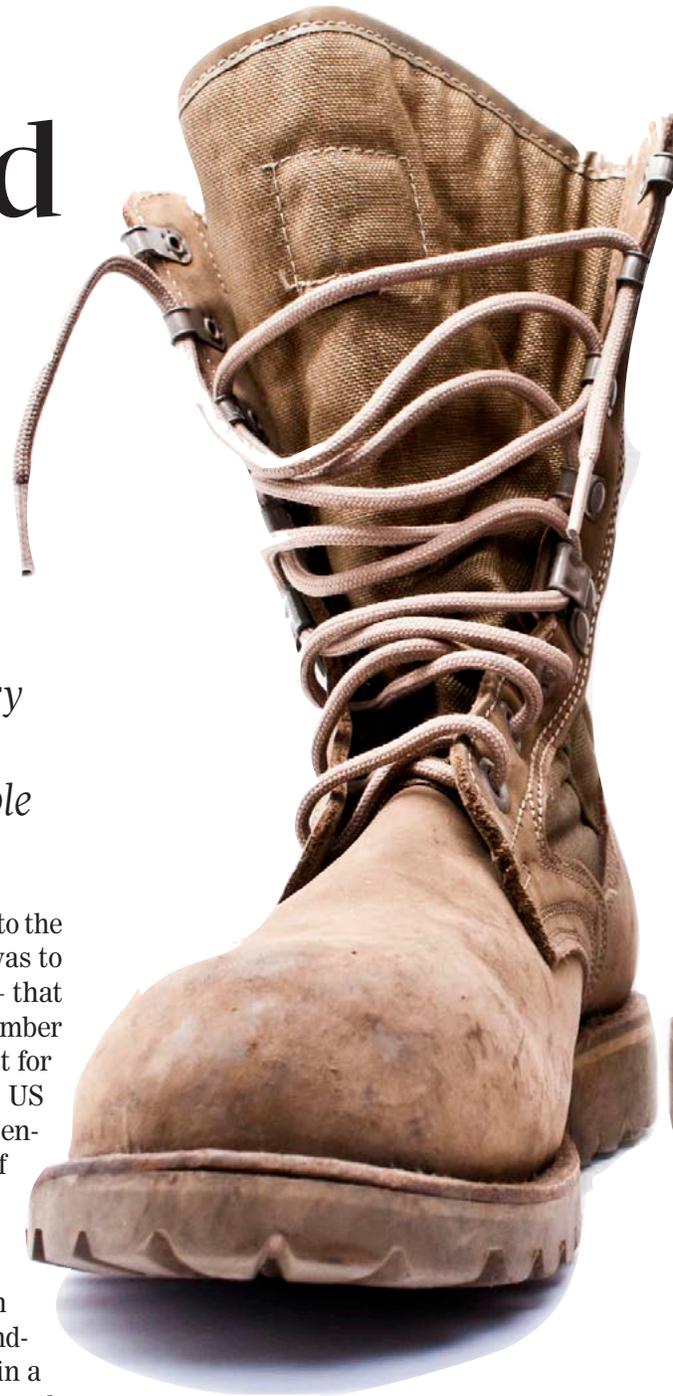
It was the end of October 2001. Two friends, Max Elbaum and Bob Wing, had just dropped by. (Yes, children, believe it or not, people used to drop in on each other, maskless, once upon a time.) They had come to hang out with my partner Jan Adams and me. Among other things, Max wanted to get some instructions from fellow-runner Jan about taping his foot to ease the pain of plantar fasciitis. But it soon became clear that he and Bob had a bigger agenda for the evening. They were eager to recruit us for a new project.

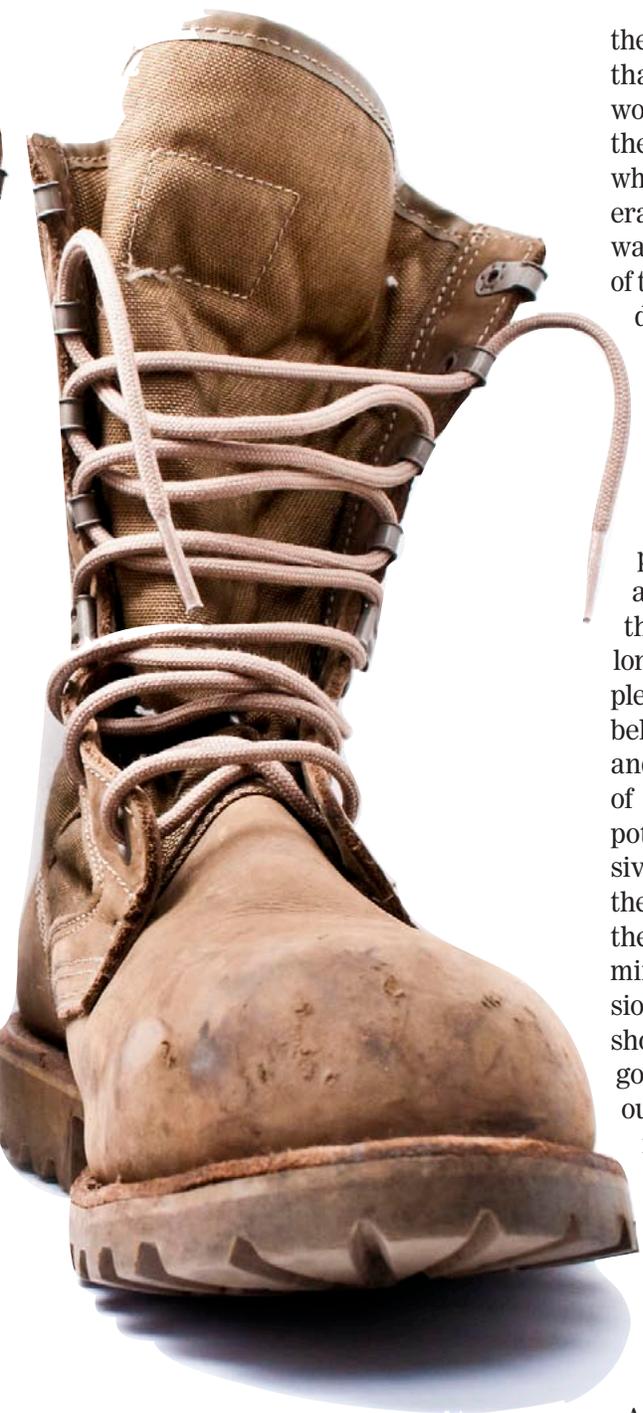
And so began *War Times/Tiempo de Guerras*, a free, bilingual, antiwar tabloid that, at its height, distributed 100,000 copies every six weeks to more than 700 antiwar organisations around the

country. It was already clear to the four of us that night – as it was to millions around the world – that the terrorist attacks of September 11 would provide the pretext for a major new projection of US military power globally, opening the way to a new era of “all-war-all-the-time.” *War Times* was a project of its moment (although the name would still be apt today, given that those wars have never ended). It would be superseded in a few years by the explosive growth of the Internet and the 24-hour news cycle. Still, it represented an early effort to fill the space where a peace movement would eventually develop.

We were certainly right that the United States had entered a period of all-war-all-the-time. It's probably

hard for people born since 9/11 to imagine how much – and how little – things changed after September 2001. By the end of that month, this country had already launched a “war” on an enemy that then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld told us was “not





the Cold War, the kind of struggle that might last decades as allies work to root out terrorists across the globe and battle extremists who want to rule the world". A generation later, it seemed Rumsfeld was right, if not about the desires of the global enemy, then about the duration of the struggle.

Here in the United States, however, we quickly got used to being "at war". In the first few months, interstate bus and train travellers often encountered (and, in airports, still encounter) a new and absurd kind of "security theatre". I'm referring to those long, snaking lines in which people first learned to remove their belts and coats, later their hats and shoes, as ever newer articles of clothing were recognised as potential hiding places for explosives. Fortunately, the arrest of the Underwear Bomber never led the Transportation Security Administration to the obvious conclusion about the clothing travellers should have to remove next. We got used to putting our three-ounce containers of liquids (No more!) into quart-sized baggies (No bigger! No smaller!).

It was all-war-all-the-time, but mainly in those airports. Once the shooting wars started dragging on, if you didn't travel by airplane much or weren't deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq, it was hard to remember that we were still in war time at all. There were continuing clues for those who wanted to know, like the revelations of CIA torture practices at "black sites" around the world, the horrors of military prisons like those at Bagram Air Force Base in

Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib in Baghdad, and the still-functioning prison complex at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. And soon enough, of course, there were the hundreds and then thousands of veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars taking their places among the unhoused veterans of earlier wars in cities across the United States, almost unremarked upon, except by service organisations.

So, yes, the wars dragged on at great expense, but with little apparent effect in this country. They even gained new names like "the long war" (as Donald Trump's Secretary of Defense James Mattis put it in 2017) or the "forever wars", a phrase now so common that it appears all over the place. But apart from devouring at least \$6.4-trillion dollars through September 2020 that might otherwise have been invested domestically in healthcare, education, infrastructure, or addressing poverty and inequality, apart from creating increasingly militarised domestic police forces armed ever more lethally by the Pentagon, those forever wars had little obvious effect on the lives of most Americans.

Of course, if you happened to live in one of the places where this country has been fighting for the last 19 years, things are a little different. A conservative estimate by Iraq Body Count puts violent deaths among civilians in that country alone at 185,454 to 208,493 and Brown University's Costs of War project points out that even the larger figure is bound to be a significant undercount, "Several times as many Iraqi civilians may have died as an indirect result

just in Afghanistan", but in "50 or 60 countries, and it simply has to be liquidated".

Five years and two never-ending wars later, he characterised what was then called the war on terror as "a generational conflict akin to

of the war, due to damage to the systems that provide food, health care, and clean drinking water, and as a result, illness, infectious diseases, and malnutrition that could otherwise have been avoided or treated”.

And that’s just Iraq. Again, according to the Costs of War Project, “At least 800,000 people have been killed by direct war violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan”.

Of course, many more people than that have been injured or disabled. And America’s post-9/11 wars have driven an estimated 37-million people from their homes, creating the greatest human displacement since World War II. People in this country are rightly concerned about the negative effects of online schooling on American children amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis (especially poor children and those in communities of colour). Imagine, then, the effects on a child’s education of losing her home and her country, as well as one or both parents, and then growing up constantly on the move or in an overcrowded, under-resourced refugee camp. The war on terror has truly become a war of generations.

Every one of the 2,977 lives lost on 9/11 was unique and invaluable. But the US response has been grotesquely disproportionate – and worse than we *War Times* founders could have imagined that October night so many years ago.

Those wars of ours have gone on for almost two decades now. Each new metastasis has been justified by George W. Bush’s and then Barack Obama’s use of the now ancient 2001 Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (AUMF),

It’s highly unlikely that the military couldn’t afford to buy bullets when Trump entered the Oval Office

which Congress passed in the days after 9/11. Its language actually limited presidential military action to a direct response to the 9/11 attacks and the prevention of future attacks by the same actors. It stated that the president, “...is authorised to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organisations, or persons he determines planned, authorised, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organisations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons”.

Despite that AUMF’s limited scope, successive presidents have used it to justify military action in at least 18 countries. (To be fair, President Obama realised the absurdity of his situation when he sent US troops to Syria and tried to wring a new authorisation out of Congress, only to be stymied by a Republican majority that wouldn’t play along.)

In 2002, in the run-up to the Iraq War, Congress passed a second AUMF, which permitted the president to use the armed forces as “necessary and appropriate”

to “defend US national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq”. In January 2020, Donald Trump used that second authorisation to justify the murder by drone of Qasem Soleimani, an Iranian general, along with nine other people.

In 2016, peace activists were preparing to confront a Hillary Clinton administration that we expected would continue Obama’s version of the forever wars – the “surge” in Afghanistan, the drone assassination campaigns, the special ops in Africa. But on Tuesday, November 8, 2016, something went “Trump” in the night and Donald J. Trump took over the presidency with a promise to end this country’s forever wars, which he had criticised relentlessly during his campaign. That, of course, didn’t mean we should have expected a peace dividend anytime soon. He was also committed to rebuilding a supposedly “depleted” US military. As he said at a 2019 press conference, “When I took over, it was a mess... One of our generals came in to see me and he said, ‘Sir, we don’t have ammunition’. I said, ‘That’s a terrible thing you just said’. He said, ‘We don’t have ammunition’. Now we have more ammunition than we’ve ever had”.

It’s highly unlikely that the military couldn’t afford to buy enough bullets when Trump entered the Oval Office, given that publicly acknowledged defence funding was then running at \$580-billion a year. He did, however, manage to push that figure to \$713-billion by fiscal year 2020. That December, he threatened to veto an even larger appropriation for 2021 – \$740 billion – but only because he wanted the military to continue to

honour Confederate generals by keeping their names on military bases. Oh, and because he thought the bill should also change liability rules for social media companies, an issue you don't normally expect to see addressed in a defence appropriations bill. And, in any case, Congress passed the bill with a veto-proof majority.

As Pentagon expert Michael Klare pointed out recently, while it might seem contradictory that Trump would both want to end the forever wars and to increase military spending, his actions actually made a certain sense. The president, suggested Klare, had been persuaded to support the part of the US military command that has favoured a sharp pivot away from reigning post-9/11 Pentagon practices. For 19 years, the military high command had hewed fairly closely to the strategy laid out by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld early in the Bush years: maintaining the capacity to fight ground wars against one or two regional powers (think of that "Axis of Evil" of Iraq, North Korea, and Iran), while deploying agile, technologically advanced forces in low-intensity (and a couple of higher-intensity) counterterrorism conflicts. Nineteen years later, whatever its objectives may have been – a more-stable Middle East? Fewer and weaker terrorist organisations? – it's clear that the Rumsfeld-Bush strategy has failed spectacularly.

Klare points out that, after almost two decades without a victory, the Pentagon has largely decided to demote international terrorism from rampaging monster to annoying mosquito cloud. Instead, the US must now prepare

Did Trump actually keep his promise and at least end those forever wars? Not really

to confront the rise of China and Russia, even if China has only one overseas military base and Russia, economically speaking, is a rickety petro-state with imperial aspirations. In other words, the US must prepare to fight short but devastating wars in multiple domains (including space and cyberspace), perhaps even involving the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the Eurasian continent. To this end, the country has indeed begun a major renovation of its nuclear arsenal and announced a new 30-year plan to beef up its naval capacity. And President Trump rarely misses a chance to tout "his" creation of a new Space Force.

Meanwhile, did he actually keep his promise and at least end those forever wars? Not really. He did promise to bring all US troops home from Afghanistan by Christmas, but acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller only recently said that we'd be leaving about 2,500 troops there and a similar number in Iraq, with the hope that they'd all be out by May 2021. (In other words, he dumped those wars in the lap of the future Biden administration.)

In the meantime in these years of "ending" those wars, the Trump administration actually loosened

the rules of engagement for air strikes in Afghanistan, leading to a "massive increase in civilian casualties", according to a new report from the Costs of War Project. "From the last year of the Obama administration to the last full year of recorded data during the Trump administration", writes its author, Neta Crawford, "the number of civilians killed by US-led airstrikes in Afghanistan increased by 330 percent".

In spite of his isolationist "America First" rhetoric, in other words, President Trump has presided over an enormous buildup of an institution, the military-industrial complex, that was hardly in need of major new investment. And in spite of his anti-NATO rhetoric, his reduction by almost a third of US troop strength Germany, and all the rest, he never really violated the post-World War II foreign policy pact between the Republican and Democratic parties. Regardless of how they might disagree about dividing the wealth domestically, they remain united in their commitment to using diplomacy when possible, but military force when necessary, to maintain and expand the imperial power that they believed to be the guarantor of that wealth.

On January 20, 2021, Joe Biden will become the president of a country that spends as much on its armed forces, by some counts, as the next 10 countries combined. He'll inherit responsibility for a nation with a military presence in 150 countries and special-operations deployments in 22 African nations alone. He'll be left to oversee the

still-unfinished, deeply unsuccessful, never-ending war on terror in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia and, as publicly reported by the Department of Defense, 187,000 troops stationed outside the United States.

Nothing in Joe Biden's history suggests that he or any of the people he's already appointed to his national security team have the slightest inclination to destabilise that Democratic-Republican imperial pact. But empires are not sustained by inclination alone. They don't last forever. They overextend themselves. They rot from within.

If you're old enough, you may

Maybe we can finally ask whether trying to prop up a dying empire actually makes us – or indeed the world – any safer

remember stories about the long lines for food in the crumbling Soviet Union, that other superpower of the Cold War. You can see the same thing in the United States today. Once a week, my partner deliv-

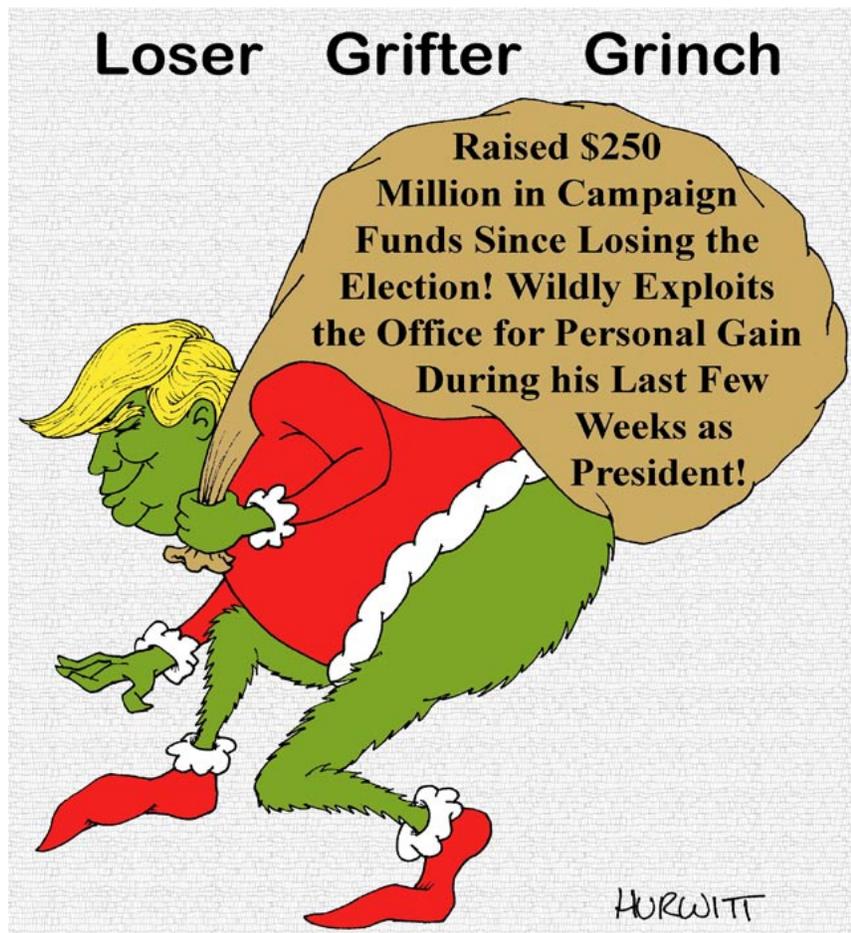
ers food boxes to hungry people in our city, those who have lost their jobs and homes, because the pandemic has only exacerbated this country's already brutal version of economic inequality. Another friend routinely sees a food line stretching over a mile, as people wait hours for a single free bag of groceries.

Perhaps the horrors of 2020 – the fires and hurricanes, Trump's vicious attacks on democracy, the death, sickness, and economic dislocation caused by Covid-19 – can force a real conversation about national security in 2021. Maybe this time we can finally ask whether trying to prop up a dying empire actually makes us – or indeed the world – any safer. This is the best chance in a generation to start that conversation. The alternative is to keep marching mindlessly toward disaster. **CT**

*Rebecca Gordon teaches at the University of San Francisco. She is the author of *American Nuremberg: The US Officials Who Should Stand Trial for Post-9/11 War Crimes*, and is now at work on a new book on the history of torture in the United States. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

Hurwitt's Eye

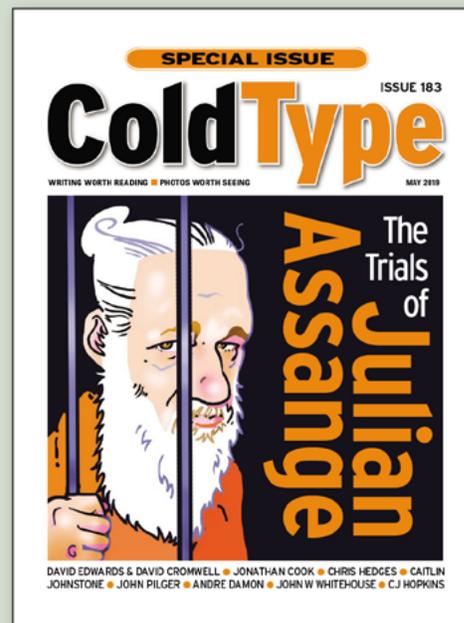
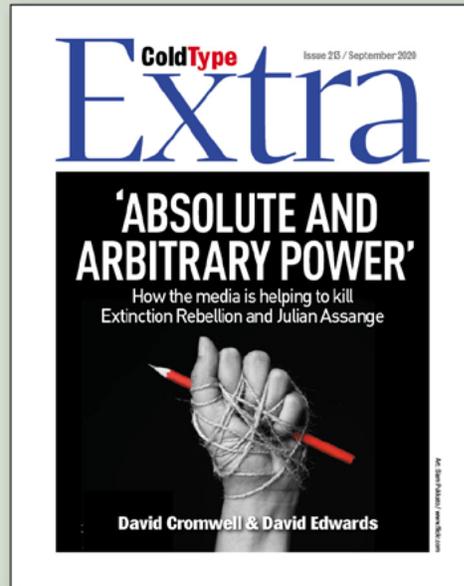
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Liam Kennedy

Country music's obscured black roots

The death of Charley Pride and the rise of new black artists provide a reminder of the racial diversity that led to the success of country music

When most people think of country music, they envisage plaid-wearing, guitar-strumming artists like Johnny Cash or Dolly Parton. They rarely think of black men like Charley Pride.

Pride, who died on December 11 at the age of 86, was one of the very few black superstars in the history of American country music. Acknowledging his contributions to the genre, the Country Music Association Awards presented him with the Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award in November.

It was a symbolic moment for the industry as it celebrated the black presence in country music. It was also a moment that came in a year in which protests about racial injustice swept across the US, and the American country music industry had been pressurised to acknowledge its troubled history of racial difference.

Much of the history of country music has been displaced by convenient myths created during the genre's commercialisation in the early 20th-century. Travelling

the American South in the 1920s looking for white performers and songs, Ralph Peers, a white record executive, played an important role in obscuring the black roots of the genre.

The story of the “founding family” of country music, the Carters, is a well-known origin myth in country music. One of Peers' discoveries, the Carter Family were a three-piece group from Virginia consisting of A.P. Carter, his wife Sara and sister Maybelle. The group are credited with popularising country music with their unique harmony style and catchy songs. Less well known, however, is the story of Lesley Riddle, the black woman who led A.P. Carter to black sources and songs, memorising melodies for Carter's transcription.

This is just one of the many examples of how country music has been whitewashed for nearly a century. The commercialisation of country music consigned the work of black artists to “race records”, while white performers were categorised as “hillbilly” or “country and western”. This was a filtering process, which determined the

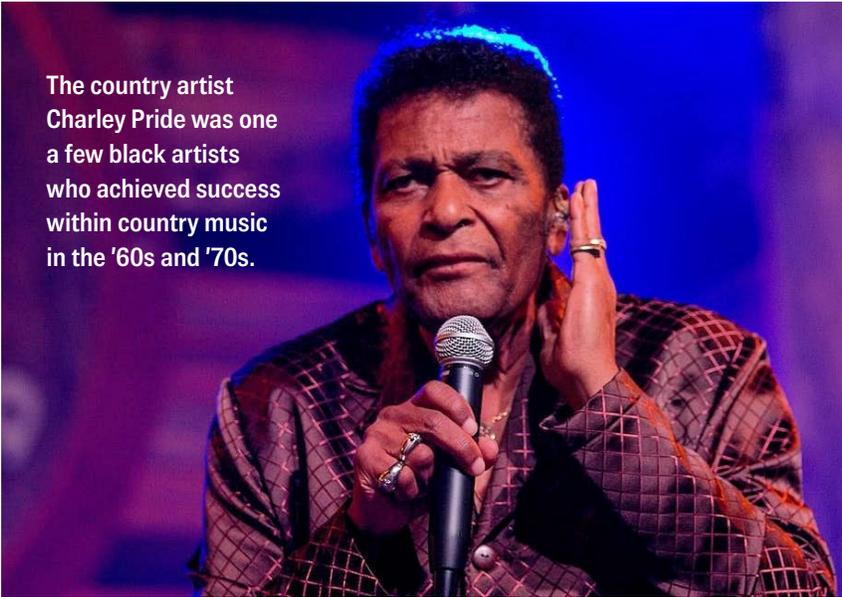
mainstream sounds and performers in these categories for several generations.

From the harmonica player DeFord Bailey in the 1920s and 30s, through to Pride in the 1960s and 70s, and Darius Rucker in the early 2000s, this categorisation also consistently sidelined the contributions of people of colour in country music, with the exceptions only proving the rule.

Today, the country music industry and its mainstream sounds remain white and anodyne. The norm is songs, often mid-tempo ballads, about drinking, pickups and relationships. A benign feel-good vibe predominates and topics that might be deemed controversial are avoided.

However, a new generation of black performers has emerged both within the mainstream and at the margins of country music. These performers are shifting the discourse around race and challenging the origin myths of country, much to the discomfort of the industry. The rise of Black Lives Matter last year has also upped the ante on Nashville's silence around racial injustice.

The country artist Charley Pride was one of a few black artists who achieved success within country music in the '60s and '70s.



To some extent, this black presence has been commercially incorporated. For example, the music of young, rising black country stars Jimmie Allen and Kane Brown could be said to mimic mainstream country fare with its narratively conservative lyrics and traditional country style, although, both do occasionally reference hip hop sounds and racial identity.

There are, however, those who strive to break the mould. In recent years there has been an emergence of genre-blending artists who mix hip hop rhythms and country tropes, which have proved disruptive. One stand out example is Lil Nas X whose song *Old Town Road* became an internet sensation in 2019 and sparked a row within the industry after it was removed from the Hot Country Songs chart. Explaining its decision, *Billboard*, which runs the chart, said that the song “does not embrace enough elements of today’s country music to chart in its current form”. This incident spawned the equally popular remix featuring the country star Billy Ray Cyrus, who defended the

track as country.

Much more forceful and breaking more from that Nashville mould, the music of black female performers Rhiannon Giddens, Yola and Mickey Guyton is bold. Guyton, a black Texan singer, released the song *Black Like Me* in June last year, with punchy lyrics on the experience of growing up black in America. The chorus runs:

If you think we live in the land of the free
You should try to be Black like me

Although there has been overwhelming silence in the industry about racism, a handful of white artists have made forceful statements about racial injustice, most notably the Appalachian country star Tyler Childers.

In September, Childers released an album titled *Long Violent History*. It quickly drew attention as a departure from his usual material. First, it mostly consists of covers of old fiddle tunes. More surprising was the title track, a ballad in which Childers asks his listeners

to put themselves in the place of African Americans facing daily injustices and violence.

Childers explicitly connects the historical struggles of rural mining communities in Kentucky to contemporary struggles for racial justice.

The song invites the listener’s empathy, appealing to an imagined rural community’s sense of fairness and justice, and its mythologies of violent redemption:

*How many boys could they haul off
this mountain
Shoot full of holes, cuffed and layin’
in the streets
‘Til we come into town in a stark
ravin’ anger
Looking for answers and armed to
the teeth?*

Part of what makes Childers’ reference to a “long violent history” so resonant is that many of the fiddle songs that precede the title track reference this history, with several referencing Civil War conflicts. When the title track plays out with a few skewed bars of *My Old Kentucky Home*, a 19th-century minstrel song associated with white supremacy and the antebellum South, we are reminded of the role of music in both celebrating and challenging the racial order of things in the US.

Country music’s reckoning with race has only just begun. As its black roots are further exposed and pioneers like Charley Pride take on fresh significance, we can only hope that the future of the genre is more diverse. **CT**

Liam Kennedy is Professor of American Studies, University College Dublin. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Joe Allen

Coughs across America

The funny thing about social collapse is that it sounds like a whoopee cushion

For eight months, I endured the global Covid lunacy by travelling from one end of America to the other. It was way more fun than I dare admit to anyone who's been quarantined since spring. From New England to Appalachia, from the Sonora Desert to the Pacific Northwest, I've enjoyed the finest natural history tour of my life.

I did my damndest to outrun the masked-up pod-people. It was like getting chased by prisons through the hollows of Uncle Sam's rotting corpse. They finally caught up to me in the northern Rockies. Presently, in every blue city (and half the red ones), you'll find pod-people shambling down the street – all alone, out in the sunshine – sporting fashion masks to simulate altruism for their fellow Covidians.

Real people are rarely as cool as the ones in the movies, but without a doubt, they're almost never as shitty as the ones held up by the media. I've met a thousand fantastic Americans, and as many fine foreigners. Wherever I've looked, from ghettos to mansions to bleak wilderness, I found

worlds brimming with life.

Looking back at the freedoms we've enjoyed fills me with nostalgia and pride. It's hard to believe our rulers ever let us go where we wanted and do what we pleased.

Looking ahead to increasing surveillance, corporate monopolies, nit-picky control mechanisms, citizen snitches, cartoon-like polarisation, mandatory tracking-devices, random checkpoints, immunity passports, and horrendously vapid entertainment, I'm bracing for a dismal spell in world history.

The Covid virus will pass soon enough. In time, the dead will be properly mourned. But this dark wave of technocratic constraint isn't going anywhere. The desire for top-down control is too tempting to resist. If you thought you could master the universe, wouldn't you try?

Not to despair, though. The sun rises all the same. No matter how much power this corporate Leviathan acquires, no matter how tight its grip, the will to freedom is innate. Living things will always fight for air.

Anti-Vaxxers in Great Barrington, Mass.

My latest jaunt across America began in the Berkshires, out in western Massachusetts. I arrived in late 2019 by way of Indonesia, Thailand, and Oceania, where I'd been working abroad. The job was hanging automated rigging systems for a super-pop techno act. On every off-day, and for three weeks after the tour, I lingered in the temples of foreign gods, as is my custom. Their juju rubs off after awhile.

After two months in the tropical breeze, the winter chill hit hard. Great Barrington has the feel of a cosmopolitan nursing home. (We called it "Not-Bad Barrington.") Local attractions include organic farms, a corporate weed dispensary, and a couple of non-traditional schools.

The town also hosts "The Largest Asian Store in America". Out in the parking lot, you see 20-foot high stone Buddha heads gazing at the ski slopes across the way. Inside, the multi-cult gallery is crammed with intricately carved Hindu idols and wooden Tantra



wieners. It really compliments the lofty character of Not-Bad Barrington.

My first visit to this rural bazaar was right before the Great Germ Panic of 2020 – back when a nakedface could roam about freely.

The owner is an opinionated know-it-all, so we hit it off right away. The diminutive man started in on my accent as if I'd fired the first shot at Fort Sumter. Keeping things civil, I voiced my admiration for snooty New England liberals. It's a miracle they've amassed half the nation's wealth despite the threat of oppression from their southern

neighbours. The jabs went back and forth. We grappled around from cultural imperialism to backward superstitions.

In his former career as an epidemiologist, this smooth operator would pick up artwork from all over Asia and sell it back in the US. As his business boomed, he went from public health expert to world religion expert, with more than enough ego to make up for any gaps in his knowledge. Turns out we have a lot in common.

"It kills me when white expats come to Bali and get put off by the local rituals", he fumed. "Some animal-rights types have tried to outlaw animal sacrifice on the

island!"

"I know, bro, your people are crazy!" I winked. "But then, think of how Londoners feel when Muslims arrive en mass, and then demand the British legal system accommodate Sharia".

Before long, our conversation turned to the anti-vaxxers who populate the Berkshires. These aren't trailer park people, he informed me. These are wealthy liberals who want other people's kids to bear any risks of adverse side-effects.

"As a trained epidemiologist, this really infuriates me!" He lambasted his neighbours' approach to public health. You'd

think they were plague-rats lurking in his ship's hull.

It turns out a lot of these anti-vaxxers are part of the Anthroposophist Society – a Western esoteric sect. Their German founder, Rudolf Steiner, pioneered organic farming in the early 1900s, and developed the Waldorf school system as an alternative to the industrial education model. Steiner also claimed to see auras and various otherworldly beings.

“This is why we’re seeing measles outbreaks!” the shop-owner hollered, punching a tiny fist into his palm. “These people are anti-science!”

“You know, I get vaxxed whenever I have to,” I said. “Before I went to India, I got inoculated for Hep B, cholera, typhoid – you name it. But still, I can understand people’s hesitation –”

“I can’t,” he snapped. “It puts other people’s lives in danger!”

“Sure, to some extent. But when I was a kid, my friend’s little sister got the measles shot and had a bad allergic reaction. Her fever shot up, and her brain swelled. When the reaction subsided, she was permanently disabled. She never spoke another word, and had to be pushed in a stroller for the rest of her life –”

“That’s just an anecdote. You don’t know if the vaccination caused it”.

“Of course. But the timing was enough to convince her parents. I mean, the kid’s fever was sky-high –”

“Vaccines don’t cause fevers!”

I stood there, blinking, as did the Hindu gods on the shelves.

“Dude, what are you talking about?”

No violence allowed, no matter how bad it gets. If a man strikes you on one cheek, by God, you turn to him the other

“I’m a trained epidemiologist and –”

“Then you should know vaccines cause fevers! It’s just part of the immune response!”

“I get my kids vaccinated every year”. He looked pleased with himself. “They never get fevers”.

“Dude! Every time I got vaxxed, the nurses warned me I’d get a fever! And I did. Every time. They said it’s normal”.

“My kids never get fevers”.

“Okay. But –”

“I’m a trained epidemiologist and ...” On and on he went, oblivious to himself. Something about “the social contract” and “selfish anti-vaxxers” and “more science education” – you know, the usual.

At the time, I was stunned any “expert” would deny that vaccines cause fevers. Was this guy a phony, or a sore loser? Turns out it just was a foretaste of all the bad medicine we’d be swallowing in 2020.

Plain Churches in Lancaster County, Penn.

A month before the Germ Panic shut down the world, I was working in a cutting-edge concert venue way out in Amish country. Curious about the locals’ archaic ways, I set out to find one

of their churches.

It turns out you don’t just wander into an Amish church. For one thing, services are typically held in family homes. For another, the hymns and liturgy are in Pennsylvania Dutch. And because the Amish take great pains to keep their culture pure, they don’t like curious strangers poking around their sacred gatherings.

After days of pestering the townsfolk, I finally got myself invited into a different “plain church” community – the Brethren – who share much in common with their Amish, Quaker, and Mennonite neighbours.

Brethren men wear black hats and suspenders, their women wear big bonnets, and many say “thee” and “thou” as if nothing has changed since King James. The Brethren are also firm pacifists. No violence allowed, no matter how bad it gets. If a man strikes you on one cheek, by God, you turn to him the other. Higher powers will handle it.

Like their old-school neighbours in cattle-n-corn country, many Brethren are farmers and skilled craftsmen. They’re admirably self-sufficient. Their children are taught the old ways in small wooden schoolhouses. Unlike the Amish, though, the Brethren readily adopt certain practical technologies – cars, tractors, telephones, eBibles – taintments of the wider culture.

That means they’ve never been exposed to real comedy, so they’ll laugh at any joke you throw at ‘em. You’ll be like – “That’s when the city boy said: ‘Is that a haybale or a horseshoe?’” – and they’re rolling in the floor for ten minutes.

One Sunday morning, this Brethren elder drove miles out of his way to pick me up for church. He introduced me to everyone – and I mean everyone. As things got started, someone handed me a hymnal. I sing like an asthmatic mule, but it didn't matter. As the congregation lifted their voices, this Abe-bearded ogre in the next pew sang as loud as possible, drowning everyone out in a single steady off-key note.

The sermon itself was all about forgiving your neighbour and cultivating patience. I guess if the congregants let that loud-mouth keep coming back every Sunday, the tolerant message must be taking root.

Afterward, a bunch of us went back to the minister's house for lunch. Three generations of Brethren gathered at a long table. They asked me questions like I was a spider from Mars. No matter what I said, the entire family cracked up laughing.

They all looked similar – strong hands, rosy cheeks – except for this quiet African girl, unusually tall, whom the minister and his wife had adopted on a missionary trip to Ghana. Over the years, this couple has spread the gospel from India to China to South America.

After lunch, the house matron showed me her vast collection of plastic cows. Most were housed in a fine, hand-made china cabinet. Later, the patriarch took me down worn wooden stairs into the cellar, where he had an elaborate model train set. He'd created an entire miniature village, with patrons browsing shop windows, farmers plowing wheat fields, and grimy men working the

If history is any guide, the only lasting effects of the Nashville RV blast will be on civil liberties

rail station. There was a nasty car wreck at the tvillage's main intersection. Two cars had hit each other head on. A dead body was sprawled out on the pavement. A dog stood barking at the wreckage.

"That poor guy should've stuck with the horse-n-buggy, eh Mordecai?"

The old fellow doubled over in a belly laugh as the little train went round and round. I shook my head. Off in the shadows, his pudgy grandson eyed me suspiciously.

It pained me to leave that old house. A sense of homesickness followed me out the door – a deep need to return to some place I've never really been.

A Lone Wolf in Nashville, Tenn.

During the six years I lived in Nashville, I saw that lovely river town start sliding downhill. The economic crash of 2008, followed by the flood of 2010, corroded the classic areas of the city. By that time, big capital was already pouring in from north and west.

In a short time, global companies had built a strong corporate infrastructure in the heart of Tennessee. Incoming hordes

kicked off a traffic jam that hasn't budged in five years. Music Row was gutted. The skyline – once dominated by brick facades, tacky neon, and the big Bat Building – suddenly mutated.

Today, the cityscape is defined by McSkyscrapers, an ultra-mod convention centre, a Bezosian borg cube, and long rows of Crayola condos. Last time I passed through, just after Election Day, the city felt like a half-finished Disney theme park where the lines never move. The old faces have been replaced by plastic cowboys and bleached LA transplants.

It looks like things will just get weirder from here. On Christmas morning, news broke that an RV had exploded – Baghdad-style – down on 2nd Ave. Watching the surveillance footage, you can hear a robotic female voice warning residents of immanent danger: "This area must be evacuated now," she repeats, over and over; concluding with, "If you can hear this message, evacuate now". Then... BOOM! Everything blown to shreds.

Before you could say "lone wolf", the perp was identified as 63 year-old Anthony Quinn Warner, a tech-averse IT guy from a nearby suburb. Bits of person were found near the blast zone. DNA analysis indicates Warner was inside the RV when it detonated. Apparently, he'd just signed over two overpriced properties to a pretty 29 year-old living in Los Angeles. He also told an ex-girlfriend he'd been diagnosed with cancer.

Warner's suspected target was the 15-storey AT&T building. Rumour has it that Warner's father,

who died years ago, worked for a company bought out by AT&T.

The Tennessean called Warner a “self-employed computer guru”. The FBI claims that the mullet-sporting misfit was freaked out by encroaching 5G networks and the spectre of mass surveillance.

His camper-bomb took out phone networks and Internet service for a couple of days. No one but Warner was killed. If history is any guide, the only lasting effects will be on civil liberties. As with self-preservation and a sense of humour, the desire for privacy will soon be pathologised.

Look for more police checkpoints on Broadway, and heavy-handed crowd control. Have your ID ready. Look for overzealous cops shaking down songwriters who busk without a permit. Look for RV-gypsies to become a public menace. Look for bland Lego blocks to replace the scorched brick buildings on 2nd Ave.

Look for drones overhead. Look for more cameras looking back at you. From now on, nothing happens out of sight. Not bar fights. Not smoke sessions. Not making out in a dark alley. If you want to paint the town red, expect your best and worst moments to go on your permanent record. Think of it as getting a state-sponsored selfie.

If the 21st-century response to terrorism has taught us anything, it's that the Panopticon appears in the blink of an eye. It

You could see the life force flow from fish to bird. Both creatures were synced to a larger flow

only takes one dumbass knocking over a single domino for the whole mess to come crashing down on our heads.

Rogue River Gorge, Ore.

After years of wandering the Oregonian mountains, last summer I finally saw a raptor pull a fish out of the river. Our group was packed into two big rubber rafts, with a few scouts in kayaks. Most were hippies – a Caucoid dreadie, a Cascadian rasta, a spun-out Indian, a cute Colombian woman, and the Prince of Persia. The alpha dread handed out psilocybin mushrooms as a matter of hospitality. He wasn't stingy with his beers, either.

By the time I saw that bald eagle swoop down, claws at the ready, hitting the water with masterful precision then pulling up a massive salmon with barely a splash, my third eye was pried wide open, half-blinded by the sun's sharp rays. You could see the life force flow from fish to bird. Both creatures were synced to the

greater movement around us.

Later on, we discovered rows of cliff swallow nests cemented to the rock under a craggy overhang. We paddled over to invade their territory. Tiny chicks cheeped in their clay fortresses, and the adults whirled up into an aggressive bird tornado, forcing us to retreat.

Down around the bend, we saw an osprey come in for the kill. It was diving down toward the river, claws outstretched, when out of the blue came an ornery cliff swallow. The smaller bird swooped in on the osprey – not touching him, really, but psyching him out – and made the raptor miss his prey. The little bastard turned around and whistled as the osprey flew off empty-handed.

The whole scene put me in a brilliant mood. I mean, that cliff swallow appeared from out of nowhere, just to fuck up an osprey's day for the hell of it.

Nature loves a belly laugh.

That night, the hippies played guitars and congas. They sang about world peace and other mythical beings. Their smiles glowed in the campfire. I stared into the flames. If hell is other people, you can damn me to hell. **CT**

Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at www.JOEBOT.xyz.

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LITERARY GIANTS: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Virginia Woolf

Photo: Wikimedia

Trevor Hoyle

Scottie and Virginia: Eighty years on

Two writers with little in common died 80 years ago: F. Scott Fitzgerald in December 1940, Virginia Woolf in March 1941. But something they do share – their literary legacy – still burns bright and their legend lives on

The hedonistic decade in which F. Scott Fitzgerald achieved fame, the 1920s, became known as the “Jazz Age”. It’s claimed – justifiably, I believe – that it was Fitzgerald himself who coined the epithet. Whether or not it’s true, he was without doubt its pre-eminent chronicler and brightest star.

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD was born in St Paul, Minnesota but brought up mostly in New York State and New Jersey. He was educated at private Catholic

schools and went on to Princeton. After a brief spell as an advertising copywriter he enlisted in the army and was posted to Montgomery, Alabama, and there met and fell head over heels in love with Southern belle, Zelda Sayre. She broke off the relationship with penniless Scott, barely out of his teens, but fate and burgeoning talent took a hand the following year with the publication of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920.

It was a tremendous success, selling more than 40,000 copies within months, and gave him the

money and status he craved in order to marry her. The pair lived extravagantly, way beyond their means, darlings of smart society in New York and the French Riviera. Early on in the marriage Zelda showed signs of mental instability. While living in Paris she set her sights on becoming a ballerina (now in her late-twenties) and started taking lessons; Scott indulged his wife, possibly to keep her occupied while he worked.

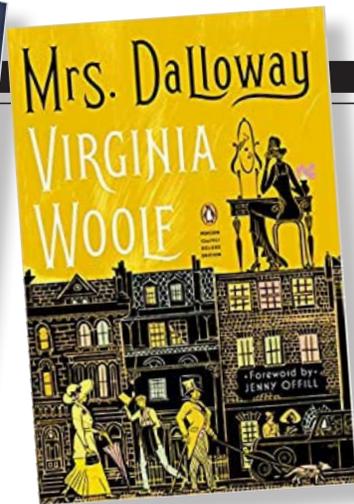
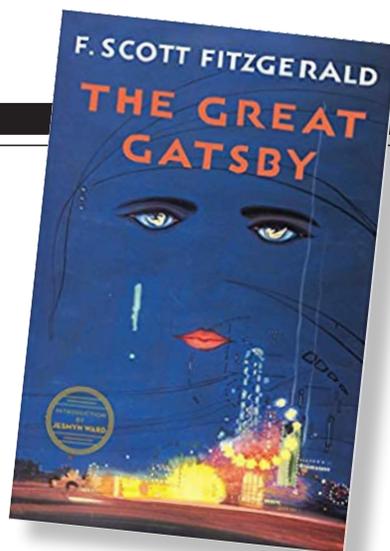
It wasn’t long, however, before Zelda’s mental disintegration and Scott’s alcoholism brought

this high-flying fantasy crashing down in debt and despair. Fitzgerald ended his days a hack writer in Hollywood, churning out screenplays purely for the money, few of which made it to the screen. Still, he did accrue a tidy stash of nearly \$90,000 over 18 months, which cleared his debts and paid for Zelda's permanent residence in a Swiss sanatorium.

The Great Gatsby (1926) is Fitzgerald's most famous and most accomplished novel. T.S. Eliot was a big fan. It tells the story of Jay Gatsby, an enigmatically romantic figure around whom myths are woven; where he came from and how he acquired his fabulous wealth are shrouded in mystery. Gatsby's ambition and singular goal, his whole life and passion in fact, are focused obsessively on winning the love of Daisy Buchanan. Daisy is a vain creature, frivolous, empty-headed – and already married. This doesn't deter Gatsby, whose manic determination to win her at all costs contains the seeds of its own inevitable, tragic end.

It is a supreme achievement that in this short novel Fitzgerald captured the dreams and heady aspirations of his age, and also the bitter dashed hopes of the "lost generation". And, it has to be said, conveyed in the most wonderful prose, restrained, unshowy, and yet limpidly poetic.

Some critics disparaged Fitzgerald for possessing a fatal facility, ie, of squandering his beautiful talent and not taking pains with his writing. The exact opposite is the truth. Witness the blood, sweat and tears he poured into *Tender is the Night* (1934) which ran to seventeen versions over its nine years of composition.



CLASSICS: Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

Set in the south of France and around Europe, this long novel traces the mental decline of Nicole, married to psychiatrist Dick Diver, and closely follows Fitzgerald's own torment as Zelda's illness descended into madness. Despite its harrowing theme, the book is both poignant and lyrical. Once again it shows how diligent Fitzgerald was in perfecting his simple yet elegant style, placing him beyond question as one of the finest novelists of his generation.

A master of the short story, and always in need of money, he wrote prolifically for high-paying magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's* and *Esquire*. Some of these pieces, written between 1920 and 1937, were collected in *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*. Unlike the fictional Gatsby, Fitzgerald was steely-eyed and unflinchingly honest about his own predicament. In *The Crack-Up* (stories and autobiographical fragments dating from 1929 to 1940) he recounts his slide into alcoholism without a shred of self-pity; indeed his fortitude in battling it is noble and inspiring.

None of Fitzgerald's books was in print when he died of a heart attack at the age of 44. At the time he was working on the first draft

of *The Last Tycoon* – despite being uncompleted, one of the most incisive "insider" portraits of Hollywood ever penned. The tycoon of the title (Monroe Stahr) is based on Irving Thalberg, the legendary wunderkind impresario of MGM, whose death at just 37 shocked the movie industry.

It is also a tender yet unsentimental love story, and in the eyes of many critics contained the seeds potentially of being Fitzgerald's crowning masterpiece. As J.B. Priestley, himself a novelist and screenwriter, wrote: "I would rather have written this unfinished novel than the total works of some widely admired American novelists".

VIRGINIA ADELIN STEPHEN suffered her first nervous breakdown at the age of 13, following the death of her mother, Julia. Born and brought up at Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, London, she was the daughter of Leslie Stephen, later knighted for his decades-long services as the compiler of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Virginia was to be plagued by debilitating depressions the rest of her life, perpetually in dread of what she called "the old devil". Her marriage to Leonard Woolf was long and happy.

Together they founded the Hogarth Press, and became the focal point of the Bloomsbury Group, a radical and unashamedly elitist circle of writers and intellectuals that flourished between the wars.

In a famous essay, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, published in 1924, Woolf set down her artistic manifesto. She rejected the tedious surface realism of the Victorian old guard (H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy), insisting instead that the true nature of reality was more transitory and elusive – *a luminous halo* was her phrase – which she tried to snare in her fiction. This led to technical experiment, to literary expressionism and the method known as stream-of-consciousness. So she was, along with James Joyce, at the forefront of the modern movement.

It’s for this reason some readers find the novels of Virginia Woolf difficult and daunting. But they repay the effort. *Mrs Dalloway*, her fourth novel, published in 1925, certainly does. The action takes place during the course of a single day as society hostess Clarissa Dalloway makes preparations for a grand dinner party that evening. Within this simple frame, Woolf plunges into Clarissa’s inner life, laying bare the host of memories, moods, feelings, impressions assailing her: an infinite number of them – some trivial, fantastic, fleeting, others engraved with the sharpness of steel.

If you pause to examine your own thoughts and their wayward, arbitrary nature in the space of just a few minutes, and then the effort of trying to capture and pin them down, you’ll glimpse the task Virginia Woolf set herself.

Both Fitzgerald and Woolf were blessed and tortured by their gifts and stuck to their true calling

The focal point of *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, is Mrs Ramsay, based very much on her own mother. Radiating out from this central figure, we encounter her family and friends as they spend a holiday at the seaside: the novel is set in Scotland, but the actual memories are of the idyllic summers Virginia spent as a child in St Ives in Cornwall. Not much happens in the way of plot or incident, everything in the senses and perceptions of the characters. Once again, Woolf is striving to grasp and recreate on the page the intensity of emotional lived experience.

Her last novel, *Between the Acts*, published posthumously in 1941, is about a pageant of Olde Englande held at a country house on a warm summer night. But the year is 1939, invasion threatens, and an elegiac note sounds through this short novel that a thousand years of history, epitomised by this peaceful pastoral scene, is about to end in brutal violation.

Living on the south coast – literally in the firing line – and being married to a Jew, Virginia must have been acutely aware of the imminent danger she and her husband were in. Perhaps this fear overwhelmed her and pushed her nearer the brink: there were ru-

mours that she and Leonard made preparations to asphyxiate themselves with exhaust fumes in their garage should Nazi troops land on British beaches.

Almost a last entry in her diary reads: “I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down”. Was this evidence of a mind unravelling? Or as I prefer to believe, the ineffable thought processes of a genius with a unique vision? It is certainly true that no English writer of the 20th-century has grown more in stature and importance after death than Virginia Woolf.

Three weeks after this diary entry, on March 28, 1941, she put stones in her pockets and walked into the river Ouse near her home in Sussex and drowned. She was 59.

As unlike as it was possible to be – in their writing style and subject matter as well as their social and intellectual milieu – Fitzgerald and Woolf nonetheless shared some common ground. At the time of death both were held in comparatively low critical esteem; neither was selling in appreciable amounts. Both were blessed and tortured by their gifts and stuck to their true calling, and in the end were recognised and lauded for the remarkable, original talents they were. **CT**

*Trevor Hoyle is a writer and novelist based in Lancashire, England. His most recent novel is the environmental thriller *The Last Gasp*, published by Jo Fletcher Books (Quercus). He is currently preparing and making notes for a novel, *The Rock ‘n’ Roll Diaries: 56-58*. His website is www.trevorhoyle.com*

Stephen F. Wagner, State College, Pennsylvania Steph





American beauties!

Gabriele Galimberti

Gun crazy

*Americans
at home with
their toys-of-
mass-destruction*

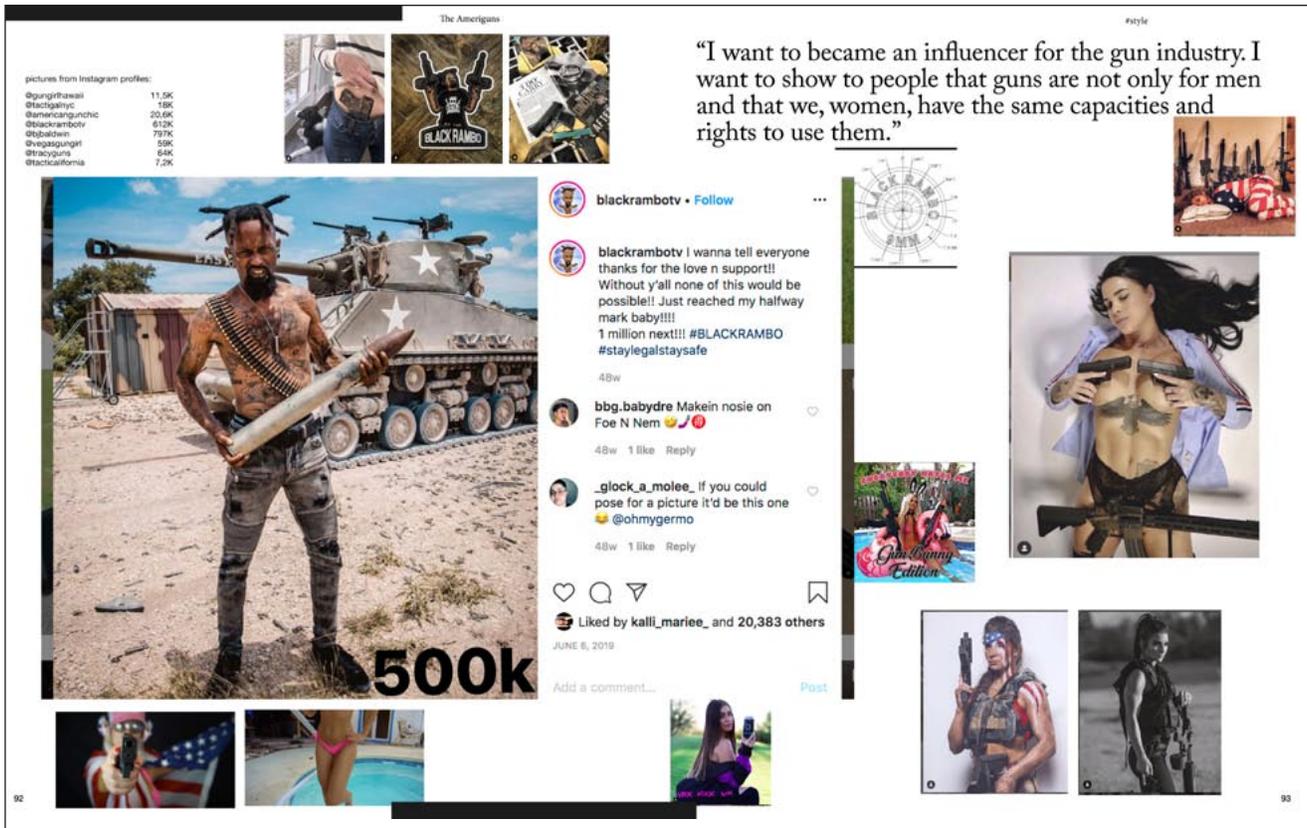
Of all the weapons in the world owned by private citizens for non-military purposes, half are in the United States. Numerically they exceed the country's population: 393-million for 372-million people. This is no coincidence, nor a matter of market alone, but of tradition and Constitutional guarantee. It is the history of the Second Amendment, ratified in 1791 to reassure the inhabitants of the newly independent territories. Two hundred



Above: Avery Skipalis of Tampa, Florida, believes people who don't love guns have an underlying problem.

Right: Page of statistics shows gun deaths in the USA, 2016.





Above: The bigger the better – Instagram images highlight a country's obsession with high-powered weapons.

and fifty years later, it is firmly entrenched in the country's life, encompassing the fundamental American belief in Family, Freedom, Passion, and Style

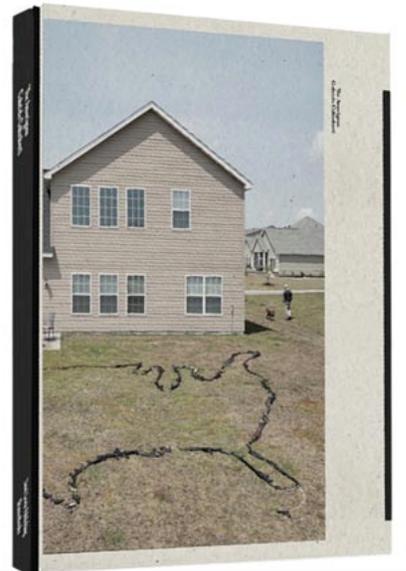
Italian photographer Gabriele Galimberti accentuates those values in his new book, *The Ameriguns*, his travels taking him from New York City to Honolulu, where he meets proud gun-owners and captures images of them proudly displaying their bizarre collections. His images feature gun-obsessed people in their homes and neighbourhoods, including locations where no one would expect to find such collections.

These portraits, along with the accompanying stories, provide an uncommon and unexpected – some would say crazy – insight into the mindset that is represent-

ed by the institution of the Second Amendment.

The Ameriguns is a stunning collection of otherworldliness – take a close look at its pictures of exuberant middle-class Americans lovingly embracing and displaying their toys-of-mass-destruction, and you might just begin to understand the dread and menace the rest of the world sees when America intrudes into their lives. – TS

● Gabriele Galimberti is an award-winning Italian photographer who works on long-term projects around the world, several of which have become books including *The Heavens*, published by Dewi Lewis in 2015. He has exhibited in shows worldwide and recently became a *National Geographic* photographer. **CT**



THE AMERIGUNS

Gabriele Galimberti

Published by Dewi Lewis Publishing
www.dewilewis.com

£35 (UK) / \$45 (US)

John Pilger

The most lethal threat isn't Covid. It's war!

I reserve a specific contempt for those who promote the crime of rapacious war, having never experienced it themselves

Britain's Armed Services Memorial is a silent, haunting place. Set in the rural beauty of Staffordshire, in an arboretum of some 30,000 trees and sweeping lawns, its Homeric figures celebrate determination and sacrifice.

The names of more than 16,000 British servicemen and women are listed. The literature says they "died in operational theatre or were targeted by terrorists".

On the day I was there, a stonemason was adding new names to those who have died in some 50 operations across the world during what is known as "peacetime". Malaya, Ireland, Kenya, Hong Kong, Libya, Iraq, Palestine and many more, including secret operations, such as Indochina.

Not a year has passed since peace was declared in 1945 that Britain has not sent military forces to fight the wars of empire.

Not a year has passed when countries, mostly poor and riven by conflict, have not bought or have been "soft loaned" British arms to further the wars, or "interests", of empire.

Empire? What empire? The investigative journalist Phil Miller recently revealed in *Declassified* that Boris Johnson's Britain maintained 145 military sites – call them bases – in 42 countries. Johnson has boasted that Britain is to be "the foremost naval power in Europe".

In the midst of the greatest health emergency in modern times, with more than 4-million surgical procedures delayed by the National Health Service, Johnson has announced a record increase of £16.5-billion in so-called defence spending – a figure that would restore the under-resourced NHS many times over.

But these billions are not for defence. Britain has no enemies other than those within who betray the trust of its ordinary people, its nurses and doctors, its carers, elderly, homeless and youth, as successive neo-liberal governments have done, Conservative and Labour.

Exploring the serenity of the National War Memorial, I soon realised there was not a single

monument, or plinth, or plaque, or rosebush honouring the memory of Britain's victims – the civilians in the "peacetime" operations commemorated here.

There is no remembrance of the Libyans killed when their country was wilfully destroyed by Prime Minister David Cameron and his collaborators in Paris and Washington.

There is no word of regret for the Serbian women and children killed by British bombs, dropped from a safe height on schools, factories, bridges, towns, on the orders of Tony Blair; or for the impoverished Yemeni children extinguished by Saudi pilots with their logistics and targets supplied by Britons in the air-conditioned safety of Riyadh; or for the Syrians starved by "sanctions".

There is no monument to the Palestinian children murdered with the British elite's enduring connivance, such as the recent campaign that destroyed a modest reform movement within the Labour Party with specious accusations of anti-Semitism.

A few weeks ago, Israel's military chief of staff and Britain's



CASUALTY OF WAR: Dead German member of Waffen-SS, Northern France, during World War II.

Chief of the Defence Staff signed an agreement to “formalise and enhance” military co-operation. This was not news. More British arms and logistical support will now flow to the lawless regime in Tel Aviv, whose snipers target children and psychopaths interrogate children in extreme isolation. (See the recent shocking report by Defense for Children, *Isolated and Alone*).

Perhaps the most striking omission at the Staffordshire war memorial is an acknowledgement of the million Iraqis whose lives and country were destroyed by the illegal invasion of Blair and Bush in 2003.

ORB, a member of the British Polling Council, put the figure at 1.2-million. In 2013, the ComRes

organisation asked a cross-section of the British public how many Iraqis had died in the invasion. A majority said fewer than 10,000.

How is such a lethal silence sustained in a sophisticated society? My answer is that propaganda is far more effective in societies that regard themselves as free than in dictatorships and autocracies. I include censorship by omission.

Our propaganda industries – both political and cultural, including most of the media – are the most powerful, ubiquitous and refined on earth. Big lies can be repeated incessantly in comforting, credible BBC voices. Omissions are no problem.

A similar question relates

to nuclear war, whose threat is “of no interest”, to quote Harold Pinter. Russia, a nuclear power, is encircled by the war-making group known as Nato, with British troops regularly “manoeuvring” right up to the border where Hitler invaded.

The defamation of all things Russian, not least the historical truth that the Red Army largely won the Second World War, is percolated into public consciousness. The Russians are of “no interest”, except as demons.

China, also a nuclear power, is the brunt of unrelenting provocation, with American strategic bombers and drones constantly probing its territorial space and – hooray – HMS Queen Elizabeth, Britain’s £3-billion aircraft carrier,

soon to sail 6,500 miles to enforce “freedom of navigation” within sight of the Chinese mainland.

Some 400 American bases encircle China, “rather like a noose”, a former Pentagon planner said to me. They extend all the way from Australia, though the Pacific to southern and northern Asia and across Eurasia.

In South Korea, a missile system known as Terminal High Altitude Air Defense, or THAAD, is aimed point-blank at China across the narrow East China Sea. Imagine Chinese missiles in Mexico or Canada or off the coast of California.

A few years after the invasion of Iraq, I made a film called *The War You Don't See*, in which I asked leading American and British journalists as well as TV news executives – people I knew as colleagues – why and how Bush and Blair were allowed to get away with the great crime in Iraq, considering that the lies were not very clever.

Their response surprised me. Had “we”, they said – that is journalists and broadcasters, especially in the US – challenged the claims of the White House and Downing Street, investigated and exposed the lies, instead of amplifying and echoing them, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 probably would not have happened. Countless people would be alive today. Four million refugees would not have fled. The grisly ISIS, a product of the Blair/Bush invasion, might not have been conceived.

David Rose, then with the London *Observer*, which supported the invasion, described “the pack of lies fed to me by a fairly sophis-

Today, the war drums have new and highly enthusiastic beaters in Britain, America and the “West”

ticated disinformation campaign”. Rageh Omah, then the BBC’s man in Iraq, told me, “We failed to press the most uncomfortable buttons hard enough”. Dan Rather, the CBS anchorman, agreed, as did many others.

I admired these journalists who broke the silence. But they are honourable exceptions. Today, the war drums have new and highly enthusiastic beaters in Britain, America and the “West”.

Take your pick among the legion of Russia and China bashers and promoters of fiction such as Russiagate. My personal Oscar goes to Peter Hartcher of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, whose unremitting rousing drivel about the “existential threat” (of China/Russia, mostly China) was illustrated by a smiling Scott Morrison, the PR man who is Australia’s prime minister, dressed like Churchill, V for Victory sign and all. “Not since the 1930s” the pair of them intoned. Ad nauseum.

Covid has provided cover for this pandemic of propaganda. In July, Morrison took his cue from Trump and announced that Australia, which has no enemies, would spend A\$270-billion on provoking one, including missiles that could reach China.

That China’s purchase of Aus-

tralia’s minerals and agriculture effectively underwrote the Australian economy was “of no interest” to the government in Canberra.

The Australian media cheered almost as one, delivering a shower of abuse at China. Thousands of Chinese students, who had guaranteed the gross salaries of Australian vice-chancellors, were advised by their government to go elsewhere. Chinese-Australians were bad-mouthed and deliverymen were assaulted. Colonial racism is never hard to revive.

Some years ago, I interviewed the former head of the CIA in Latin America, Duane Claridge. In a few refreshingly honest words, he summed up “Western” foreign policy as it is ordained and directed by Washington.

The super-power, he said, could do what it wanted where it wanted whenever its “strategic interests” dictated. His words were: “Get used to it, world”.

I have reported a number of wars. I have seen the remains of children and women and the elderly bombed and burned to death: their villages laid to waste, their petrified trees festooned with human parts. And much else.

Perhaps that is why I reserve a specific contempt for those who promote the crime of rapacious war, who beckon it with bad faith and profanities, having never experienced it themselves. Their monopoly must be broken. **CT**

This is a version of an address John Pilger gave to a Stop the War fund-raiser, Artists Against War, in London, last month.



BILLION-DOLLAR KID: Austin Russell on the Autotech + Talkrobot stage during Collision 2018 in New Orleans.

Sam Pizzigati

The myth of the youngest self-made billionaire

The super rich owe their super fortunes to factors that have little to do with ‘genius’

Myths die hard, especially when the myths in question serve to prop up the legitimacy of the richest among us. And the myth these richest hold dearest: that

their grand fortunes represent a fitting reward for smarts and hard work.

Wall Street has just juiced this deeply cherished myth with a stock public offering that’s created “the world’s newest and youngest self-

made billionaire”. Meet Austin Russell, the 25-year-old founder and CEO of Luminar, a company aiming to outfit self-driving cars with laser technology.

Russell holds about a third of Luminar’s stock. After the first day

of public trading last month, that stock's soaring value boosted Russell's net worth to \$2.4-billion. Five days later, more soaring brought Russell another billion.

All these billions, business commentators gushed, couldn't be going to a smarter guy. At age two, *Forbes* informed us, Russell memorised the periodic table of elements. At age 11, the *Wall Street Journal* added, he was "building prototype supercomputers and optical-electronics systems". At age 13, marvelled *Entrepreneur*, Russell filed his first patent.

Four years later, this precocious young man dropped out of Stanford to found Luminar after winning a \$100,000 fellowship from PayPal billionaire Peter Thiel. Since then, Russell has been fine-tuning "laser sensors that bounce off objects, to give vehicles a three-dimensional view of their surroundings."

His work, Russell assures us, hasn't been easy.

"Scaling this up," he noted after entering America's billionaire ranks, has "been insanely intense, gruelling".

None of this coverage about young Russell's emergence should particularly surprise us. Business commentators are always rushing to find brilliance in billionaires – and billionaires seldom shy from supplying the evidence.

What should surprise us, at least a little bit, turns out to be the rush by a newly named Joe Biden appointee to endorse the heroic claims our captains of industry and their cheerleaders so regularly inflict upon us.

This surprisingly full-throated endorsement came courtesy of

Russell owes his ten-digit status to a variety of factors that have nothing to do with talent or work ethic

Rep. Cedric Richmond of Louisiana, president-elect Biden's pick to direct the White House Office of Public Engagement.

"Nobody's going to persuade me", Richmond told a gathering of the *Wall Street Journal's* CEO Council, "that CEOs in this country are bad people. CEOs in this country are creating jobs, they are supporting families".

CEOs in this country are also making fantastically big bucks. They've spent recent decades growing the gap ever wider between what they take home and what their workers earn. Major chief execs, the Economic Policy Institute calculates, now make 320 times worker pay, up from 21 times worker pay in 1969 and 61 times in 1989.

These CEOs remain exceptionally adverse to any move that might narrow that gap. Walt Disney, for instance, has just announced the layoff of 4,000 employees, on top of the 28,000 layoffs the company announced this past October. This autumnal assault on Disney workers came after the company – in August – gave its top execs a reprieve from pandemic hardship by ending the temporary corona pay cuts the execs accepted last spring.

Disney's Bob Iger, for the rec-

ord, pocketed \$47.5-million last year as CEO and chairman.

The same economic insecurity Disney workers now face has become chronic nationwide. American workers a half-century ago had jobs that paid enough to support families and buy homes. Millions of Americans workers today, by contrast, find themselves trapped in a 21st-century "precariat". They have no security. And the myths that justify grand fortunes help lock this precariat in place.

So let's start piercing those myths at every opportunity. Yes, Austin Russell certainly has smarts and works hard. But plenty of top execs a half-century ago also had exceptional smarts and worked hard and never made it anywhere close to the billionaire status Russell has now registered.

Smarts and hard work haven't made Russell a billionaire. He owes his ten-digit status to a variety of factors that have nothing to do with talent or work ethic.

Consider Luminar's lofty share price, the vehicle driving Russell's new-found fortune. That share price reflects a stock market awash with rich investors eager to speculate on unproven firms like Russell's that just might hit the jackpot. Those rich investors, in turn, owe their stashes of cash to decades of public policies that have crushed trade unions and prevented workers from sharing fairly in the wealth they create.

And let's not overlook the role the current federal tax code plays. High-tech corporate wunderkinds like Austin Russell enjoy kid-gloves treatment at tax time, thanks to the obscure but incred-

ibly potent “founders’ stock” loophole.

Founders of start-ups typically don’t take big paychecks as compensation. They take stock in their company instead. Over time, the stock appreciates in value. The founders pay no tax on that increase. Eventually, they start selling their shares, reaping huge windfalls. They do have to pay taxes on these profits, but at just the discounted “capital gains” tax rate.

And top execs getting on in years, tax watchdog Victor Fleischer adds, often bequeath founder shares of stock to their heirs, who only face taxes on the increase in the value of those shares after they’ve taken possession of them. In other words, the vast increase in the value of the shares goes totally untaxed.

“The tax treatment of founders’ stock”, notes Fleischer, “represents a critical design flaw in a progressive income tax system” that “contributes to the broader trend of increasing inequality, particularly at the very top of the scale”.

Those at the top and their cheerleaders have a justification,

Our entrepreneurial geniuses, the argument goes, need an incentive to take the risks that make our economy grow

of course, for their preferential tax treatment. Our entrepreneurial geniuses, the argument goes, need an incentive to take the risks that create jobs and make our economy grow. But researchers, Fleischer points out, have found next to no evidence that tax breaks for entrepreneurs do anything more than reward these entrepreneurs for what they would be doing anyway.

Many Americans, observes Fleischer, take risks and get no tax breaks for their risk-taking.

“It is not self-evident”, he writes, “why risk taking by rich executives and venture capitalists is more valuable than risk taking by, say, a Korean-American grocer, a Mexican-American restaurateur, a farmer in California, or an Uber driver in Miami”.

Joe Biden campaigned on a call for a tax code that ends the “founders’ tax” loophole. His advisers have detailed changes that would both tax the capital gains of America’s rich at ordinary income tax rates – in effect almost doubling, the Tax Foundation reports, the federal levy on capital gains income – and tax the unrealised capital gains the rich bequeath to their heirs.

The Congress that takes office in January will be unlikely to enact such changes, given the party split in the Senate. Fundamental changes in the federal tax code will have to await the results of the 2022 midterm elections. But what we can do right now: change the conversation – and blow away the bogus rationales that let billion-dollar fortunes proliferate at our economy’s ridiculously lofty summit. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him at @Too_Much_Online.

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JUNE 23, 2016: STOKE NEWINGTON, LONDON



“ Before heading to work on this momentous morning, I visited my local polling station to vote in the 'United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum'. The atmosphere was one of anticipation and, for me at least, anger as to why the public had been asked to decide on such an important issue, one that I felt that I and most of the more than 33.5-million others who voted that day did not fully understand the implications of. ”

Michael Goldrei

12-star blues

As the UK departs the EU, a photographer revisits his record of what Brexit has meant to him, using images he has taken since the referendum vote on June 23, 2016

JUNE 23, 2016: HACKNEY, LONDON



“ This evening I attended an event hosted by Magnum Photos, with many of their photographers in attendance. I heard several people express their concern as to what the outcome would be in the morning, fearing that not everyone would vote to remain. At one point, the venue opened up its shutters and I spotted this unknown man outside, who seemed to be a perfect caricature of Brexit Britain. ”

JUNE 24, 2016: KING'S CROSS, LONDON



“ This was the morning the results were published, with 52 percent of the public voting to leave the EU and a close 48 percent to remain. Upon learning this, the blood drained from my face, and the rest of my journey to work felt surreal, as if I was a zombie, passing many other zombies, all of us in a state of shock and disbelief. ”

JULY 30, 2016: PECKHAM, LONDON



“ A few months before the referendum, a friend introduced me to a young woman called Tabea. An excellent example of the benefits of freedom of movement, she'd moved to the UK from Germany to become a clockmaker. She was an instant hit and we became a couple. Soon after this photo was taken, she accepted a job in Vienna, starting in February 2017. As I was enraptured by her, I decided to move there, too. ”

AUGUST 21, 2017: WESTMINSTER, LONDON



“ I gathered with many others in Parliament Square on this day to witness Big Ben's final chimes at 12 noon, before four years of restoration work began on the Elizabeth Tower. The crowd was a mixture of people with the same curiosity as me, as well as tourists, pro-EU protesters, politicians and news crews. It was all very peaceful and felt like an excuse for people to come together to witness an interesting event. ”

MARCH 12, 2019: VIENNA

“ One of the loose ends I'd wanted to tie up before moving to Vienna to join Tabea was to apply for Irish citizenship. Through the sheer luck of having had Irish grandparents, I decided to make the most of this opportunity, in the hope it would help ensure I'd be able to remain in the EU. The process, from gathering the documents to getting citizenship and then a passport, took just over two years. Some of the documents I obtained were so old they seemed they might evaporate into thin air at any moment, while others included information I felt I shouldn't be seeing. Eventually I got my passport and celebrated in true Irish style. ”



Michael Goldrei is a British-born, Vienna-based street and documentary photographer. His work has been featured by the Guardian, BBC, Time Out, Slate.fr, Il Post, BuzzFeed, Petapixel, Eyeshot, and Vogue Italia's PhotoVogue.

He has published two books, "Chromorama" and "Hoods". His artwork based on the latter book featured on Petapixel as "The World's First One-sided Continuous Photography Book?"

He is the founder of Optic Nerve, an international street photography collective.

JANUARY 29, 2020: VIENNA



“ With two days to go until the UK's withdrawal from the EU, I visited an address that is very important to me. My grandmother grew up in this building in Vienna and, being Jewish, had to flee before the Second World War. Aged 18, she left for England on her own, where she remained to live a long life, but that wasn't the case for all of her family. Coincidentally, I now live just a street away from where she once lived. When I think about what happened to my grandmother not that long ago, and the divisions among different countries and cultures at the time, I can't help but worry about where our future may lie. ”

JANUARY 31, 2020: VIENNA



“ On the evening the UK formally withdrew from the EU, I visited a Brexit-themed event in Vienna at 'The Tube Station', a British bar. Like me, most of the guests were British citizens living in Austria, unhappy that their home country had voted to leave the EU. The TV screens above our heads relayed the news from the ORF (the Austrian State TV), and the BBC, building up to the UK's official departure from the EU at midnight. ”

DECEMBER 25, 2020: VIENNA



“ With only weeks to go until the transition period ended and with no clear deal in sight, Boris Johnson finally put on a show in December 2020, attending talks with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen. I was unimpressed that the UK Prime Minister had left it until the afternoon of Christmas Eve to announce a deal (meaning it would be covered by newspapers here on Christmas Day). It seems that Boris Johnson's deal will leave Britain in a poorer position for decades to come. All of this on top of the year the coronavirus has had a devastating impact on the world will surely leave Britain in need of more help from its European neighbours than ever before. ”

Conn Hallinan

The high price of the new high ground

Adding another military service when America is reeling from the economic fallout of Covid-19, and the warming oceans are churning out superstorms, is something neither the US nor the world can afford

When President-elect Joe Biden takes office Jan 21 he will be faced with some very expensive problems, from bailing out the Covid-19 economy to getting a handle on climate change. Vaccinating over 300-million people will not be cheap, and wrestling the US hydrocarbon-based economy in the direction of renewable energies will come with a hefty price tag. One place to find some of that would be to respond to Russian, Chinese and United Nations (UN) proposals to demilitarise space, heading off what will be an expensive – and destabilising – arms race for the new high ground.

In December 2019 the US Department of Defense (DOD) created the Space Force, although a major push to increase the military's presence in space dates back to the Obama administration. In fact, space has always had a military aspect to it, and no country is more dependent on that dimension than the US. A virtual cloud of surveillance satellites spy on adversaries, tap into communications and monitor

military manoeuvres and weapons tests. It was a US Vela Hotel satellite that caught the Israelis and the South Africans secretly testing a nuclear warhead in the southern Indian Ocean in 1979.

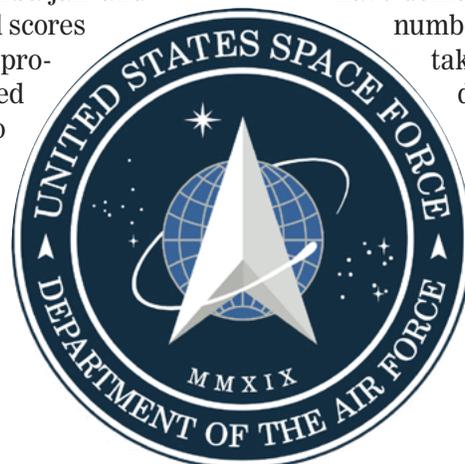
While other countries have similar platforms in space, the US is the only country with a worldwide military presence, and it is increasingly dependent on satellites to enhance its armed forces. Such satellites allow drone operators to call in missile strikes from half a world away without risking the lives of pilots.

The US is not the only country with armed drones. Turkish and Israeli drones demonstrated their effectiveness in the recent war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and scores of countries produce armed drones. But no other country wages war from tens of thousands of miles away.

American drones stalk adversaries in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East piloted from air conditioned trailers in southern Nevada. "It's only really the US that needs to conduct military operations anywhere in the world all the time against anyone", says Brian Weeden of the Secure World Federation told *Scientific American* in the magazine's November article, "Orbital Aggression: How do we prevent war in space?"

According to the DOD, it is the Russians and the Chinese who have taken the initiative to militarise space, although most of that is ancient news and a lot of it is based more on supposition than fact. Moscow, Beijing and Washington have long had the ability to take out an opponent's satellites, and have demonstrated that on a

number of occasions. It takes no great skill to do so. Satellites generally have very predictable orbits and speeds. Astrophysicist Laura Greco of the Union of





LETHAL FORCE: Image from last year's recruitment advertising campaign by the US Space Force.

Concerned Scientists calls them “sitting ducks”.

Satellites do, however, have the capacity to manoeuvre. Indeed, it was a recent encounter between a Russian Cosmos “inspection” satellite and a US spy satellite that kicked off the latest round of “the Russians are coming!” rhetoric from the Pentagon. The Americans accused the Cosmos of potentially threatening the American satellite by moving close to it, although many independent observers shrug their shoulders. “That’s what an inspection satellite does,” says Weedon, “It is hard to see at this point why the US is making it a big deal”.

Because blaster rattling loosens Congressional purse strings.

China’s military and civilian space budget is estimated to be \$8.4-billion, and Russia’s a modest \$3-billion. In contrast, the US space budget is \$48-billion and climbing

and that figure doesn’t account for secret black budget items like the X-37B unmanned space plane.

The DOD also points to the fact that the Chinese have launched more satellites in the past year than the US, but that is a reflection of the fact that the US currently dominates space, both on the military and the civilian side. Other countries – like India and the European Union – are simply trying to catch up. Out of 3,200 live satellites currently in orbit, the US controls 1,327.

Space is, indeed, essential for the modern world. Satellites don’t just spy or direct drones, they are central to communication systems, banking, weather predictions and monitoring everything from climate change to tectonic plate movement. An actual war in space that destroyed the satellite networks would cause a world-

wide blackout and likely lead to a ground war.

Which is why it is so important to sit down with Russia, China and the UN and work out a way to keep space a realm for peace not war. While there are treaties that cover weaponising space, they are dated. The 1967 Treaty on Outer Space keeps nuclear weapons from being deployed, but doesn’t cover ground-launched or space-launched anti-satellite weapons, or how close a satellite has to get to another country’s satellite to be considered a threat?

In 2008, and again in 2014, Moscow and Beijing proposed a Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space Treaty. So far, the US has not formally responded, and rejected four resolutions proposed by the UN’s General Assembly on preventing the militarisation of space. There

have been informal talks between the Russians and Americans, but the last three US administrations have essentially stonewalled serious discussions.

Of course, the US currently holds most of the cards, but that is shortsighted thinking. Adversaries always figure out how to overcome their disadvantages. The US was the first country to launch an anti-satellite weapon in 1959, but the Russians matched it four years later. China destroyed one of its old satellites in 2007, and India claims it has such a weapon.

But there is strong opposition to such an agreement in the Pentagon and the Congress, in part because of growing tensions between Russia, China and the US, and in part because of the power of corporations. Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics stand to reap billions in profits by supplying the hardware to dominate space. Added to the formidable lobbying power of the major arms corporations is another layer of up and comers like Virgin Galactic,

The services have their own space-based systems with their own budgets, and they jealously guard their turf

SpaceX and Blue Origin,

The Space Force also has bipartisan support. Some 188 Democrats joined 189 Republicans to pass the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020.

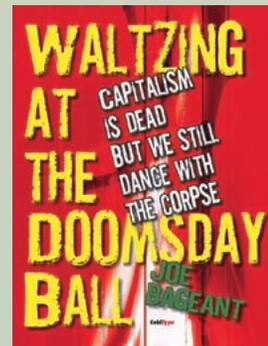
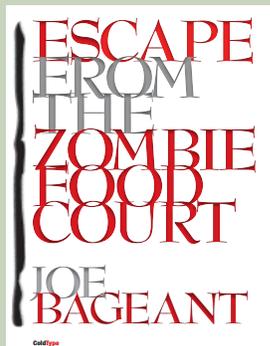
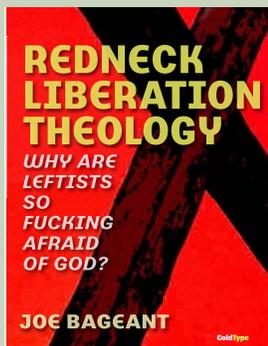
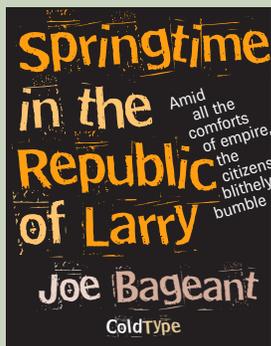
The creation of the Space Force has not exactly been met with open arms by the other military services. Each of the services have their own space-based systems and the budgets that go along with that, and they jealously guard their turf. For the time being Space Force is under the Air Force's wing, but its budget is separate and few doubt that it will soon become a

service in its own right.

At this point the outlay for the Force will be \$200-billion over five years, but military budgets have a way of increasing geometrically. The initial outlay for the Reagan administration's missile-intercepting Star War system was small, but it has eaten up over \$200-billion to date and is still chugging along, in spite of the fact that it is characterised more for failure than success.

The Biden administration will have to make hard choices around the pandemic and climate change while continuing to spend close to \$1-trillion a year on its military. Adding yet another military service when American states are reeling from the economic fallout of Covid-19, and the warming oceans are churning out superstorms, is something neither the US nor the world can afford. **CT**

Conn Hallinan can be read at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and at middleempireseries.wordpress.com.



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C.J. Hopkins

GloboCap Year Zero

The global-capitalist system can, virtually any time it wants, suspend the Simulation of Democracy and crack down on us with despotic force

Last year was GloboCap Year Zero. The year when the global capitalist ruling classes did away with the illusion of democracy and reminded everyone who is actually in charge, and exactly what happens when anyone challenges them.

In the relatively short span of ten months, societies throughout the world have been transformed beyond recognition. Constitutional rights have been suspended. Protest has been banned. Dissent is being censored. Government officials are issuing edicts restricting the most basic aspects of our lives ... where we can go, when we can go there, how long we are allowed to spend there, how many friends we are allowed to meet there, whether and when we can spend time with our families, what we are allowed to say to each other, who we can have sex with, where we have to stand, how we are allowed to eat and drink, etc. The list goes on and on.

The authorities have assumed control of the most intimate aspects of our daily lives. We are being managed like inmates in

a prison, told when to eat, sleep, exercise, granted privileges for good behaviour, punished for the slightest infractions of an ever-changing set of arbitrary rules, forced to wear identical, demeaning uniforms (albeit only on our faces), and otherwise relentlessly bullied, abused, and humiliated to keep us compliant.

None of which is accidental, or has anything to do with any actual virus, or any other type of public health threat. Yes, before some of you go ballistic, I do believe there is an actual virus, which a number of people have actually died from, or which at least has contributed to their deaths ... but there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever of any authentic public health threat that remotely justifies the totalitarian emergency measures we are being subjected to or the damage that is being done to society. Whatever you believe about the so-called “pandemic”, it really is as simple as that. Even if one accepts the official “science”, you do not transform the entire planet into a pathologised-totalitarian nightmare in response to a health threat of this nature.

The notion is quite literally insane.

GloboCap is not insane, however. They know exactly what they are doing ... which is teaching us a lesson, a lesson about power. A lesson about who has it and who doesn't. For students of history it's a familiar lesson, a standard in the repertoire of empires, not to mention the repertoire of penal institutions.

The name of the lesson is “Look What We Can Do to You Any Time We Fucking Want”. The point of the lesson is self-explanatory. The USA taught the world this lesson when it nuked Hiroshima and Nagasaki. GloboCap (and the US military) taught it again when they invaded Iraq and destabilised the entire Greater Middle East. It is regularly taught in penitentiaries when the prisoners start to get a little too unruly and remember that they outnumber the guards. That's where the “lockdown” concept originated. It isn't medical terminology. It is penal institution terminology.

As we have been experiencing throughout 2020, the global capitalist ruling classes have no



Art: 123rf.com

qualms about teaching us this lesson. It's just that they would rather not to have to unless it's absolutely necessary. They would prefer that we believe we are living in "democracies", governed by the "rule of law", where everyone is "free," and so on. It's much more efficient and much less dangerous than having to repeatedly remind us that they can take away our "democratic rights" in a heartbeat, unleash armed goon squads to enforce their edicts, and otherwise control us with sheer brute force.

People who have spent time in prison, or who have lived in openly totalitarian societies, are familiar with being ruled by brute force. Most Westerners are not, so it has come as a shock. The majority of them still can't process it. They cannot see what is staring them in the face. They cannot see it because they can't afford to see it. If they did, it would completely short-circuit their brains. They would suffer massive psychotic breakdowns, and become entirely unable to function, so their psyches will not allow them to see it.

Others, who see it, can't quite accept the simplicity of it (i.e., the lesson being taught), so they are proposing assorted complicated theories about what it is and who is behind it ... the Great Reset, China, the Illuminati, Transhumanism, Satanism, Communism, whatever. Some of these theories are at least partially accurate. Others are utter bull-goose lunacy.

They all obscure the basic point of the lesson.

The point of the lesson is that GloboCap – the entire global-capitalist system acting as a single glo-

bal entity – can, virtually any time it wants, suspend the Simulation of Democracy, and crack down on us with despotic force. It can

a. declare a “global pandemic” or some other type of “global emergency”,

b. cancel our so-called “rights”,

c. have the corporate media bombard us with lies and propaganda for months,

d. have the Internet companies censor any and all forms of dissent and evidence challenging said propaganda,

e. implement all kinds of new intrusive “safety” and “security” measures, including but not limited to the physical violation of our bodies ... and so on. I think you get the picture. (The violation of our bodies is important, which is why they love “cavity searches” in prison, and why the torture-happy troops at Abu Ghraib were obsessed with sexually violating their victims.)

And the “pandemic” is only one part of the lesson. The other part is being forced to watch (or permitted to watch, depending on your perspective) as GloboCap makes an example of Trump, as they made examples of Corbyn and Sanders, as they made examples of Saddam and Gaddafi, and other “uncooperative” foreign leaders, as they will make an example of any political figurehead that challenges their power. It does not matter to GloboCap that such political figureheads pose no real threat. The people who rally around them do. Nor does it make the slightest difference whether these figureheads or the folks who support them identify as “left” or “right”. GloboCap could not possibly care less. The

**You will do what
you are told.
You will not ask
questions. You will
believe what they
tell you to believe**

figureheads are just the teaching materials in the lesson that they are teaching us.

Now, here we are, at the end of the lesson ... not the end of the War on Populism, just the end of this critical Trumpian part of it. Once the usurper has been driven out of office, the War on Populism will be folded back into the War on Terror, or the War on Extremism, or whatever GloboCap decides to call it ... the name hardly matters. It is all the same war.

Whatever they decide to call it, this is GloboCap Year Zero. It is time for reeducation, my friends. It is time for cultural revolution. No, not communist cultural revolution ... global capitalist cultural revolution. It is time to flush the aberration of the last four years down the memory hole, and implement global “New Normal” *Gleichschaltung*, to make sure that this never happens again.

Oh, yes, things are about to get “normal”. Extremely “normal”. Suffocatingly “normal”. Unimaginably oppressively “normal”. And I’m not just talking about the “Coronavirus measures”. This has been in the works for the last four years.

Remember, back in 2016, when everyone was so concerned about “normality,” and how Trump was

“not normal”, and must never be “normalised?” Well, here we are. This is it. This is the part where GloboCap restores “normality”, a “new normality”, a pathologised-totalitarian “normality”, a “normality” which tolerates no dissent and demands complete ideological conformity.

From now on, when the GloboCap Intelligence Community and their mouthpieces in the corporate media tell you something happened, that thing will have happened, exactly as they say it happened, regardless of whether it actually happened, and anyone who says it didn’t will be labelled an “extremist”, a “conspiracy theorist”, a “denier”, or some other meaningless epithet. Such unpersons will be dealt with ruthlessly. They will be censored, deplatformed, demonetised, de-certified, rendered unemployable, banned from travelling, socially ostracised, hospitalised, imprisoned, or otherwise erased from “normal” society.

You will do what you are told. You will not ask questions. You will believe whatever they tell you to believe. You will believe it, not because it makes any sense, but simply because you have been ordered to believe it. They aren’t trying to trick or deceive anybody. They know their lies don’t make any sense. And they know that you know they don’t make any sense. They want you to know it. That is the point. They want you to know they are lying to you, manipulating you, openly mocking you, and that they can say and do anything they want to you, and you will go along with it, no matter how insane.

If they order you to take a fucking vaccine, you will not ask what is in the vaccine, or start whining about the “potential side effects”. You will shut up and take the fucking vaccine. If they tell you to put a mask on your kid, you will put a fucking mask on your fucking kid. You will not go digging up Danish studies proving the pointlessness of putting masks on kids. If they tell you the Russians rigged the election, then the Russians rigged the fucking election. And, if, four years later, they turn around and tell you that rigging an election is impossible, then rigging an election is fucking impossible. It isn’t an invitation to debate. It is a GloboCap-verified fact-checked fact. You will stand (or kneel) in your designated, colour-coded, social-distancing box and repeat this verified fact-checked fact, over and over, like a fucking parrot, or they will discover some new

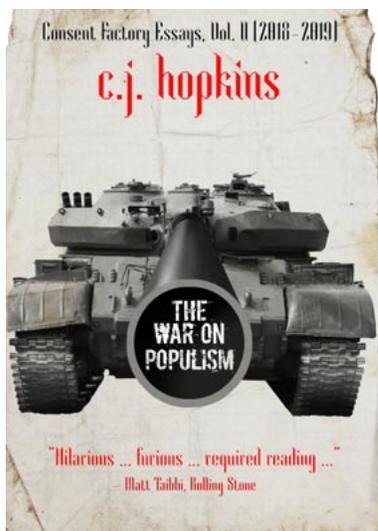
If they order you to take a vaccine, you will not whine about the “potential side effects”. You will take the vaccine!

mutant variant of virus and put you back in fucking “lockdown”. They will do this until you get your mind right, or you can live the rest of your life on Zoom, or tweeting content that no one but the Internet censors will ever see into the digital void in your fucking pyjamas. The choice is yours ... it’s is all up to you!

Or ... I don’t know, this is just a crazy idea, you could turn off the fucking corporate media, do a lit-

tle fucking research on your own, grow a backbone and some fucking guts, and join the rest of us “dangerous extremists” who are trying to fight back against the New Normal. Yes, it will cost you, and we probably won’t win, but you won’t have to torture your kids on airplanes, and you don’t even have to “deny” the virus! **CT**

C.J. Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing and Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. His dystopian novel, Zone 23, is published by Snoggs-worthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volumes I and II of his Consent Factory Essays are published by Consent Factory Publishing, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Amalgamated Content, Inc. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.



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