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ISSUE 216

ColdType

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Jonathan Cook

WHY BIDEN WILL FAIL

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Death of a 'controversial' journalist

Joe Allen

Two tribes go to war

Alan Macleod

The end of online privacy



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ISSUE 213

COVID-SPREADING FARTS OF DEATH | Tony Sutton
THE 21ST-CENTURY'S NEW GREAT GAME | Conn Hallinan
TECH ANTS ON A TOURBUS | Joe Allen

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September 2020



TRAPPED IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

Woman the Republicans call a Marxist

WHEN PARENTS FEAR THEIR CHILDREN

Covid 19: Who could have known?

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ISSUE 214

I WAS A VICTIM OF FLINT WATER CRISIS | Nakiya Wakes
TAX REVELATIONS WON'T SINK TRUMP | Norman Solomon
PATRICE LUMUMBA'S TEETH | Percy Zromuya

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WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

October 2020



ONLINE CLASSES? IT'S AS LAME AS IT SOUNDS

Corporations are always ready to exploit our irrational fears. Now EdTech is here to keep us safe

Joe Allen

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ISSUE 207

LET'S NOT FALL INTO THE AUSTERITY TRAP! Linda McQuaid
PHILIP K. DICK AND ENGLISH MASS MURDERERS! Trevor Hoyle
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, BILLIONAIRE-STYLE! Sam Pizzigatti

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

June 2020



ISSUE 200

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

NO NO NO NO NO

A stronger, more committed, and more determined global peace movement could tame the US war machine / Medea Benjamin & Nicholas JS Davies - PAGE 33

www.coldtype.net

LABOUR IN A TIME OF STAYING PUT

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

NO NO NO NO NO

America gets its own Colour Revolution

GloboCap is determined to crush any populist resistance to its ideology, no matter how much social chaos and destruction it unleashes in the process

C.J. Hopkins | Page 12



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ISSUE 198

TIME TO END WAR PROFITEERING! Sarah Anderson
2019 - STUPID, EXPENSIVE AND IDIOTIC | Conn Hallinan
THE GLOBAL WAR OF ERROR | Tom Engelhardt

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WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

MID-JANUARY 2020



World War III

Worried that this month's Iran-US confrontation could herald an all-out fight that will end in global annihilation? Forget it! We've had that war and global capitalism won, writes CJ Hopkins

www.coldtype.net

ISSUE 203

NEW YORK: A TALE OF TWO SURGES | Bill Van Auken
LEADERS AREN'T SCARED OF A VIRUS, BUT OF US! | Jonathan Cook
A LETTER FROM THE END OF THE WORLD | Tim Knight

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

April 2020



THE WAR ON DEATH

For those of us who remember the War on Terror, the new war is just like that, except now the enemy is Death

C.J. HOPKINS - Page 12

HOARDERS vs. GOUGERS
Andrew Fischer

CELEBRITY PSY-OPS
Caitlin Johnstone

THE OTHER AFRICANS
David Goldblatt

STAY HOME, STAY ANGRY
Jill Richardson

www.coldtype.net

ISSUE 205

WELCOME TO THE GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT | Jonathan Cook
JUST LIKE LIVING UNDER THE BUBONIC PLAGUE | Ute Lotz-Heumann
COME IN, NUMBER THREE! | Philip A. Farruggio

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WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

May 2020



Bill Gates: Chipping the Hand of God

Joe Allen doesn't believe Gates is the Antichrist, or even evil - just another Alpha Dog tracing chemical trails through our hi-tech uniform, leading us where he wants us to go

(See Page 12)

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and at www.issuu.com/coldtype

CONTENTS

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUES

- 4 MEATBALLS, NOT SUBS** / Frida Berrigan
- 8 THE ANIMALS THAT SEE US AS PREY** / Michael Bradley
- 14 MAKE WAY FOR THE SNITCH STATE**
John W. Whitehead & Nisha Whitehead
- 18 INVASION OF THE TARTAN ARMY** / Dougie Wallace
- 24 MEDIA BLACKOUT ON ASSANGE REVELATIONS**
Caitlin Johnstone
- 28 MANUFACTURING THE 'NEW NORMAL' REALITY**
C.J. Hopkins
- 31 EXCERPT FROM 'A LEGACY OF CHAINS'** / Philip Kraske
- 35 HOW WE CAN CONQUER DYNASTIC FAMILY FORTUNES** / Sam Pizzigati
- 37 HURWITT'S EYE** / Mark Hurwitt
- 38 A WIDE WORLD OF WAR PORN** / Nick Turse

INSIGHTS

- 43 ABSOLUTE ZERO: DISTRACTIONS FROM CLIMATE FAILURE** / George Monbiot
- 44 NO FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE US, JUST A BUSINESS PLAN** / William J. Astore
- 45 DEAD CENTRE: 200 YEARS OF THE GUARDIAN**
Tim Gopsill
- 47 CONGRESSMAN TOOK ON VENEZUELA BLOCKADE**
Celina Della Croce
- 48 TO FIGHT POVERTY, CUT PENTAGON BUDGET**
T.J. Thompson
- 49 WHY DO WE HATE THE SOUND OF OUR OWN VOICE?** / Neel Bhatt
- 50 KEEP RIGHT ON 'TIL THE END OF THE RHODES**
Trevor Grundy



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FRIDA BERRIGAN

Meatballs, not subs

Or how to feed the world's most prolific arms makers and help them deliver 16,128 new Hiroshimas

Groton and New London, Connecticut, are home to about 65,000 people, three colleges, the Coast Guard Academy, 15 nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed submarines capable of destroying the world many times over, and General Dynamics' Electric Boat, a multi-billion-dollar private corporation that offers stock options to its shareholders and mega-salaries to its top executives as it pockets taxpayer dollars and manufactures yet more of those stealthy, potentially world-ending machines. Whew! That was a long sentence!

Naval Submarine Base New London stretches along the east side of the Thames River, straddling the towns of Groton and Ledyard. Occupying at least 680 acres, the base has more than 160 major facilities. The 15 subs based there are the largest contingent in the nation. They're manufactured just down the river at Electric Boat / General Dynamics, which once built the Polaris and Trident nuclear submarines, employs more than 12,000 people in our region, and is planning to hire another 2,400 this year to meet a striking "demand" for the newest version of such subs.

Some readers might already be

asking themselves: Are submarines still a thing? Do we really still put men (and women) far beneath the ocean's surface in a giant metal tube, ready to launch a nuclear first strike at a moment's notice? At a time when the greatest threats to human life may be viruses hidden in our own exhales, our infrastructure is crumbling, and so much else is going wrong, is the US really spending billions of dollars on submarines?

Yes!

Back in 2010, the Department of Defense's Nuclear Posture Review called for a "recapitalisation of the nation's sea-based deterrent", as though we hadn't been spending anything on submarines previously. To meet that goal, the Obama administration, the Trump administration, and now the Biden administration

Do we really still put men (and women) far beneath the ocean's surface in a giant metal tube, ready to launch a nuclear first strike at a moment's notice?

all agreed that, on a planet already filled with devastating nuclear weapons, the US must begin construction of a new class of 12 Columbia ballistic missile submarines.

The Navy's 2021 budget submission estimates that the total procurement cost for that 12-ship class of subs will be \$109.8-billion. However, even a number that big might prove nothing but rough back-of-the-napkin figuring. After all, according to the Navy's 2022 request, the cost estimate for the first submarine of the 12 they plan to build, the lead ship in its new programme, had already grown from \$14.39-billion to \$15.03-billion. Now, that may not sound like a lot, but string out all those zeros behind it and you'll realize that the difference is more than \$640-million, just a little less than what Baltimore – a city of more than 600,000 people – will get in federal pandemic relief aid.

Swirling around those submarines are descriptions citing "strategy" and "capability". But don't be fooled: they'll be potential world killers. Each of those 12 new subs will be armed with 16 Trident D-5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, or SLBMs, which have a range of 4,500 miles and can carry 14 W-76-1 thermonuclear warheads. Each one of those warheads is six times more



KILLING MACHINE: The nuclear-powered attack submarine Columbia glides to a stop in the Thames River at the vessel's christening and launch ceremony. The Columbia was the last Los Angeles class submarine to be built at the Electric Boat Shipyard, Groton, CT.

powerful than the atomic bomb that the US military detonated over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Start multiplying 12 times 16 times 14 times 6 and there isn't enough world to destroy with math like that. After all, the single Hiroshima bomb, "small" as it was, killed an estimated 140,000 people and turned the city into rubble and ash.

The best way to understand the Columbia class submarine, then, is as a \$100-billion-plus initiative that aims to deliver 16,128 Hiroshimas.

My family and I live in New London and evidence of the military is everywhere. There's a cannon planted amid the roses at the entrance to the motel right off the highway near our house. And another in front of the laundromat. Huge American flags flap at the car dealership that offers special financing to Navy personnel.

Signs declaring New London/Groton to be the "Submarine Capital of the World" festoon the highways into town. The huge naval submarine base and the General Dynamics/Electric Boat yards dominate the Groton side of the Thames River. There's a massive garage for half-built submarines, painted a very seventies shade of green, that chews up most of the scenery on the Groton side of the river, alongside cranes and docks and industrial buildings in various hues of grey. It's dismal. New London's waterfront homes and private beaches look out on three generations of military-industrial-complex architecture. We wouldn't want to live in Groton, but at least they feast their eyes on our quaint downtown and the parks that stretch along our side of the river.

On the New London side, General Dynamics/Electric Boat looks more like a corporate campus than

a shipyard. It employs a lot of people, but there are still plenty of New Londoners who work at jobs that have nothing to do with the military or the business of building and designing submarines. Unfortunately, that seems to be changing, because General Dynamics is ramping up its engineering and manufacturing operations in order to build that new fleet of submarines.

Local developers smell money in the air, which means that our downtown is getting a makeover intended to attract the sort of young professionals who will design and oversee the production of those subs. A new development right near New London's General Dynamics complex is now renting studio apartments for \$1,300 a month, even though ours is the fifth poorest city in Connecticut.

An uproar of protest over our rampant version of local militarism

rose to a sustained din in the 1970s and 1980s but has since dulled to a whisper, despite regular protest vigils and demonstrations carried out by a stalwart handful of people. It's tough to understand since the danger is still so imminent. After all, the symbolic Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists now stands at 100 seconds to nuclear midnight, as close as it's ever been in its 70 years of existence. Meanwhile, the United States will once again spend staggering sums on its military in fiscal year 2022.

The upside? Our local thrift shops are full of the kitsch that comes with military occupation. I drink my morning coffee out of a white mug that commemorates Electric Boat's 1987 Christmas Blood Drive, emblazoned with a red drop of blood, the company's logo, and the phrase "I give so that others may live".

I'm a lifelong pacifist, the child of people who, as protesters, climbed over fences and cut through locks in order to enter US weapons facilities like that naval base at Groton. I spent my childhood at the Pentagon, where, a few times a year, my parents and our friends made elaborate spectacles out of blood and ash and cardboard tombstones, leaving Pentagon workers to walk through the muck and mess, tracking it into the headquarters of the Department of Defense. And yet I'll confess to you that I do have a genuine weakness for military kitsch.

My husband is a lifelong pacifist, too. His parents went to malls to hold "Stop War Toys" demonstrations and entered toy stores to put "this glorifies violence" stickers on GI Joe and Rambo dolls. He spent his summers outside Electric Boat in Groton. His family and their friends went to the commissionings and christenings

The beer glasses make me think of the dingy strip of bars right outside the main gate of the Electric Boat shipyard in Groton

of newly built subs, holding protest signs, blocking the entrances, and trying to leaflet the well-dressed guests coming to those strange ceremonies with oddly Christian baptismal overtones to them. And yet (or do I mean, and so?) he loves military kitsch, too. As a result, whenever we go to our local Goodwill, Salvation Army store, or neighbourhood yard sales, we invariably keep a lookout for mugs and beer glasses from our corner of the military-industrial complex.

It's the ultimate in-joke for us. Such killer kitsch helps us manage our deep discomfort with living in a militarised community.

One made-in-China coffee mug of relatively recent vintage that we own, for instance, has a picture on one side of a submarine and the phrase "Virginia Class: Confronting the Challenge, Driving Out Cost". The other reads: "Designed for Affordability: General Dynamics, Electric Boat".

That second mug always makes me snicker because the Virginia Class submarines were built by Electric Boat in New London/Groton in collaboration with Newport News Shipbuilding, part of Huntington Ingalls in Virginia.

Those boats cost a mere \$3.45-billion each and that "two-yard strategy" – Connecticut and Virginia – was meant to keep both of those corporate entities from financial disaster. ("Afloat" is the word that comes to mind.) However, it made for an even more expensive product as partially

assembled submarines had to be floated laboriously up and down the Eastern seaboard. According to Ronald O'Rourke of the Congressional Research Service, "A primary aim of the arrangement was to minimise the cost of building Virginia-class boats at a relatively low annual rate in two shipyards (rather than entirely in a single shipyard) while preserving key submarine-construction skills at both shipyards". Not likely, as it turned out. Then again, what weapons-building project doesn't have staggering cost overruns in 21st-century America?

Honestly, can you imagine the federal government contracting with Hershey and Nestle to collaborate on a gigantic new candy bar and then paying extra for it because their workers needed to pass the product back and forth between their factories, hundreds of miles apart? Such thoughts regularly occur to me as I drink my morning coffee out of that hilariously labelled "Designed for Affordability" mug. The anger that follows is like a second jolt of caffeine!

Speaking of rage, we drink our happy-hour beers out of glasses commemorating the USS Pittsburgh, SSN 720. That Los Angeles class submarine was commissioned in 1985 and was one of two that launched Tomahawk Cruise missiles at Iraq during 1991's Gulf War.

The beer glasses make me think of the dingy strip of bars right outside the main gate of the Electric Boat shipyard in Groton. They're all closed now, but in the 1970s heyday of submarine manufacturing, bars like El Bolero (shortened to The Elbow) and Elfie's served the shipyard workers and submariners alike. The lunch crowd was thick, the bar full of small glasses of beer, and the workers would drop dollar bills in garbage cans as they filed out and

back across the street to work. Those bars estimated then that they made more in their daily lunchtime dollar-bill rushes than other local bars and restaurants made in a week.

At some point, the higher-ups at Electric Boat grew embarrassed by the daily spectacle of drunken workers, beer bottles littering the curbs, regular fender-benders, and the fights that tend to accompany excessive drinking. Their solution? They stopped letting the workers leave for lunch.

As a younger person, I imagined that daytime drinking served to dull the cognitive dissonance of working people who put food on the table for their children by welding the machines that threatened all children anywhere on this planet. As I grow older, however, I wonder if such daytime drinking wasn't just fun.

Another way we manage our discomfort with our local version of the military-industrial complex and what it means for this country and this planet is to be a small but visible "No" amid the ubiquity of militarism in this town, amid all those chubby, cute submarines that adorn our public spaces.

We stand on a bleak street corner near the base for at least an hour once a week to protest the world we find ourselves in. It's admittedly a small thing, but we do it without fail. Souped-up trucks and fast cars with custom paint jobs rev their engines as they pass, cutting that corner uncom-

Souped-up trucks and fast cars with custom paint jobs rev their engines as they pass, cutting that corner uncomfortably close, while tossing gravel in their wake

fortably close, while tossing gravel in their wake. The vehicles are mostly driven by clean-cut young men, often in the uniform of the Groton-New London Naval Submarine base. They're off for an hour of freedom at the newly completed, squeaky-clean Chipotle up the hill or the seedy Mynx Cabaret across the street. If we have staying power, we'll see the Chipotle crew come tearing back down the hill at the end of that hour.

On one corner is a grimy little liquor store with a big parking lot, the kind of place that should make you question your drinking habits. (If I don't have a problem, why am I parked here?) On the second corner is an empty lot with the vestiges of a once-thriving car-repair shop. The third has a truck rental company, the signpost of a transitory community. And sure enough, the licence plates on the cars streaming into the base hail from Navy-centred communities like ours around the country.

Route 12 is a mini-highway where cars regularly hit 70 miles an hour as they roar up the hill. We're desperately small and slow by comparison. My mother paces the sidewalk, I

stand still, shifting my weight from one foot to the other, while our friend Cal Robertson sits. A Vietnam veteran, he came back from that long-gone war physically unscathed but deeply disturbed by everything he witnessed and experienced.

Cal holds a sign emblazoned with this question: "What About the Children?" Some cars honk in response. My guess: not so much in support of his message as in recognition of his regular presence over these long decades. My mother and I are interlopers, occasional sign holders counting down the minutes, but Cal – comfortable in a walker that converts to a chair – could do this all day.

My mother holds a simple sign that reads "No Nukes". For the men in trucks headed out to lunch, I painted on mine: "Meatball Subs, not Nuclear Submarines". It receives an occasional nod or grin. And in the meantime, in our very community, the place where I'm raising my kids, the military-industrial complex continues to invest in and build vessels meant only for the end of the world. **CT**

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MICHAEL BRADLEY

The animals that see us as prey

Our species fits comfortably into the crocodile's diet, slipping into the line-up between pigs and horses

The wet season in tropical Australia begins with tension. Physical tension, caused by the friction of earth and clouds. Mental tension, caused by the heat, and the expectation of rain and relief. It is also an ecological tension, where every plant and animal is poised – genetically, physiologically – to grow, reap, sow and copulate within a few short months.

We call it the build-up. The tension builds, and then it breaks. It was at the point of breaking when Val Plumwood, a young philosopher from the temperate south, was taken by a crocodile.

She was an environmental activist, exploring Kakadu to experience the wilderness she'd had a hand in protecting. She was paddling upstream in a small, red, low-sided canoe when it began to rain. There are many attacks on visitors to the tropics, especially those in small watercraft, but we know more about this one than any other.

When Val began fighting for the protection of wild places in the 1970s, the saltwater crocodile was rare almost to the point of extinction. By the mid '80s they were protected, plentiful, and in remote places, lacked memory of the hunters' gun. When Val climbed into her vessel

that morning in 1985, she did so in good faith. They were not a known threat to someone travelling by canoe in a back channel lagoon.

But crocodiles are a threat. Young salties eat fish and crabs. As they grow, they move on to larger prey – dogs, pigs, people, horses and buffalo. Our species fits comfortably in their diet, slipping into the line-up between pigs and horses.

Crocodiles may be opportunistic hunters, but their encounters with prey aren't chance. They think about it. They watch, and they learn. Wash your pots and pans on the riverbank every evening, and you are inviting an attack. For people along the coastline of the tropical arc between Eastern India and Australia, they colour the water's edge with a lurking malice and the threat of a violent death.

We share our world with other dangerous animals. Sharks, for instance, kill every year. Poisonous snakes, too. However, there is a difference. Snakes strike when threatened, usually by an unintentional kick in the ribs. Sharks do bite when unprovoked, but rarely, and they almost never consume us. We share our beaches with them, but you can spend your life in the water

and never get bitten. The saltwater crocodile is a different beast, and it boils down to intent. As crocodile researcher Professor Grahame Webb has put it: "There is no way of avoiding nor sugarcoating the predatory nature of saltwater crocodiles. If you dive off the Adelaide River bridge, 60 km east of Darwin's city centre, and start swimming, there is a 100 percent chance of being taken by a saltwater crocodile. It is not the same as swimming with sharks".

Like Val Plumwood, I had come up north from the temperate south, and was not used to sharing my world with something that wanted to eat me.

There is a mountain range in north Queensland, cut off from the mainland by the sea. The space between is filled with a tangle of mangrove trees and snaking waterways. Heading down one of these channels in the early morning, my small boat cut around a bend, and on the far bank I saw a crocodile basking in the sun.

I eased back on the throttle and let my boat drag through the water. This was my chance to see one up close, as long as I didn't scare it off. I was a young scientist, new to the tropics, and hadn't yet seen a croc up close. I'd glimpsed them sliding off the banks as I motored past, or as eyes above the waterline, following



KILLING MACHINE: A crocodile known locally as 'Barrat' emerges from the water of the lower Daintree River, in the far north of Queensland.



HUNTED: The Australian philosopher Val Plumwood pictured in 1990. In her work, Val interrogated the human-nature dualism that lies at the heart of modern culture.

my boat with interest.

I drifted closer, engine idling.

It was big. I turned the engine off to let momentum and the current take me closer. I didn't want to disturb the creature. Apart from the occasional snapping of pistol shrimp in their burrows, the air was still and quiet. The forest around us

was a deep green, reflected in the greasy green of the water. The mud bank was almost black with silt; waist-deep, from recent experience. I could see the heft of the animal as I approached.

Its muscular tail rested in an arc, and the great mass of its body bulged, unsupported on dry land. It

didn't flinch as I drew closer, it held its jaws open in a permanent, basking yawn.

Now I was close enough to see very clearly its long pointed teeth ringing the muscular bed of the lower jaw. I could see sinew and texture in the enormous muscle that connects upper and lower jaw, allowing it to slam the two shut with the bite force of Tyrannosaurus Rex. I could see it too well. Current and momentum had conspired to bring me right to the bank where the animal lay. I was no longer worried about disturbing the creature. I was within striking distance. I was an outsider, intruding, and I was afraid.

The fear and fascination never quite reconciled. I had seen the crocodile as an indicator, both in the ecological sense, as my training had described, but also in a personal sense.

Ecologists like indicator species, because they tell us about a complex world in a very simple way. They stand in for a whole range of factors.

A caddis-fly larva can tell you

about the purity of the alpine pond you found it in, how recently it was frozen and the stability of the seasons. A stingray can tell you about the flooding patterns of a sandbank and the abundance of invertebrates therein. They do this just by showing up. Crocodiles, to me, indicated nutrient rich tropical waters providing a glut of large bodied prey. Warm winters and big barramundi.

They indicated the sanctuary of the wild. Here was a place beyond the realm of humankind, remote, beautiful, and my place of work. They punctuated the landscape, and their presence transformed the place. In the temperate south, a bank in an inlet might be a good place to pull up for lunch, or cast a line. Here, it's a place you don't want to linger.

A floating log becomes an object of suspicion, and the value of a swimming hole, no matter how inviting, is measured in downstream barriers. We tend to hold crocs up as symbols, and dangle the fact of their existence in front of southerners and tourists to prove our rugged credentials. But I had not reckoned with the animal itself.

As I fumbled for the ignition, the crocodile turned its full attention to me and slid down the bank. In one easy motion it slipped under the surface, and swam toward our boat.

I kicked the engine into gear. As the roar of my 15-horse motor sped us to safety, I wondered how on earth we live alongside these creatures. I also wondered how many of those 15 horses that croc could eat in its lifetime.

Crocodiles are not symbols – I was about to learn – they are living beasts capable of real material damage. I could venture into their world, but spent most of my time high above the waterline. For other people in that

The pig had been stashed in a dead tree on the bank, and its skin was beginning to trail in the current. Crocodiles don't like a fresh kill; they like to let it soften

Indo-Pacific arc, contending with these animals is daily life. Work brought me to the islands of Papua New Guinea, where crocodiles are a threat to both people and property. While it might sound far flung, New Guinea is closer to my home in North Queensland than any Australian capital. It's part of the same great landmass of Sahul, and shares a recognisable fauna and flora.

In the places I worked, people built their villages at the water's edge, on volcanic black-sand beaches. That strip of coast contains all of everyday life; houses, fishing nets, canoes, livestock, children, dogs and cooking fires. So, when the largest reptile in the world crawls from the ocean of a nighttime, and carries away a squealing pig, it seems a reasonable price to pay. Especially considering the other potential prey sleeping in their beds.

I came across one of these sacrificial pigs, postmortem. I was investigating the small estuaries along the coast with a local man named Alfonse. We turned into a small creek, hidden from view by the angle of its entrance and a tall forest of mangrove trees. Estuaries in the tropics have a certain smell caused by things that want to rot, but don't have the air to do so. Sealed under the mud, they turn black and change their chemistry. Mixed in with this is the salt, and the fresh-sap of the mangrove leaves. Some people hate it, but I relish it.

This creek had an altogether different odour. It was the smell of rotting flesh, but not the dry waft of roadkill by the side of the road. This was wet-rot. The pig had been stashed in a dead tree on the bank, and its skin was beginning to trail in the current. Crocodiles don't like a fresh kill; they like to let it soften. That pig would have fed a village and perhaps been the central meal of a wedding or a funeral. Now it was bloating in the muddy water.

On a different trip, Alfonse told me the story of a fatal attack in his village. Alfonse is a serious man with a young family, a gentle sense of humour and a legitimate hatred of Malaysian logging companies. We were working in a system called the Langalanga, a great palm swamp, almost cut off from the sea. In the slanted afternoon light, the marine palms reflect crazily on the black water, and their fruit-rot nectar clots the air.

Some of Alfonse's family were camped on the edge of the swamp, and had set out in a canoe to collect mussels – a happy scene repeated on occasion throughout the seasons.

A few years back, another family was doing the same, when the father was taken by a crocodile. As he was being dragged under by the legs, his wife held on to his arms, and in that brief battle there was enough time for him to say, "take care of the kids". By the time I left, a man from our team was taken by a crocodile somewhere in that same labyrinth of palms.

Crocodiles are murderous creatures. Not indifferent to our suffering, but actively in pursuit of it. They crave us, like we might crave a pizza, and they act on those impulses.

Val Plumwood learned this too, from the vantage point of her red canoe, as her path converged sus-



KILLING MACHINE: A crocodile in the mangroves of the lower Daintree River in the north of Queensland.

piciously with a floating log. The log was a crocodile, and from that point on, she was prey. The animal charged her craft several times. She tried to escape by climbing an overhanging tree. It burst from the water between her legs and clamped down on her torso. In that moment, in the force of realisation that accompanied the puncture wounds to her abdomen, she saw very clearly that she was food.

She was thrown into a death roll – crocodiles thrash with such force that all the air and struggle is sucked out of their prey, which they then hold underwater until drowned. Val, somehow, survived this experience. It was then repeated.

Incredibly, she surfaced and climbed to safety in the overhanging tree. She was plucked from the tree again, by her left leg, and the horror was repeated for the final time.

But, inexplicably, the crocodile's jaws relaxed. Val wrestled free and scrambled up the mud bank. Her lower half was shredded, and she could see the raw meat of her leg muscle hanging from the bone. She staggered back through the bush until she began losing consciousness.

She gave out at the edge of the swamp, as the wet season floodwater rose around her. Here she accepted her end as food for the crocodiles waiting in the rising lagoon.

We know so much about this attack because Val survived it. But also because she was a philosopher. She didn't just survive it, she thought about it, she examined its consequences, and she wrote about it.

One of the key Australian thinkers of our time, she challenged the way we look at the natural world. It took her the rest of her life to fully reckon with the experience of being prey. The result is a revelation of a book, pulled together posthumously, (Plumwood died of a stroke in 2008), called *The Eye of the Crocodile*. Val's experience has become a centre point for me, around which all my encounters with crocodiles now pivot. The anchoring wisdom in a confusing set of facts and impulses.

At the heart of her insight is the knowledge that we are food – “juicy, nourishing, bodies” for the rest of the animal kingdom. We forget that. Or perhaps, we never really come

to know it. Val knew, but when she found herself as prey, she rejected the idea. I'll let her speak for herself here:

“My disbelief was not just existential but ethical – this wasn't happening, couldn't be happening. The world was not like that! The creature was breaking the rules, totally mistaken, utterly wrong to think I could be reduced to food. As a human being, I was so much more than food. Were all the other facets of my being to be sacrificed to this utterly indiscriminating use, was my complex organisation to be destroyed so I could be reassembled as part of this other being?”

“With indignation as well as disbelief, I rejected this event. It was an illusion! It was not only unjust but unreal! It couldn't be happening. After much later reflection, I came to see that there was another way to look at it. There was illusion alright, but it was the other way around. It was the world of ‘normal experience’ that was the illusion, and the newly disclosed brute world in which I was prey was, in fact, the unsuspected reality, or at least a crucial part of it... both I and the culture that shaped

my consciousness were wrong, profoundly wrong – about many things, but especially about human embodiment, animality and the meaning of human life”.

In the end, we are just another animal, scratching around on the surface of the earth. Like a few other terrestrial vertebrates, we sometimes forage in shallow seas and there, form part of the coastal food chain. In the Indo-Pacific arc, at this moment in ecological history, that food chain finishes with the saltwater crocodile.

They are simply the inheritors of their evolutionary mantle, held long before we ever dipped our toes in the water. In our brief history on this earth, we have rarely been at the top of our own food chains.

We are food, and not just for crocodiles. We live our lives trying to avoid eye contact with the fact, but it is always there in our peripheral vision. We are victim to a constant gnawing of insects, bacteria, fungus, and when we die – no matter how hard we try to bury and embalm – we finally succumb. Diseases like Ebola haunt our collective imagination, but their worst symptoms are simply the failing of our own immune system to hold back the flood of decay that will find us all when we stop breathing.

Ecologists no longer talk about food chains as if there is a top and a bottom. Food loops, cycles of productivity and nutrients, hold the great ecosystems of this earth in place, as vast organised structures of recycling viscera. Our denial of our place in them is what Val came to see as “dualism” – the belief in a hierarchy of nature with ourselves at the top; different, unique, separate. Outsiders on our own planet. Because of this, crocodiles seem like monsters of a senseless world, a world to be feared.

We think of ourselves as somehow separate from the rest of nature’s

‘In our brief history on this earth, we have rarely been at the top of our own food chains. We are food, and not just for crocodiles’

bloom and rot. This man vs wild illusion butts up against reality in ways that now threaten our existence.

The experience of being outside of nature allows us to deny the urgency of the many crises now facing our planet. We see the signs, but it is easy to distance the collapse of the natural world from the continuity of our own lives, and hold an unreasonable faith that the human world will go on indefinitely. But this is denial. Nature, as we know, can crush us in its jaws. To face the reality that confronts us as a species, we must feel like insiders – part of our own planet. But what would that look like?

In Arnhem Land, where Val was attacked, people have lived alongside crocodiles for thousands of years. They see themselves differently – not as outsiders, but as part of the landscape. Indigenous philosophies, such as those of the Yolngu, see human or animal life as existing for others, not just itself. The crocodile is not hideous for eating humans. They are animals to be understood and respected, through the kind of insider knowledge gained over thousands of years. They take life, but are also capable of acting in good faith.

Their maternal tenderness is equally important. They punctuate the landscape as powerful beings, reminding us to tread carefully, because the world is not arranged for our pleasure alone. This resonated

with Val who understood “life as a circulation, as a gift from a community of ancestors”. Death, whether by crocodile or otherwise, is recycling, a “flowing into an ecological and ancestral community of origins”.

In the time it took me to write this, a man named Andrew Heard was taken from his dingy in that tangle of creeks in North Queensland where I still work. The police found his vessel upside down and some of his remains in the mangroves. They caught a four-metre crocodile, cut it open, and found the rest of him inside.

Then they killed another one. We could just keep going, get rid of them all. Fifty years ago, we almost did. At a time like this, with everyone reeling in shock, and grappling with some measure of personal fear, I understand the impulse.

I’m going out there again tomorrow, as usual. Older now, my fear and fascination have turned into something else. Despite their intentions for us, I like having them around. To me, they are indicators – but they indicate more than warm winters and big barramundi. They indicate a living world, giving and taking, and a society that’s starting to find its place in it.

As I motor down the creek, they punctuate the landscape, reminding me that we’ve decided, together, there are lives that matter beside our own. That despite the pain we may face in the future, we’re beginning to find our way. They indicate hope. **CT**

Michael Bradley is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at James Cook University, in Australia.

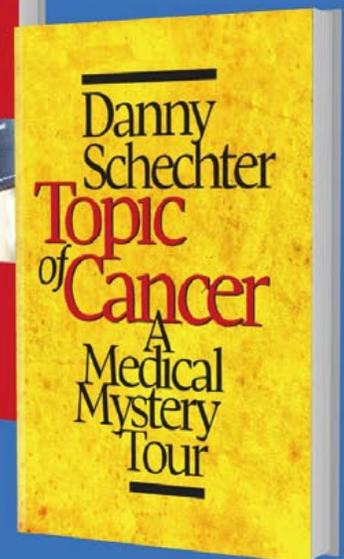
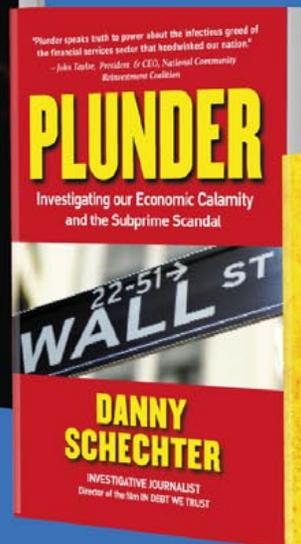
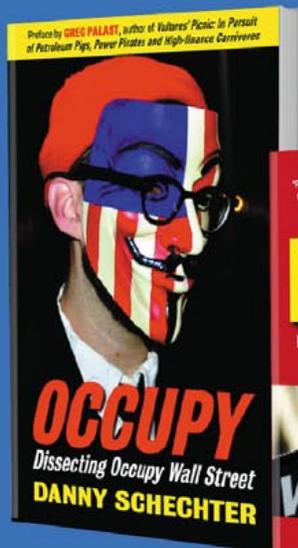
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JOHN W. WHITEHEAD & NISHA WHITEHEAD

Make way for the snitch state

Why the US people must beware of the Surveillance State – an insidious domestic army of government snitches, spies and techno-warriors

“It is just when people are all engaged in snooping on themselves and one another that they become anesthetized to the whole process. As information itself becomes the largest business in the world, data banks know more about individual people than the people do themselves. The more the data banks record about each one of us, the less we exist.” – Marshall McLuhan, From Cliche To Archetype

We’re being spied on by a domestic army of government snitches, spies and techno-warriors.

This government of Peeping Toms is watching everything we do, reading everything we write, listening to everything we say, and monitoring everything we spend.

Beware of what you say, what you read, what you write, where you go, and with whom you communicate, because it is all being recorded, stored, and catalogued, and will be used against you eventually, at a time and place of the government’s choosing.

This far-reaching surveillance has paved the way for an omnipresent, militarised fourth branch of government – the Surveillance State – that came into being without any

electoral mandate or constitutional referendum.

Indeed, long before the National Security Agency (NSA) became the agency we loved to hate, the Justice Department, the FBI, and the Drug Enforcement Administration were carrying out their own secret mass surveillance on an unsuspecting populace. Even agencies not traditionally associated with the intelligence community are part of the government’s growing network of snitches and spies.

Just about every branch of the government – from the Postal Service to the Treasury Department and every agency in between – now has its own surveillance sector, authorised to spy on the American people. For instance, the US Postal Service, which has been photographing the exterior of every piece of paper mail for the past 20 years, is also spying on Americans’ texts, emails

and social media posts. Headed up by the Postal Service’s law enforcement division, the Internet Covert Operations Program (iCOP) is reportedly using facial recognition technology, combined with fake online identities, to ferret out potential troublemakers with “inflammatory” posts. The agency claims the online surveillance, which falls outside its conventional job scope of processing and delivering paper mail, is necessary to help postal workers avoid “potentially volatile situations”.

Then there are the fusion and counterterrorism centres that gather all of the data from the smaller government spies – the police, public health officials, transportation, etc. – and make it accessible for all those in power. And that doesn’t even begin to touch on the complicity of the corporate sector, which buys and sells us from cradle to grave, until we have no more data left to mine.

It’s not just what we say, where we go and what we buy that is being tracked.

We’re being surveilled right down to our genes, thanks to a potent combination of hardware, software and data collection that scans our biometrics – our faces, irises, voices, genetics, even our gait – runs them through computer programmes that can break the data down into unique

Just about every branch
of the government
– from the Postal Service
to the Treasury Department
– now has its own
surveillance sector



“identifiers”, and then offers them up to the government and its corporate allies for their respective uses.

All of those internet-connected gadgets we just have to have (*Forbes* refers to them as “(data) pipelines to our intimate bodily processes”) – the smart watches that can monitor our blood pressure and the smart phones that let us pay for purchases with our fingerprints and iris scans – are setting us up for a brave new world where there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

For instance, imagine what the government could do (and is likely

already doing) with voiceprint technology, which has been likened to a fingerprint. Described as “the next frontline in the battle against overweening public surveillance”, the collection of voiceprints is a booming industry for governments and businesses alike. As the *Guardian* reports, “voice biometrics could be used to pinpoint the location of individuals”.

We are now the unwitting victims of an interconnected, tightly woven, technologically evolving web of real-time, warrantless, wall-to-wall mass surveillance that makes the spy pro-

grams spawned by the USA Patriot Act look like child’s play.

Fusion centres. See Something, Say Something. Red flag laws. Behavioural threat assessments. Terror watch lists. Facial recognition. Snitch tip lines. Biometric scanners. Pre-crime. DNA databases. Data mining. Precognitive technology. Contact tracing apps.

These are all part and parcel of the widening surveillance dragnet that the government has used and abused in order to extend its reach and its power.

The COVID-19 pandemic has succeeded in acclimating us even further to being monitored, tracked and reported for so-called deviant or undesirable behaviour. Consequently, we now live in a society in which a person can be accused of any number of crimes without knowing what exactly he has done. He might be apprehended in the middle of the night by a roving band of SWAT police. He might find himself on a no-fly list, unable to travel for reasons undisclosed. He might have his phones or internet tapped based upon a secret order handed down by a secret court, with no recourse to discover why he was targeted.

This Kafkaesque nightmare has become America’s reality.

Despite the fact that its data snooping has been shown to be ineffective at detecting, let alone stopping, any actual terror attacks, the government continues to operate its domestic spying programmes largely in secret, carrying out warrantless mass surveillance on hundreds of millions of Americans’ phone calls, emails, text messages and the like.

The question of how to deal with government agencies and programmes that operate outside of the system of checks and balances

established by the Constitution forces us to contend with a deeply unsatisfactory and dubious political “solution” to a problem that operates beyond the reach of voters and politicians: how do you hold accountable a government that lies, cheats, steals, sidesteps the law, and then absolves itself of wrongdoing?

Certainly, the history and growth of the NSA tracks with the government’s insatiable hunger for ever-great powers.

Since its official start in 1952, when President Harry S. Truman issued a secret executive order establishing the NSA as the hub of the government’s foreign intelligence activities, the agency – nicknamed “No Such Agency” – has operated covertly, unaccountable to Congress all the while using taxpayer dollars to fund its secret operations. It was only when the agency ballooned to 90,000 employees in 1969, making it the largest intelligence agency in the world with a significant footprint outside Washington, DC, that it became more difficult to deny its existence.

In the aftermath of Watergate in 1975, the Senate held meetings under the Church Committee in order to determine exactly what sorts of illicit activities the American intelligence apparatus was engaged in under the direction of President Nixon, and how future violations of the law could be stopped. It was the first time the NSA was exposed to public scrutiny since its creation.

The investigation revealed a sophisticated operation whose surveillance programs paid little heed to such things as the Constitution. For instance, under Project SHAMROCK, the NSA spied on telegrams to and from the US, as well as the correspondence of American citi-

The 9/11 attacks ushered in an era in which immoral and/or illegal government activities are sanctioned as part of the quest to keep us “safe”

zens. Moreover, as the *Saturday Evening Post* reports, “Under Project MINARET, the NSA monitored the communications of civil rights leaders and opponents of the Vietnam War, including targets such as Martin Luther King, Jr, Mohammed Ali, Jane Fonda, and two active US Senators. The NSA had launched this program in 1967 to monitor suspected terrorists and drug traffickers, but successive presidents used it to track all manner of political dissidents”.

Senator Frank Church (D-Ida.), who served as the chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence that investigated the NSA, understood only too well the dangers inherent in allowing the government to overstep its authority in the name of national security. Church recognised that such surveillance powers “at any time could be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left, such is the capability to monitor everything: telephone conversations, telegrams, it doesn’t matter. There would be no place to hide”.

Noting that the NSA could enable a dictator “to impose total tyranny” upon an utterly defenceless American public, Church declared that he did not “want to see this country ever go across the bridge” of constitutional protection, congressional oversight and popular demand for privacy. He avowed that “we,” implicating both Congress and its con-

stituency in this duty, “must see to it that this agency and all agencies that possess this technology operate within the law and under proper supervision, so that we never cross over that abyss. That is the abyss from which there is no return”.

The result was the passage of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), and the creation of the FISA Court, which was supposed to oversee and correct how intelligence information is collected and collated. The law requires that the NSA get clearance from the FISA Court, a secret surveillance court, before it can carry out surveillance on American citizens. Fast forward to the present day, and the so-called solution to the problem of government entities engaging in unjustified and illegal surveillance – the FISA Court – has unwittingly become the enabler of such activities, rubberstamping almost every warrant request submitted to it.

The 9/11 attacks served as a watershed moment in our nation’s history, ushering in an era in which immoral and/or illegal government activities such as surveillance, torture, strip searches, SWAT team raids are sanctioned as part of the quest to keep us “safe”.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush secretly authorised the NSA to conduct warrantless surveillance on Americans’ phone calls and emails. That wireless wiretap programme was reportedly ended in 2007 after the *New York Times* reported on it, to mass indignation.

Nothing changed under Barack Obama. In fact, the violations worsened, with the NSA authorised to secretly collect internet and telephone data on millions of Americans, as well as on foreign governments.

It was only after whistleblower

Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013 that the American people fully understood the extent to which they had been betrayed once again.

Even so, nothing really changed.

Since then, presidents, politicians, and court rulings have come and gone, but none of them have done much to put an end to the government's "technotyranny".

At every turn, we have been handicapped in our quest for transparency, accountability and a representative democracy by an establishment culture of secrecy: secret agencies, secret experiments, secret military bases, secret surveillance, secret budgets, and secret court rulings, all of which exist beyond our reach, operate outside our knowledge, and do not answer to "we the people".

Yet the surveillance sector is merely one small part of a shadowy permanent government comprised of unelected bureaucrats who march in lockstep with profit-driven corporations that actually runs Washington, DC, and works to keep us under close watch and, thus, under control. For example, Google openly works with the NSA, Amazon has built a massive \$600-million intelligence database for the CIA, and the telecommunications industry is making a fat profit by spying on us for the government.

Most recently, the Biden Administration indicated it may be open to working with non-governmental firms in order to warrantlessly monitor citizens online. This would be nothing new, however. Vast quantities of the government's digital surveillance is already being outsourced to private companies, who are far less restrained in how they harvest and share our personal data.

In this way, Corporate America is making a hefty profit by aiding and abetting the government in its

What we are dealing with today is not just a beast that has outgrown its chains but a beast that will not be restrained

militarised domestic surveillance efforts.

Cue the dawning of what *The Nation* refers to as "the rise of a new class in America: the cyberintelligence ruling class. These are the people – often referred to as 'intelligence professionals' – who do the actual analytical and targeting work of the NSA and other agencies in America's secret government. Over the last [20] years, thousands of former high-ranking intelligence officials and operatives have left their government posts and taken up senior positions at military contractors, consultancies, law firms, and private-equity firms. In their new jobs, they replicate what they did in government – often for the same agencies they left. But this time, their mission is strictly for-profit".

The snitch culture has further empowered the Surveillance State.

As Ezra Marcus writes for the *New York Times*, "Throughout the past year, American society responded to political upheaval and biological peril by turning to an age-old tactic for keeping rule breakers in check: tattling".

This new era of snitch surveillance is the lovechild of the government's post-9/11 "See Something, Say Something" programmes combined with the self-righteousness of a politically correct, technologically-wired age.

Marcus continues: "Technology, and our abiding love of it, is crucial to our current moment of social surveillance. Snitching isn't just a byproduct of nosiness or fear; it's a technological feature built into the digital architecture of the pandemic era – specifically when it comes to software designed for remote work and Covid-tracing... Contact tracing apps ... have started to be adapted for other uses, including criminal probes by the Singaporean government. If that seems distinctly worrying, it might be useful to remember that the world's most powerful technology companies, whose products you are likely using to read this story, already use a business model of mass surveillance, collecting and selling user information to advertisers at an unfathomable scale. Our cellphones track us everywhere, and our locations are bought and sold by data brokers at incredible, intimate detail. Facial recognition software used by law enforcement trawls Instagram selfies. Facebook harvests the biometric data of its users. The whole ecosystem, more or less, runs on snitching".

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, what we are dealing with today is not just a beast that has outgrown its chains but a beast that will not be restrained. **CT**

John W. Whitehead, a constitutional attorney and author, is founder and president of the Rutherford Institute. His books *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, and *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*, are available online at www.amazon.com. **Nisha Whitehead** is the Executive Director of the Rutherford Institute. Information about the Institute is available at www.rutherford.org.



DOUGIE WALLACE

Invasion of the Tartan Army

It's party time as thousands of Scottish football fans descend on London to celebrate their team's first appearance in a major international tournament in 23 years





All photos © Dougie Wallace: www.dougiwallace.com



TEXT: TONY SUTTON

Friday June 18 was the biggest day in 23 years for Scottish football fans – the Tartan Army – 20,000 of whom travelled to London to support their national team against their oldest rivals England in Euro 2020, the first international tournament for which Scotland has qualified since the 1998 World Cup in France.

However, most of them didn't actually get into Wembley Stadium, where their team held their top-rated opponents to a 0-0 draw. Covid restrictions meant that just 20,300 fans (2,800 of them Scottish) were allowed into the 90,000-capacity stadium. So the blue-shirted horde gathered in the heart of Lon-

Above: Ever wondered what a well-dressed Scotsman wears under his kilt? Now you know.

Top Left: Scotland doesn't have the best football team in the world. But their fans know how to party.

Left: London cops get ready to boogie.



Game over. Let the party begin: Scottish fans pour into the streets to celebrate their team's draw against old rivals England.

don's West End – from Trafalgar Square to Leicester Square to Soho – first watching the game in crowded pubs before spilling into the rain-drenched streets to celebrate their team's performance against their fiercest rivals.

“We didn't win, but we didn't lose – and who cares about the result, anyway?”, said one joyous fan clutching a half-empty bottle of wine. “Just being here's a victory for Scot-

land. Unlike England, we have no ambitions to rule the world. Win, lose or draw, we're the winners”.

A week earlier, the imminent arrival of thousands of Scottish fans had been welcomed by London's mayor Sadiq Khan, who hoped they would provide a much-boost to his city's hard-hit hospitality sector. But he executed a nifty about-turn days before the game, telling



them the “best thing to do is not to come to London, and instead enjoy the game at home”, after being warned of the twin threats of violence and Covid transmission,

The fans ignored him – and a Scotland Yard “dispersal order” issued in anticipation of antisocial behaviour – as the Tartan Army arrived in packed trains from Edinburgh and Glasgow, eager to be part of the latest round

of the two nations’ 149-year-long football rivalry.

The warnings turned out to be unnecessary: there were just a handful of arrests, before the police dispersed the last remnants of the still-celebrating crowd from the area at 2 am on Saturday morning.

One drenched fan explained, “Following the Scottish national team is about being an

Singing in the rain: Scotland didn’t win. But they didn’t lose, either.



Flags, kilts and pouring rain: Scottish fans celebrate in the heart of London's West End.

underdog standing against the favourites. Unlike English fans, we know we're crap, so the country doesn't go into mourning when we lose. The only awards Scotland gets on the international stage are for our partying".

Scotland lost two of their three games in the first round, finishing bottom of their group. England came top, but we'll say no more about that. **CT**

● See more of Wallace's work at his website, www.dougiewallace.com.



Celebration time:
Scottish fans
yell out their team's
Euro anthem, the
1980s disco hit,
Yes, Sir, I Can Boogie.

About the photographer

● Based in London,
Dougie Wallace is
the author of many
photobooks, the
latest of which are
East Ended and
Bus Response,
both published
by Dewi Lewis
Publishing –
www.dewilewis.com.

CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

Media blackout on Assange revelations

The fact that the most powerful government in the world is persecuting a journalist for telling the truth shouldn't be ignored by big media

As *ColdType* goes to press, it has been five days since the Icelandic newspaper *Stundin* broke the story that a key FBI informant-witness in the US government's case against Julian Assange had fabricated allegations against the WikiLeaks founder. And yet, somehow, Assange is still in prison in London.

Weirder still, not one major western media outlet outside of Iceland has reported on this massive and entirely legitimate news story. A web search brings up coverage by

Icelandic media, by Russian media, and by smaller western outlets including Democracy Now, World Socialist Website, Consortium News, Zero Hedge and some others, but as of publication, this story has been completely ignored by all major outlets who are ostensibly responsible for informing the public in the western world.

It's not that those outlets have been ignoring Assange altogether these last few days either. Reuters recently published an interview with Assange's fiancée Stella Moris. The London *Evening Standard* has

a recent article out on Assange's plans to marry Moris in Belmarsh, as does *Deutsche Welle*. It's just this one story in particular that they've been blacking out completely.

And it's not that the mainstream press are unaware of this story. Mainstream western reporters spend a lot of time on Twitter, and Assange's name was trending in the United States after the *Stundin* story broke. Tweets about the article from high-profile accounts such as WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden have many thousands of shares each. Mainstream journalists and their editors have all seen the article. They all know it's newsworthy. They're just choosing not to report on it.

It reminds me of the blanket media blackout that occurred while the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was hemorrhaging leaks revealing a US government-tied cover up in the alleged chlorine gas incident in Douma, Syria. Immensely newsworthy stories were breaking every few days on a major international scandal, yet not a peep was made about it by the mainstream press.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons



FABRICATED: Sigurdur Thordarson aboard a helicopter in New York City, March 2011.

We got some insight into what happens in mainstream newsrooms during such bizarre circumstances when journalist Tareq Haddad leaked the emails from his editors at *Newsweek* as they were refusing him permission to write about the unfolding OPCW scandal. Haddad's pitch was rejected by editor Dimi Reider on the basis that other bigger outlets hadn't written about it.

"Leak has been

Assuming other news outlets feel the same, it means they're all generally following the lead of a handful of top-tier publications

out since weekend", Reider wrote. "It's certainly no scoop. Yet despite the days that passed, not a single respected media outlet – many of whom boast far greater regional expertise, resources on the ground and in newsroom than *Newsweek* does – have taken the leak remotely seriously. Which already yesterday made my wonder how we could or why we should".

Reider was supported by *Newsweek's* digital director Laura Davis, who told Haddad his pitch was being rejected because "the leak found zero to no traction among publications which are highly resourced and experienced on Syria."

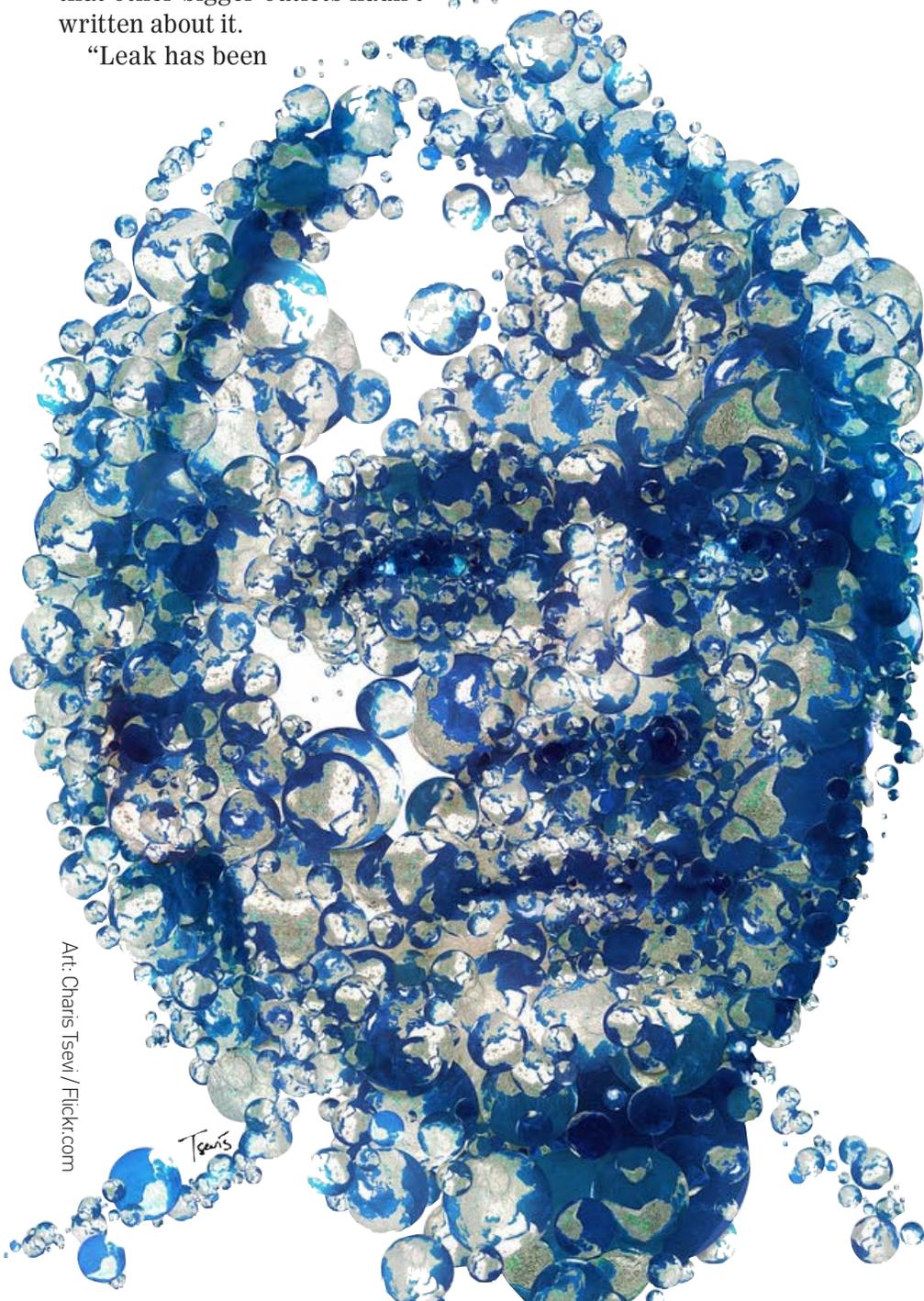
And that's just pretty darn convenient for the powerful, is it not? Assuming other mainstream news outlets feel the same, this means they're all generally following the lead of just a handful of top-tier publications like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *Guardian*.

If just those few outlets decide to ignore a major news story that's inconvenient for the powerful (either by persuasion, infiltration or by their own initiative), then no one else will either.

As far as the media-consuming public is concerned, it's like the major news story never happened at all.

And that's really, really creepy.

Western mass media outlets are propaganda. They are owned and controlled by wealthy people in coordination with the secretive government agencies tasked with preserving the world order upon which the media-owning plutocrats have built their kingdoms, and their purpose is to



Art: Charis Tsevi / Flickr.com

manipulate the way the mainstream public thinks, acts and votes into alignment with the agendas of the ruling class.

You see this propaganda in the way things are reported, but you also see it in the way things are not reported. Entire news stories can be completely redacted from mainstream attention if they are sufficiently inconvenient for the mechanisms of empire, or only allowed in via platforms like *Tucker Carlson Tonight* and thereby tainted and spun as ridiculous right-wing conspiracy theories.

If newsworthiness and significance were what governed mainstream news media reporting, instead of the agendas of profit and power, we'd constantly be hearing about the people dying in Yemen and the brutal income inequality in the United States. And the fact that the most powerful government in the world is persecuting a journal-

Our minds are being messed with by powerful people with limitless resources to ensure their continued domination of the planet at any cost

ist for telling the truth would be at the forefront of everyone's awareness, instead of the mountain of smears they have heaped upon Julian Assange.

I sometimes get people telling me that some news stories are meant to "distract" us from other, bigger news stories, like this is something the imperial narrative managers do especially on some occasions but not all the time. In reality, distraction is never not happening, because every single day the plutocratic media pull people's

attention away from the pressing issues of the moment like ecocide, poverty, oppression and mass military slaughter to get them talking about Cardi B's baby bump and Marjorie Taylor Greene's latest doofy publicity stunt.

We are being lied to. Constantly, and in more ways than we realise. By omission, by distortion, by half-truths and by outright deception. Our minds are being actively messed with by powerful people with limitless resources to ensure their continued domination of the planet at any cost.

Our very perception of reality is being assaulted on myriad fronts. Until humanity finds a way to wake itself up from its propaganda-induced coma, the abuses of the powerful will continue. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is www.caitlinjohnstone.com

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by
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THE ROAD STOPS AT NOWHERE
"They say you choose your friends, but not your family; them you love regardless. You don't choose your nation, either. South Africa is my nation - revolutionaries and racists and samaritans and dimwits and all!"
DENIS BECKETT
ColdType

RADICAL MIDDLE
Chasing peace while apartheid ruled
DENIS BECKETT

WHITE MAN WALKING
DENIS BECKETT

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C.J. HOPKINS

Manufacturing the 'New Normal' reality

We're not going to wake up the New Normals with facts. This is not a civilised debate about facts. This is a fight. Act accordingly

The ultimate goal of every totalitarian system is to establish complete control over society and every individual within it in order to achieve ideological uniformity and eliminate any and all deviation from it. This goal can never be achieved, of course, but it is the raison d'être of all totalitarian systems, regardless of what forms they take and ideologies they espouse. You can dress totalitarianism up in Hugo Boss-designed Nazi uniforms, Mao suits, or medical-looking face masks, but its core desire remains the same: to remake the world in its paranoid image ... to replace reality with its own "reality".

We are right in the middle of this process currently, which is why everything feels so batshit crazy. The global capitalist ruling classes are implementing a new official ideology, in other words, a new "reality". That's what an official ideology is. It's more than just a set of beliefs. Anyone can have any beliefs they want. Your personal beliefs do not constitute "reality". In order to make your beliefs "reality", you need to have the power to impose them on society. You need the power of the police, the military, the media, scientific "experts", academia, the culture industry, the entire ideology-manu-

facturing machine.

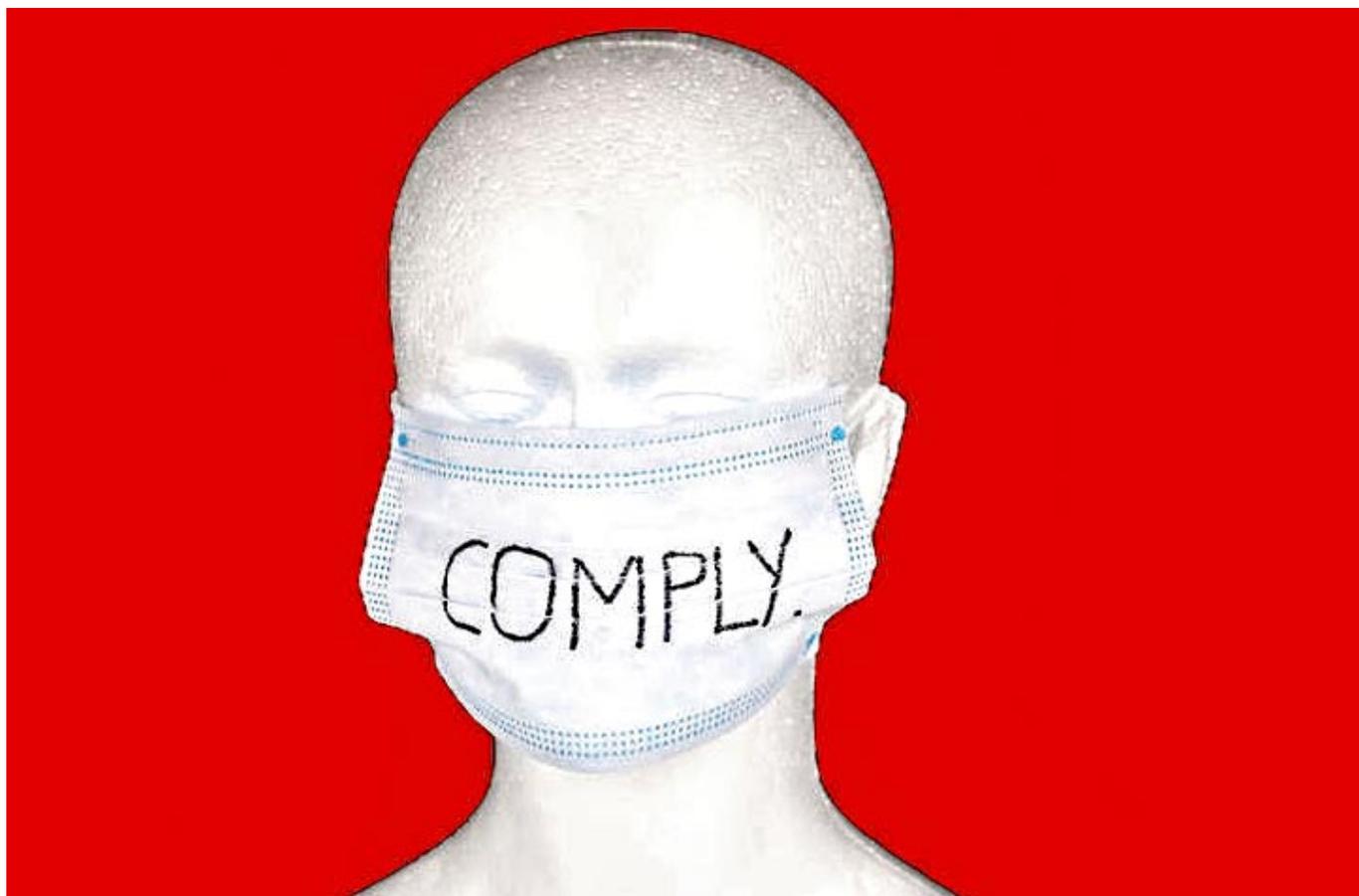
There is nothing subtle about this process. Decommissioning one "reality" and replacing it with another is a brutal business. Societies grow accustomed to their "realities". We do not surrender them willingly or easily. Normally, what's required to get us to do so is a crisis, a war, a state of emergency, or ... you know, a deadly global pandemic.

During the changeover from the old "reality" to the new "reality", the society is torn apart. The old "reality" is being disassembled and the new one has not yet taken its place. It feels like madness, and, in a way, it is. For a time, the society is split in two, as the two "realities" battle it out for dominance. "Reality" being what it is (ie, monolithic), this is a fight to the death. In the end, only one "reality" can prevail.

This is the crucial period for the totalitarian movement. It needs to negate the old "reality" in order to implement the new one, and it cannot do that with reason and facts, so it has to do it with fear and brute force. It needs to terrorise the majority of society into a state of mindless mass hysteria that can be turned against those resisting the new "reality". It is not a matter of persuad-

ing or convincing people to accept the new "reality". It's more like how you drive a herd of cattle. You scare them enough to get them moving, then you steer them wherever you want them to go. The cattle do not know or understand where they are going. They are simply reacting to a physical stimulus. Facts and reason have nothing to do with it.

And this is what has been so incredibly frustrating for those of us opposing the roll-out of the "New Normal", whether debunking the official Covid-19 narrative, or "Russiagate", or the "Storming of the US Capitol", or any other element of the new official ideology. (And, yes, it is all one ideology, not "communism", or "fascism", or any other nostalgia, but the ideology of the system that actually rules us, supranational global capitalism. We're living in the first truly global-hegemonic ideological system in human history. We have been for the last 30 years. If you are touchy about the term "global capitalism", go ahead and call it "globalism", or "crony capitalism". or "corporatism", or whatever other name you need to. Whatever you call it, it became the unrivalled globally-hegemonic ideological system when the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s. Yes, there are pockets of internal resistance, but it has no external adversaries, so its



progression toward a more openly totalitarian structure is logical and entirely predictable.)

Anyway, what has been so incredibly frustrating is that many of us have been operating under the illusion that we are engaged in a rational argument over facts (eg, the facts of Russiagate, Literal-Hitlergate, 9/11, Saddam's WMDs, Douma, the January 6 "insurrection", the official Covid narrative, etc). This is not at all what is happening. Facts mean absolutely nothing to the adherents of totalitarian systems.

You can show the New Normals the facts all you like. You can show them the fake photos of people dead in the streets in China in March of 2020. You can show them the fake projected death rates. You can explain how the fake PCR tests work,

What has been so frustrating is that many of us have been operating under the illusion that we are engaged in a rational argument over facts

how healthy people were deemed medical "cases". You can show them all the studies on the ineffectiveness of masks. You can explain the fake "hospitalisation" and "death" figures, send them articles about the unused "emergency hospitals", the unremarkable age-and-population-adjusted death rates, cite the survival rates for people under 70, the dangers and pointlessness of "vaccinating" children. None of this will make the slightest difference.

Or, if you've bought the Covid-19 narrative, but haven't completely abandoned your critical faculties, you can do what Glenn Greenwald has been doing recently. You can demonstrate how the corporate media have intentionally lied, again and again, to whip up mass hysteria over "domestic terrorism". You can show people videos of the "violent domestic terrorists" calmly walking into the Capitol Building in single file, like a high-school tour group, having been let in by members of Capitol Security. You can debunk the infamous "fire-extinguisher murder" of Brian Sicknik that never really happened. You can point out that the belief that a few hundred unarmed people running around in the Capitol qualifies as an "insurrection", or an "attempted coup", or "domestic terrorism", is delusional to the point of being literally insane. This will also not make

the slightest difference.

I could go on, and I'm sure I will as the "New Normal" ideology becomes our new "reality" over the course of the next several years. My point, at the moment, is ... this isn't an argument. The global-capitalist ruling classes, government leaders, the corporate media, and the New Normal masses they have instrumentalised are not debating with us. They know the facts. They know the facts contradict their narratives. They do not care. They do not have to. Because this isn't about facts. It's about power.

I'm not saying that facts don't matter. Of course they matter. They matter to us. I'm saying, let's recognise what this is. It isn't a debate or a search for the truth. The New Normals are disassembling one "reality" and replacing it with a new "reality". (Yes, I know that reality exists in some fundamental ontological sense, but that isn't the "reality" I'm talking about here, so please do not send me angry emails railing against Foucault and post-modernism.)

The pressure to conform to the new "reality" is already intense and it's going to get worse as vaccination passes, public mask-wearing, periodic lockdowns, etc, become normalised. Those who don't conform

The pressure to conform to the new "reality" is going to get worse as passes, public mask-wearing, periodic lockdowns, etc., become normalised

will be systematically demonised, socially and/or professionally ostracised, segregated, and otherwise punished. Our opinions will be censored. We will be "cancelled", deplatformed, demonitised, and otherwise silenced. Our views will be labelled "potentially harmful." We will be accused of spreading "misinformation", of being "far-right extremists", "racists", "antisemites", "conspiracy theorists", "anti-vaxxers", "anti-global-capitalist violent domestic terrorists", or just garden variety "sexual harassers", or whatever they believe will damage us the most.

This will happen in both the public and personal spheres. Not just governments, the media, and corporations, but your colleagues, friends, and family will do this. Strangers in shops and restaurants will do this. Most of them will not do it consciously. They will do it because your non-conformity represents an existential threat to them ... a negation of their new "reality" and a reminder of the

reality they surrendered in order to remain a "normal" person and avoid the punishments described above.

This is nothing new, of course. It is how "reality" is manufactured, not only in totalitarian systems, but in every organised social system. Those in power instrumentalise the masses to enforce conformity with their official ideology. Totalitarianism is just its most extreme and most dangerously paranoid and fanatical form.

So, sure, keep posting and sharing the facts, assuming you can get them past the censors, but let's not kid ourselves about what we're up against. We're not going to wake the New Normals up with facts. If we could, we would have done so already. This is not a civilised debate about facts. This is a fight. Act accordingly. **CT**

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FICTION

“The Pentagon has always flatly denied that any POWs were left behind in ‘Nam. You think they’re going to be happy to see us back?”

An excerpt from *A Legacy of Chains*, by Philip Kraske



FOR DECADES AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR, the rumours persisted: Some American prisoners-of-war were never brought home. In public, both Washington and Hanoi denied it. In private, Hanoi insisted on receiving war reparations before they would release the hundreds of prisoners still in chains. Washington refused; the men never came back.

Now it is the year 2010. American diplomat Paul Klippen is summoned to Spain’s south coast on a strange mission: a boat with nine Americans in their seventies has been towed ashore by the Spanish Coast Guard. They tell him they are American POWs who have finally managed to escape Vietnam after forty years of captivity. Klippen works to repatriate the men, but quickly discovers that many in Washington are not happy to see those long-ago denials refuted.

Set against the dreamy countryside of Spain and political revolt in America, this novella examines the initial cracks in the social contract between rulers and ruled.



“**F**

OR THE MOMENT, I FIGURED I HAD A window of two or three days while I figured out what to do with the nine men. Because I believed their story – they were American POWs from Vietnam all right. And they were counting on State – that is, on me – because they knew that the Pentagon would again deny their existence and maybe eliminate their existence as well.



“The Vietnamese had a very convenient argument: there had been no formal declaration of war on either side, therefore no legal state of war existed, therefore the Conventions did not apply. The men they captured were not soldiers at all, but criminals and murderers – full stop”

“Well, the men had a few thousand left over from what the captain had returned for not smuggling them all the way to Newark, and they could sit tight in my friend’s vacation house for a few days. Matilda the maid could bring supplies. I figured out how to heat the swimming pool and told the men to stay inside the walls and not make any noise.

“Then I high-tailed it back to Madrid before my absence became noticeable. I told the night-duty staff, in my best espionage tone, that they were to strike from the records the call from the Red Cross and the one they’d made to me. Then I got on a secure line to our esteemed colleague here, Dr. Max Venable, Donelly Chair in Caribbean Studies, and told him I needed a thorough and immediate education in US POWs left over in Vietnam – this because I couldn’t be sure who might be looking at my home and work computers. Was the issue really as serious as the men were saying? And of course, a few hours later, Max came though. Why don’t you give us a summary?”

“My pleasure, old fruit,” I said, straightening up in my chair, “though I was so enjoying your narration. Well! Have to sing for my supper a bit. Let me see...”

“Oh, god, here it comes, everybody,” said Wanda. “My husband the professor from jolly old England. Pour yourselves new drinks.”

“Thank you, my love. Your confidence overwhelms.” I sipped my port, complimented Ramón on its excellence, and began:

“It was a bloody sordid business all around. The war ended and prisoners were sent back to their countries. But the gasp across Washington was audible when the Vietnamese handed over a list of but six hundred men. Washington had expected more than double that number. There had never been any accounting on prisoners, you see, as the Geneva Conventions require. For that and many other contingencies, the Vietnamese had a very convenient argument: there had been no formal declaration of war on either side, therefore no legal state of war existed, therefore the Conventions did not apply. The men they captured were not soldiers at all, but criminals and murderers – full stop. And with the war’s end, it quickly became clear that they intended to keep the remaining men just to be sure Uncle Sam forked over the money pledged: 3.75 billion dollars. They’d done the same thing with the French before them after the French-Indochinese war – ended in ’54 – and the French were paying big wampum till 1971 to get their men back.”

“How much is that in today’s money?” asked Cindy.

“On it,” said Ramón, tapping on his cell phone. “Okay...3.75 billion then is 21.88 billion today. That’d fund a couple of federal departments but good.”



I SIGHED, DRANK. “**BUT THOSE HARD-EYED** men in Washington in their white business shirts and narrow black ties weren’t about to lose to North Vietnam and pay for the privilege. So they didn’t. And the whole circus began: the White House saying all known prisoners had been returned, the Pentagon stonewalling every congressional investigation, families of POWs and MIAs

demanding investigations, investigations held, investigations stymied, documents gone missing, documents discovered. A bloody mess. Defectors and refugees from Vietnam, after the fall of Saigon, all described seeing prisoners.”

“Well, what did the government say about that?” Wanda asked.

“Generally, that these were people trying to curry favour, trying to gain some extra attention and maybe money.”

“God, what a bunch of fuckers.”

“There’s nobody so effortlessly lubricious, old love, as a bureaucrat covering up a scandal.”

“Well, what about when Carter came into office? He didn’t have any baggage from the war.”

“Total stonewall. Wouldn’t give the POW families the time of day. Sent them packing.”

“Carter the great Christian – shit,” said Ramón.

“But what about the money we promised?” said Wanda. “Didn’t the Vietnamese take the US to an international court or something over that? I mean, it’s black on white, it’s signed, it’s official.”

“The North, I think, got suckered there,” said Paul. “They hadn’t insisted on the number being in the treaty, just the fact that the US agreed to pay war reparations. The actual number was in a letter signed by Nixon and sent to the president of North Vietnam. In fact, the Nixon letter was secret and didn’t come to light until after he’d resigned.” He drank. “Go on, Max.”

I did. “A few years after the treaty was signed, there was a high-level meeting between the Yanks and the Vietnamese; some of the same people who had negotiated the treaty were there. The Yanks pressed for the return of all their men, the Vietnamese said it could all be arranged as soon as Uncle Sam paid up – all that in the euphemisms of diplomacy, of course. The Vietnamese – no longer the North Vietnamese, now that they had reunited their country – waved a copy of Nixon’s letter at the Americans and said, ‘What about this, gents?’ The Yanks’ reply was that they did not consider that

document binding.”

“Unbelievable,” said Wanda. “Just unbelievable.”

“Better tell them about Garwood,” said Paul. “That’s when I realized what kind of mess these men were in – not to mention myself.”

“Indeed, old man. Another tawdry little anecdote. One fine day in 1979, the BBC reported a note from a live American POW. It had been smuggled out of Vietnam by a representative of the World Bank, gent from Finland. Here was living proof: American POWs were still alive. Big embarrassment for the Vietnamese, and a headache for the Pentagon.”

“Just one guy is a headache?” asked Wanda.

“The problem was not the man, old love, but what he might have seen, for example, other POWs. And indeed he had. Private Robert Garwood, USMC.. A truly gob-smacking story if you ever get the chance to read him up. Long story short, he –” I stopped. The Lilliputians were staring at me. “‘Gobsmacking’ – astonishing, you bloody baboons.”

They laughed.



LONG STORY SHORT, GARWOOD WAS captured in ’65, tortured like all the rest of them, and sent to jungle prisons. Oh, he went through hell, that poor man. American bombs fell on one of his prisons and he was deaf and blind for some six months from the blast. Anyway, early on, an older prisoner took him under his wing and told him the facts of life: either you make yourself useful to the Vietnamese or they let you die. And you can’t make yourself useful unless you know the language. He taught Garwood Vietnamese, taught him what to eat out in the jungle to supplement the bit of rice his captors vouchsafed him, showed him what roots would cure cuts and aches – all that. This good man, by the way, was later beaten to death by the guards for some infraction of the rules: just goes to show you what Garwood was up against.



“Garwood was captured in ’65, tortured like all the rest of them, and sent to jungle prisons. ... Anyway, early on, an older prisoner took him under his wing and told him the facts of life: either you make yourself useful to the Vietnamese or they let you die. And you can’t make yourself useful unless you know the language”



“The second time around, Garwood passed his note to the Finn there in the hotel lobby and talked to him briefly. And the Finn played his cards right. Rather than going with the note to the Yankees, he got back to London, where he was based, and went with it to the International Red Cross”

“But Garwood ultimately gave his captors just enough rope to hang themselves with. He made himself useful. He was a farmboy from Indiana, one of these fellows who can fix a tractor with a piece of wire and a wad of gum. And he became their handyman – repaired whatever they brought him: abandoned equipment, rifles, radios, trucks.

“After some years, they took him into Hanoi from time to time to repair things there, and he worked a deal with his guards: they let him go into a high-class hotel – no Vietnamese allowed – and buy cartons of American cigarettes for them to sell on the black market; all he wanted was a pack for himself. Twice he was able to slip foreigners a note with his name and so on. The first time the fellow who got the note informed the Pentagon. It held a meeting among a lot of generals who mulled it over, rubbed their necks, and said, ‘No, couldn’t be. An impostor. Kids playing a joke.’ And they buried the matter.”

“Those shits!” cried Wanda.

“Shits indeed, old love. But military men are the same the world over: the lower ranks are all excellent fellows, but theirs is but to do or die. At any rate, the second time around, Garwood passed his note to the Finn there in the hotel lobby and talked to him briefly. And the Finn played his cards right. Rather than going with the note to the Yankees, he got back to London, where he was based, and went with it to the International Red Cross. They wisely passed the note to British media, and then there was no wiggle room for the spin doctors: here was a live American POW being held against his will who wanted out.”



I SIPPED MY PORT AND APPRECIATED its smoothness. “Poor Garwood. Part two of his nightmare was just beginning. He went back on an Air France flight and as soon as it cleared Vietnamese airspace he was charged by American officials with collaboration and some lesser crimes against other prisoners.”

“What?” cried Wanda.

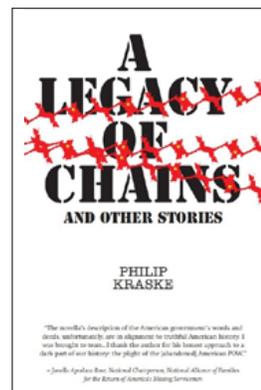
“Fuck. Me,” said Ramón.

“It was so outrageous, not to say gob-smacking, that the French captain of the plane came back into the cabin and told Garwood that the plane itself was French territory and he was in command; he would set Garwood down in Paris if he wanted. Garwood said no. He would go back and face the music.”

“But why would the military do that?” said Wanda. “That’s criminal!”

“The point was to discredit him, old girl. This way, anything he had to say about left-behind POWs would smack of sour grapes. Garwood was court-marshalled, a few of his fellow prisoners were brought in to testify that he’d collaborated with the Vietnamese prison officials against the prisoners, and it was only the last-minute chance intervention of an Army buddy of his who saved him from the worst charges.

“So Garwood ended up a free man, but he was tossed out into the street with a dishonourable discharge, losing fourteen years of back pay. He could barely speak English anymore, and ended up working at a gas station. Vietnam-veteran organizations helped him get back on his feet. He campaigned hard in favour of abandoned POWs, but the charges and the media coverage had blackened his reputation. Later on, in the Nineties, Senators John Kerry and John McCain – both Vietnam vets – buried the evidence on left-behind POWs – got it all classified Top Secret. Maybe our grandchildren will be able to read the true story.”



**A LEGACY OF CHAINS
And Other Stories**

Philip Kraske

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SAM PIZZIGATI

How we can conquer dynastic family fortunes

Since 1983, 27 family wealth dynasties have seen their fortunes triple and then more than triple again, from \$80.2-billion in 1983 to \$903.2-billion in 2020

All things eventually end, even grand dynastic family fortunes. In the abstract, we all know this to be true. But the facts on the ground can be disconcerting. And those facts have never been clearer, not after last month's release of stunning new research on America's enduring family wealth dynasties.

In America, the fabled land of opportunity, our wealthiest families have taken full advantage of the opportunities their grand fortunes create. They've deployed the power their riches impart to rig our economic and political systems and manufacture the closest thing to a perpetual-motion machine for ensuring dynastic fortune the world has ever seen.

Over the last four decades, the Institute for Policy Studies details in its new *Silver Spoon Oligarchs* report, the fortunes of our richest wealth dynasties have multiplied tens of times over. Back in 1983, for instance, Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton and his family had a net worth, in today's dollars, of \$5.6-billion. In 2020, Walton's progeny were sitting on a stash worth over \$247-billion.

And the Waltons have hardly been outliers. Some 27 families that appeared on the 1983 *Forbes* list of

America's richest families also appeared on the 2020 *Forbes* "Billion-Dollar Dynasties" list. These 27 families have seen their combined fortunes soar by 1,007 percent.

What does a percentage rate that humungous mean in simpler terms? Since 1983, these 27 family wealth dynasties have seen their fortunes triple and then more than triple again, from \$80.2-billion in 1983 inflation-adjusted dollars to \$903.2-billion in 2020.

The authors of *Silver Spoon Oligarchs*, the new Institute for Policy Studies report, haven't just quantified the extent of dynastic wealth in the United States today. They've also laid out over a dozen policy moves we could make to shear our dynastic fortunes down to something approximating democratic size. But these policy fixes won't be going anywhere until we scale the psychological wall – the aura of invincibility – our wealthiest now have guarding their grand fortunes.

Psychologically, this aura has grand fortunes simply seeming too powerful to significantly dent. Our richest families, after all, have enough billions to buy anything. They have politicians in their pockets. They own much of our major

media. They've outfitted our academic and think-tank worlds with well-endowed centres dedicated to defending grand concentrations of enormous private wealth.

Overcoming the aura of invincibility that envelops our super rich will take more than a well-articulated reform agenda. We need a sense of hope as well, a sense that ordinary people just like us can confront and deflate grand dynastic family fortunes. In other words, we need history on our side – and, fortunately, we have it. Our egalitarian forbears have already once before, against all odds, deflated our nation's grandest fortunes.

That deflation came in the middle of the 20th century, a century that began in the midst of a Gilded Age even more noxious than our own Gilded Age today. In 1906, the economist Henry Laurens Call ranked the American people by level of privilege for the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Only "one-thousandth" of the population rated as "enormously rich," Call estimated, with those in "comfortable circumstances" making up about 5 percent of the American people. America's remaining 95 percent, he went on, "cannot be said to live other than a precarious existence".

"A sad spectacle this, under any

circumstances”, Call lamented. “Viewed in connection with our enormous wealth production, and the billionaire fortunes of the day, it is an infamous spectacle!”

America’s great “inherited fortunes”, added attorney Frank Walsh, the chair of the federal Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915, “automatically treble and multiply in volume” while average Americans toil up to twelve hours a day.

“From childhood to the grave”, Walsh continued, average Americans “dwell in the shadow of a fear that their only resource – their opportunity to toil – will be taken from them, through accident, illness, the caprice of a foreman, or the fortunes of industry”. Average families, he raged, find their babies “snuffed out by bad air in cheap lodgings”, their fathers and husbands “maimed in accidents”.

Leading plutocrats of the day regularly blamed the poor for their plight and blasted the foolishness of any move that would upset the genius of America’s “natural” economic order. James J Hill, the chairman of the Great Northern Railway, saw “waste, idleness, and rising wages all interrelated to one another” and considered “the modern theory that you can safely tax the wealthy” as “just as obnoxious as the medieval theory that you can safely oppress or kill the poor”.

In one 1909 newspaper interview, Hill, then worth over \$2-billion in today’s dollars, faulted the “extravagance” of the American people for the nation’s high cost of living.

“He was asked,” the newspaper story related, “how the American people as a whole could be very extravagant on an average wage of \$437 a year, which is the wage that the census of 1900 revealed”.

Extravagance, Hill harrumphed, clearly constituted a “relative” phe-

None of the lists of the all-time richest Americans include any Americans who hit their economic peak in the mid-20th century

nomenon. America’s workers, like everyone else, should practice “thrift and economy”. At the time Hill lived in five-floor Minnesota mansion that featured 13 bathrooms, 22 fireplaces, 16 crystal chandeliers, and a reception hall a hundred feet long.

A half-century later, Hill’s world of unimaginable wealth no longer existed. The latest research from America’s most astute wealth-distribution scholars, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman of the University of California-Berkeley, has the wealth share of the nation’s top 0.1 percent peaking at close to 27 percent early in the 20th-century. By the mid-1900s, that share had nudged below 10 percent.

In mid-century America, corporations were simply no longer manufacturing mega millionaires. Stiff tax rates on top-bracket income – as high as 91 percent in the nearly two decades after World War II – and strong trade unions at the bargaining table wouldn’t let them.

“Many of the top executives in some of our largest corporations have spent a lifetime in the field of industrial management without ever having been able to accumulate as much as a million dollars”, Benjamin Fairless, chairman of the US Steel board, would ruefully posit in the 1950s, “And I know that to be fact because I happen to be one of them myself”.

Investment bankers and swank

Wall Street law firms felt the same downward pay pressure. In the mid-century years, notes journalist Malcolm Gladwell, principals in the nation’s top legal powerhouses would look wistfully at the days of opulence gone by. Roswell Magill, a partner at New York’s eminent Cravath, Swaine & Moore, would acknowledge in 1956 that law firms “can no longer honestly assure promising young men that if they become partners they can save money in substantial amounts, build country homes and gardens for themselves like their fathers and grandfathers did, and plan extensive European holidays”.

Before the 1950s, emerging new industries had always created grand personal fortunes. Steel, auto, and oil had left the nation’s economic landscape littered with dynastic wealth. The two greatest economic transformations of the 1950s – the advent of television and the suburbanisation of America – would create no lasting economic dynasties.

Business analysts – from *American Heritage*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Times* – have over recent years assembled inflation-adjusted lists of the richest Americans of all-time. Many of the fortunes on these lists grew to king size before the federal income tax first became a permanent economic fixture in 1913. The rest of the giant fortunes on these lists emerged after 1980, when tax rates on the rich began their steep downward descent.

None of the lists of the all-time richest Americans include any who hit their economic peak in the mid-20th century. Mid-century America would, to be sure, still have rich people. But these would be rich people of a peculiar sort. In a 1969 book, *New Yorker* writer Kenneth Lamott would give the richest of his

era a name. He would call them “in fact the Income Tax Rich”. That label made sense. You couldn’t enjoy a great private fortune at mid-century unless you had a privileged relationship with America’s progressive tax system. You either had to have inherited your fortune from a time before taxes in the United States became steeply progressive. Or you had to have been doing your business in an industry – like oil – with loopholes that shielded you from America’s steeply graduated tax rates.

Fortune magazine’s 1957 list of America’s richest would personalise that phenomenon. The *Fortune* list came divided into wealth tiers. In the top tier, between \$700-million and \$1-billion, the magazine would only unearth one contemporary American: oilman J. Paul Getty. In the second and third tiers, covering the range from \$200- to \$700-million, *Fortune* found 15 grand accumulations of wealth. Eight of these would be inherited, four more either directly or indirectly from oil.

The historic mid-century soaking of America’s rich would climax under a Republican president. In 1960, at an auto industry dinner in Detroit, Dwight Eisenhower would give his own personal take on our economic world. Any society that tolerates a “fabulously wealthy”, he noted, is asking for trouble.

“Since time began”, Ike reminded his corporate listeners, “opulence has too often paved for a nation the way to depravity and ultimate destruction”. That depravity, Eisenhower’s remarks went on to suggest, could also destroy us – if we foolishly chose to let the rich “contribute far less than they should in taxes”.

Our political elite, sadly, refused to follow Ike’s advice. His successor in the White House, John Kennedy, asked Congress to drop the tax rate on top-bracket income from 91 to 65

Also precipitously down since the Kennedy years: the share of the nation’s private-sector workers carrying union cards

percent. That rate would drop, soon after Kennedy’s death to 70 percent and then, under Ronald Reagan, to as low as 28 percent. The current top rate: 37 percent.

Also precipitously down since the Kennedy years: the share of the nation’s private-sector workers carrying union cards. That’s dropped from over one-third of the labor force in the 1950s to under 7 percent. Rich people-

friendly think tanks and political action committees – initially bankrolled in large part by Big Oil fortunes – have sped this shift along.

The result? Today’s unconscionably more unequal America, a place where grand fortunes rule our roost and seem utterly unbeatable. But we beat those fortunes back before – and we can beat them back again. We just have to study how we once prevailed and why we couldn’t sustain that success. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. Parts of this article have been adopted from his 2012 book, *The Rich Don’t Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. Follow him on Twitter at @Too_Much_Online

HURWITT’S EYE

MARK HURWITT



NICK TURSE

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It's not what you think.

A lot of people are worried about what's lurking on their smartphones. Compromising photos. Illicit text messages. Embarrassing contacts. Porn.

What I noticed was a video in the photo stream between a picture of a document I sent to an editor and a shot of my dog – a clip of a man in Burkina Faso having his lower arm chopped off.

The still image of that act is bad enough. The video is far worse. The victim lies on the ground, pleading, screaming as another man, swinging a machete, forces him to place his right arm on a wooden bench. The attacker is trying to make the amputation easier, allowing him to make a cleaner cut. But “easier” is a relative term. The assailant hacks away, again and again and again, taking time to taunt his victim. You watch it happen. Slowly. You see the anguish on the face of the man whose arm is bleeding but mostly intact, then hanging at an odd angle, then barely attached. The video runs one minute and 18 seconds. It

seems longer. Far longer. You hear the tortured screams. You watch the final swing, then see the victim kicking his legs back and forth, writhing in agony on the ground.

I shudder to think how many similar videos and images lurk on my phone – saved in the photos, in the files, sitting in text chains from sources, colleagues, fixers, contacts. There's the man lying in a street in the Democratic Republic of Congo as an assailant with a machete attempts to cut off his leg below the knee. I still remember the exact sound of his cries even years after first viewing it. There's the video of the captured Kurdish fighters. I recall how the second woman to be killed – just before she's shot in the head – watches the execution of her comrade. She doesn't plead or cry or even flinch. Not once.

There's the bound man shot at point blank range and kicked,

The victim lies on the ground, pleading, screaming as another man, swinging a machete, forces him to place his right arm on a wooden bench

still alive, into a ditch. There are the women and children forced to march to their execution. “You are going to die”, says the Cameroonian soldier, who refers to one of the women as “BH”, a reference to the terrorist group, Boko Haram. He steers her off the road and a young girl follows. Another soldier does the same to a second woman who has a toddler strapped to her back. The soldiers force the women to kneel. One of those men directs the girl to stand next to her mother. He then pulls the girl's shirt over her head, blindfolding her. Gunshots follow.

My career in journalism tracks the global proliferation of “war porn”. In the 20th century, this particular genre consisted mostly of still photos that only rarely surfaced. The Japanese “rape” of Nanking. Murders by Nazis. Decapitations during Britain's “Malayan Emergency.” Most of those images were trophy photos, taken by or with the consent of the perpetrators and they generally received only modest circulation. In rare cases, as in an execution in South Vietnam, they were documented by the press, made front-page news, and were sometimes even captured on film.



A poster found in the ruins of a village in the Democratic Republic of Congo where machete-wielding militia killed men, women and children, and destroyed their homes.

Such photos and footage have become ubiquitous over the last two decades. As mobile phone technology has improved, cellphone prices have dropped, and social media and messaging platforms have proliferated, people in conflict zones from Syria to Myanmar – often the perpetrators of atrocities, sometimes the victims – have been increasingly able to share video and photographic documentation of human-rights violations. During the 2010s, the Islamic State flooded the online ecosystem with gruesome execution photos and videos. Israel’s most recent attacks on civilians in Gaza have also provided a seemingly endless stream of traumatic images and video.

While news consumers may increasingly be subjected to hor-

rific images, exposure to limited amounts is, in most cases, unlikely to cause lasting distress. Binging on such footage is a different story. A 2014 analysis of exposure to media coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, found that “repeated bombing-related media exposure was associated with higher acute stress than was direct exposure”; that is, those who consumed six or more hours a day of news coverage experienced greater stress than those who were at or near the actual bombing scene.

It’s clear that immersion in atrocity

content is bad for your mental health. But what if your job is to binge-watch trauma? The work of certain journalists, social media content moderators, human rights researchers, and other analysts now has them awash in graphic “user-generated content” (UGC) or eyewitness video that can leave a lasting mark on one’s mind. The American Psychiatric Association’s 2013 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, its official manual, states that post-traumatic stress can be brought about by exposure to the graphic details of another individual’s experience, including work-related exposure to disturbing television footage, movies, pictures, or other electronic media.

I’ve written articles based on

video footage of executions and massacres. Sometimes atrocity photos figure in my reporting, so it's not surprising that sources often send me war porn. Still, I'm not immersed in such brutal scenes as regularly as some of my colleagues. In 2015, the Eyewitness Media Hub conducted a survey of people who often work with graphic UGC. Even then, more than half of the 209 respondents reported that they viewed distressing media several times weekly. Twelve percent of the responding journalists and almost a quarter of the human rights and humanitarian workers said they viewed such traumatic content daily.

"You witness it a lot more with UGC", said an anonymous senior editor at a news agency. "You're exposed to more intense visual material than battle-hardened war cameramen sitting in Sarajevo in the middle of the 1990s because it's coming at you from everywhere – even more so than, say, in Jerusalem. I was there at the height of the Intifada and there were body parts flying in and out of the office like nobody's business, but there's now a lot more of it".

Forty percent of Eyewitness Media Hub survey respondents said that viewing such traumatic content had a negative impact on their personal lives, leaving them with feelings of isolation, flashbacks, nightmares, and other stress-related symptoms. One quarter reported high or even very high "professional adverse effects".

In 2018, an anonymous staffer from Videre, an international charity that provides activists around the world with equipment, training, and support to gather video evidence of human-rights violations, offered a candid chronicle of the effects of two days of "cutting and splicing, frame by frame" video footage of a massa-

Facebook agreed to pay \$52-million to 11,250 current and former moderators to compensate them for mental-health conditions resulting from the job

cre of men, women, and children. "I went into auto-pilot: charred bodies, severed limbs", that staffer wrote.

"They ceased to be human. I needed not to think of their lost hopes and dreams. And for two days I edited. Headphones stuck deep in my ears. The sound of desperate cries crashing around my head... And then, I started sleeping badly – waking in the night, bad dreams. I was distracted at work. It all felt so futile. A couple of weeks later, I was out walking with my partner and I started to cry".

The next year, Casey Newton, writing for the *Verge*, offered a glimpse into the professional lives of Facebook's 15,000 sub-contractor-employed content moderators. After three and a half weeks of training – immersed in hate speech, violence, and graphic pornography – "Chloe" was asked to "moderate" a post in front of her fellow trainees. It was a video of a murder, a man stabbed again and again as he begged for his life. Chloe, her voice quivering, correctly informed the class that the post needed to be removed since section 13 of Facebook's community standards prohibits videos depicting murder.

As the next potential moderator took her place, Chloe left the room to sob. After that, the panic attacks began. They continued even after Chloe left the job and hers is not an isolated case. Last year, Facebook agreed to pay \$52-million to 11,250

current and former moderators to compensate them for mental-health conditions resulting from the job. There is evidence to suggest that the situation may have worsened since then as Facebook has come under increased pressure to take action against online child abuse, forcing moderators to watch greater amounts of disturbing content.

"Even when the events depicted are far away, journalists and forensic analysts, deeply immersed in a flood of explicit, violent, and disturbing photos and video, may feel that it is seeping into their own personal headspace," reads a fact sheet on working with traumatic imagery provided by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (where I was once a fellow) at Columbia University's Journalism School. "Intrusive recollections – re-seeing traumatic images one has been working with – are not unusual", wrote Gavin Rees, the Dart Center's senior adviser for training and innovation in a 2017 guide for journalists. "Our brains are designed to form vivid pictures of disturbing things, so you may experience images popping back into consciousness at unexpected moments".

Days before I saw that traumatic arm-amputation clip on my phone, I was rummaging around for an old file in the digital folders of a cloud-storage service. I noticed a folder of mine labelled "Graphic photos DRC". I had uploaded those images – dozens of people butchered as if they were meat – while I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018. Back then, I needed to get the images off my phone but carefully labelled the folder as a warning to my editor back in the US, who was monitoring the material, about what lurked in that

innocuous-looking digital version of a manila folder.

Not long after finding that cache of Congo carnage, I needed to contact a source via a messaging platform. I didn't realise that it was several years since we had communicated via that app and that our last "conversation", still sitting there, included a photo of the corpse of a colleague who had been shot through the head.

I have many other atrocity photos on thumb drives, portable hard drives, and external hard drives that sit on my desk. I know some of those photos by heart. A few from the research I did for my book *Kill Anything That Moves* on American war crimes in Vietnam have resided somewhere deep in the recesses of my skull for close to 20 years. Several of them that I found in the US National Archives were glossy photos of the victims of an American ambush. The dead were officially reported as enemy troops, but the investigation and those photos made it clear that they were just average Vietnamese civilians – men, women, and children.

One image burned into my brain is of a young Vietnamese boy lying lifeless on a forest floor. His glassy eyes, still open, evoke an enigmatic sense of serenity. It could be an art photo if you didn't know that parts of his body had been obliterated by bullets and landmine fragments.

Newer photos stick with me, too, like one of a heap of mostly headless bodies that no one could

For years, I wondered what it must have been like for that man to live with the skull of a Vietnamese man or woman in his home ...

mistake for art, for example. I could go on, but you get the picture – or rather, I got the pictures.

I once interviewed a Vietnam veteran who had kept grisly war trophies – a small collection of atrocity images – corpses of those his unit had killed, some visibly mistreated.

In Vietnam, a surprising number of American troops amassed such photos and made grim scrapbooks out of them. Some also collected actual body parts – scalps, penises, teeth, fingers and, most commonly of all, ears. For others, like this man, the preferred anatomical souvenirs were skulls.

That veteran had held onto those war "trophies" for most of his life but, ever more aware of his advancing age, he confessed to me that one day – soon, but not yet – he needed to burn the photos and take a hammer to the skull. He didn't want his daughter to find them when, after his death, she came to clean out his home.

For years, I wondered what it must have been like for that

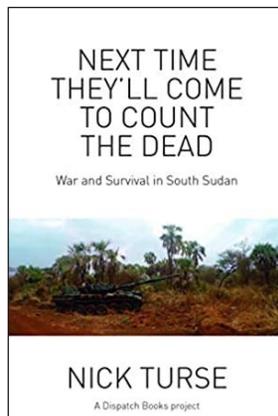
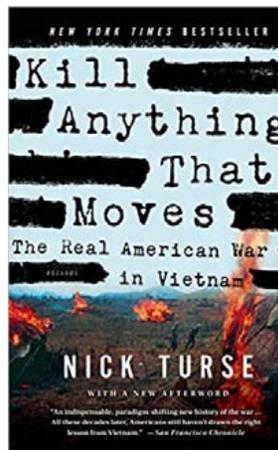
man to live with the skull of a Vietnamese man or woman, to wake up every morning with that spectre of atrocity in his home. Only years later did I begin to grasp that I might have some idea of what that was indeed like.

I've never actively collected war trophies, of course. I've left every skull, every corpse that I've encountered as I found it. But I've nonetheless amassed a horrific collection of war porn, far larger than anything that Vietnam veteran had.

While I don't have a human skull in my closet, my atrocity collection is arguably far more gruesome. That veteran's collection is still and silent, but the screams of the victims, people being butchered alive on video, are part of my collection. His trophy skull sat on a shelf hidden from view, while my compendium of horrors is scattered about my computer, cloud storage, my phone, my message chains – the totality of my digital life.

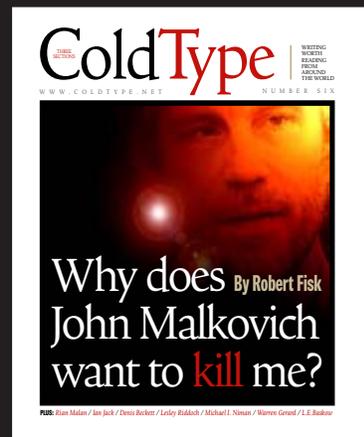
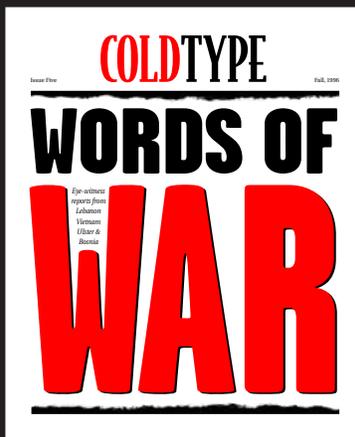
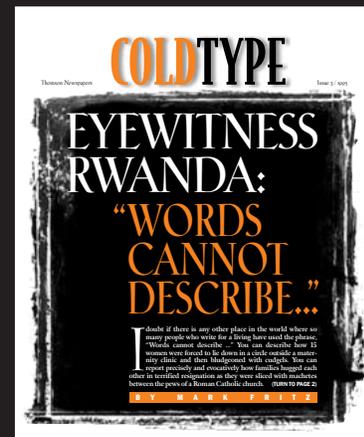
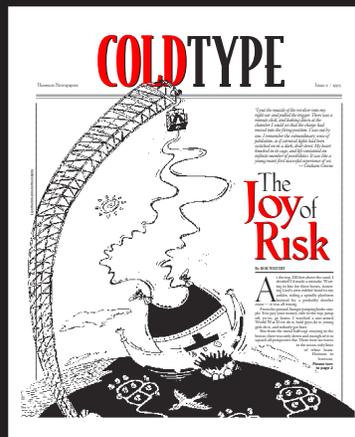
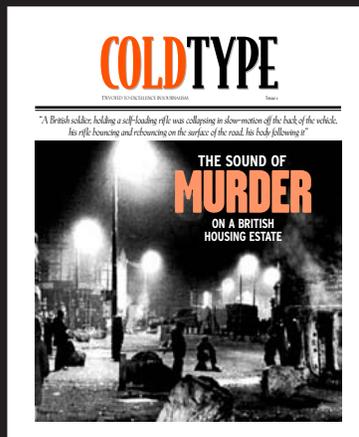
That man's collection was finite and contained, the product of one war and one year of military service many decades ago. Mine lives with me and grows by the week. While I was writing this article, another video clip arrived. It's horrific. At first, I couldn't tell if the woman was dead or alive. The answer only became clear when... On second thought, you're better off not knowing. **CT**

Nick Turse is the managing editor of *TomDispatch* and a fellow at the *Type Media Center*. He is the author most recently of *Next Time They'll Come to Count the Dead: War and Survival in South Sudan* and of the bestselling *Kill Anything That Moves*. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com.



Turse's best-sellers: *This Time They'll Come to Count The Dead*, and *Kill Anything That Moves*.

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INSIGHTS



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GEORGE MONBIOT

Absolute Zero: Every new climate pledge is a distraction from failure

Every week, governments' headline announcements save the planet, and every week their smallprint un-saves it. The latest puff by the G7 is a classic of the genre. Apparently, all seven governments have committed "to conserve or protect at least 30 per cent of the world's land and at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean by 2030". But what does it mean? The UK, which says it secured the new agreement, claims already to have "conserved or protected" 26% of its land and 38% of its seas. In reality, it has simply drawn lines on the map, designating our sheepwrecked hills and trawler-trashed seas "protected",

when they're nothing of the kind. This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a press release.

All governments do this, but Boris Johnson's has perfected the art. It operates on the principle of commitment inflation: as the action winds down, the pledges ramp up. Never mind that it won't meet the targets set by the fourth and fifth carbon budgets: it now has a thrilling new target for the sixth one. Never mind that it can't meet its old commitment, of an 80 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Instead, it has promised us "net zero" by the same date. Yes, we need more ambition, yes, it is following official advice, but higher

targets appear to be a substitute for action.

Fifteen years ago, I wrote a book called *Heat*. I tried to work out how far we would have to cut greenhouse gases to fulfil our international obligations fairly, and how we could do it without destroying the prosperity and peace on which success depends. The best estimates at the time suggested that if the UK were justly to discharge its responsibility for preventing climate breakdown, we would need to cut our emissions by 90 percent by 2030.

Researching the preface for a new edition, I wanted to discover how much progress we've made.

INSIGHTS

An article in the journal *Climate Policy* uses a similar formula for global fairness. Its conclusion? If the UK were justly to discharge its responsibility for preventing climate breakdown we would need to cut our emissions by 90 percent by 2030. And by 2035, it says, our emissions should reach “real zero”. In other words, in terms of the metric that really counts, we have gone nowhere. The difference is that we now have nine years in which to make the 90 percent cut, instead of 24.

How could this be true, given that the UK has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 49 percent since 1990? Surely we’ve been a global leader on climate action? It’s partly because we now know that limiting global heating to 2°C commits us to a dangerous world. In theory, governments have accepted a more stringent target of 1.5°C. But it’s also because, if we ignore the impact of the pandemic, our reduction of greenhouse gases has stalled.

We did the easy things first. Coal-burning power stations were replaced with gas, and some of the gas with renewables. This makes no difference to most people: when we flick the switch, the lights still come on. But almost all the other reductions must involve us directly. They won’t happen unless the government mobilises the nation: encouraging us to drive less and use our feet, bicycles and public transport more; taxing frequent flyers; refitting our homes; reducing the meat we eat; reducing the emissions embedded in the stuff we buy. On these issues, the government’s commitment to action amounts to zero. Not net zero. Absolute zero.

Surface transport in the UK releases the same amount of greenhouse gases as it did in 1990: a shocking failure by successive governments. Yet Johnson intends to spend another £27-billion on roads. Every major airport in the UK has plans to expand.

Buildings release more greenhouse gases than they did in 2014, and the schemes intended to green them have collapsed. The green homes grant, which the government outsourced to a private company, has been a total fiasco, meeting roughly 8 percent of its target. At the current rate of installation, the UK’s homes will be equipped with low-carbon heating in a mere 700 years.

When I wrote *Heat*, we were promised that all new homes would soon be green ones. It still hasn’t happened, and date has been pushed forward yet again, to 2025. Rubbish homes are still being built, which will either require a much more expensive refit or will lock in high emissions for the rest of their lives.

And no one in government wants to touch the biggest issue of all: the greenhouse gases embedded in the stuff we buy, that account for some 46 percent of our emissions. Government ministers urge China to cut its greenhouse gases, but our economic model depends on us buying junk we don’t need with money we don’t have. Because the fossil fuels required to produce most of it are burnt overseas and don’t appear in our national accounts, the government can wash its hands of the problem.

But something has changed for the better: us. In 2006, climate campaigners beat their heads against public indifference. Now, at last, we have mass movements, and some highly effective actions, like the successful shutdown of the McDonalds network by Animal Rebellion last month. If there is hope, this is where it lies. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com.

WILLIAM J. ASTORE

No foreign policy for the US, just a business plan

America doesn’t have a foreign policy, it has a business plan, and it’s business as usual in the Biden administration. Joe Biden promised his donors that nothing

would fundamentally change in his administration. Kamala Harris said her agenda wasn’t about substantive change. So what we’re getting under the Biden/Harris team is eminently predictable:

INSIGHTS

1. More blank checks for Israel, and no recognition of any rights for Palestinians.

2. A revival of the old Cold War, with China as the leading “threat” but with Russia not forgotten.

3. Politics subordinated to the military, rather than the military in service of political aims. In brief, military dominance is America’s foreign policy.

4. Related to (1-3) is dominance of the world’s trade in weapons. The State Department has become a tiny branch of the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex. It’s all about closing arms deals, moving hardware, selling weaponry, making a buck.

5. Naturally, one of Biden’s first acts as president was to bomb a foreign country, in this case Syria. So presidential!

In Joe Biden, America has a fading and flailing man to lead a fading and flailing empire. In Kamala Harris, America has an example of old wine in new packaging. She’s a woman, she’s Black, she’s South Asian – and she thinks like Hillary Clinton and Henry Kissinger.

Remember when Joe Biden said he’d be all about diplomacy? That the power of America’s example would rule over the example of our power? Nice words, but that’s all they’ve been so far. Words.

Two examples where Biden has appeared to offer meaningful change are with Afghanistan and Yemen. With Afghanistan, Biden has promised a complete military withdrawal by 9/11/2021. But does this apply only to combat troops while excluding mercenaries, the CIA, special forces “trainers”, and

the like? It’s not yet clear. Plus anything can happen between now and 9/11 for Biden to switch gears and keep some combat troops in place.

With Yemen, Biden made a point about excluding offensive arms sales to Saudi Arabia while still allowing defensive ones. Almost any weapon can be labelled as defensive in nature, so it’s doubtful whether Saudi operations in Yemen will be impacted at all by Biden’s weasel-word policies.

The Biden/Harris foreign policy, such as it is, is retrograde. It’s a return to the Cold War, with an emphasis on new nuclear weap-

ons and larger Pentagon budgets. It’s about global dominance while America at home burns. It’s foolish and stupid yet it will make a few people richer for a few more business cycles. And thus it’s business as usual in Washington, which is exactly what Biden/Harris were hired for. **CT**

William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and professor of history, is a senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN), an organisation of critical veteran military and national security professionals. He personal blogs at www.bracingviews.com.

TIM GOPSILL

Dead centre: 200 years of the *Guardian*



CAPITAL'S CONSCIENCE: 200 YEARS OF THE GUARDIAN
Edited by Des Freedman
Pluto Press / £16.95

People choose media that reflect their views of the world. Except on the British left, where everybody reads the *Guardian*, but many don’t share its outlook at all. They feel no loyalty, even if they give money to keep it going, and complain about it quite bitterly.

Their reading choice is determined for them by the market. The *Guardian* has to position itself only millimetres to the left of the *Independent* to scoop up the whole of that readership. For the last five years that has been a substantial market. Labour Party membership swelled over half a million under

INSIGHTS

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership: people eager for facts and comment to fuel their zeal to transform the world. Socialism was on the agenda.

The *Guardian* prospered. It was able to stabilise its chaotic finances and construct a sound base of voluntary subscriptions. But just when it mattered politically, the paper took fright. From generally supporting the Labour Party under a Tory government, it turned on Corbyn and joined the right-wing media witch-hunt.

It deserted a lot more than just the Labour left. Over recent years The *Guardian* has been through a dramatic lurch to the centre. As it smugly celebrates its 200th anniversary, an alternative history appears, entitled *Capitalism's Conscience*, a collection of 15 essays by left-wing writers and academics, edited by Des Freedman, catalogues a series of reversals from the paper's strong historical legacies:

- After defiantly exposing the phone-hacking scandal in the face of the fury of the rest of the press, it snubbed the corrective regulatory process installed after the Leveson Inquiry.

- After courageously publishing in the Wikileaks documents exposing atrocities committed by the USA in Iraq (and those leaked by Edward Snowden three years later), the *Guardian* turned on Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, running a smear on his alleged



The *Guardian* promoted its achievements for the 200th anniversary

collaboration with Russian intelligence and downplaying his defence against extradition.

- After earning a shining reputation among feminists for its pioneering Women's Pages in the last century, the *Guardian* is now accused of buying into sex-based liberal feminism that enables transphobia and reinforces the attack on the Labour Party left, signified by the ugly term 'brocialism' that brands the Corbyn movement as essentially masculine – even though it was embraced enthusiastically by trans and cis-women alike.

- And after decades of radical reporting and commentary on the third world, with writers such as Victoria Brittain and Richard Gott, it opted in this century to back the Latin American clients of the USA

in turning back the 'pink tide' of Bolivarian nationalism.

There are more. This story of betrayal presents itself as polemical, but in truth it is not at all controversial, because the *Guardian* does not pretend to be socialist. Sometimes it says it is 'of the left' but its self-ID is liberal, big or small L, and since 2015 it has effectively been the mouthpiece of the New Labour right – notably in its promotion of the 'antisemitism' smear.

But its permanent alignment is centrist. It has a long lineage of columnists who wobble on the tightrope of the precise political centre. One day they write a bit lefty, tomorrow they lean to the right. Chief current exponents are Polly Toynbee and Jonathan Freedland.

Some enterprising leftwing academic might work up a theory using textual analysis of *Guardian* comment columns to pinpoint the dead centre of politics at any given time, and posit it as the furthest left opinion tolerated in mass media in liberal democracy.

While the left chides *The Guardian* for its political failures, it relies on its reporting. *The Guardian* publishes some marvellous stuff. But it's not left-wing. Got that? **CT**

Tim Gopsill, former editor of *The Journalist*, magazine of the journalists' union in Britain, reviewed this book for *MediaNorth* at www.medianorth.org.uk.

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INSIGHTS

CELINA DELLA CROCE

Congressman took on Venezuela blockade

On a cold winter day in February 2019, activists gathered in downtown Northampton, Massachusetts, to denounce the attempted US-backed coup in Venezuela. More than two years later, in the wake of ongoing rallies and discussions with Democratic Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, activists gained some ground as the congressman tweeted an open letter to President Joe Biden on June 14 in which he called on the president to end “all secondary and sectoral sanctions” against Venezuela.

The letter stated: “While US officials debate the sanctions policy in Washington, for people in Venezuela the ongoing crisis is a life-and-death matter. ... I have never believed that sanctions should be used to punish whole populations for the actions of their leaders or to bludgeon an adversary into submission ...”.

These sanctions killed more than 40,000 people from 2017 to 2018 alone, and put at least 300,000 others at risk of dying because they could not access essential medicines for over a year for treatable conditions such as diabetes, cancer, HIV, and kidney disease.

In 2018, the Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Federation reported 85 percent shortages of

medicine (compared to 55 percent in 2014). During the pandemic, the situation has only become more dire despite the country’s robust measures to break the chain of infection.

As activists pointed out in meetings and rallies at Rep. McGovern’s office, it is widely recognised that US sanctions are a violation of the standards of the Geneva Convention (1949) and a crime against humanity as defined by the United Nations International Law Commission (1947).

Rep. McGovern’s Twitter feed is already alive with debate over his letter, with people both thanking him for his bold stance and attacking him with a list of unfounded accusations, among them being out of touch with his constituents. But his stance on the sanctions came from his constituents and local activists, including Venezuelan American citizens.

On March 24, 2021, Rep. McGovern joined constituents at a rally outside his Northampton office organised by a coalition of local organisations to call for all sanctions to be lifted, among other demands.

In the words of Héctor Figarella, a local Venezuelan American activist, member of the Anti-

Imperialist Action Committee and Latin America Solidarity Coalition, and speaker at the rally: “Sanctions have become a new type of warfare: a very cruel, inhumane, and immoral kind of warfare that our government, the United States government, is currently engaging [in] across the globe. ... You no longer have to drop bombs to kill people; that’s no longer necessary. That’s what we call a hyb...”.

Figarella, who migrated to the United States in 1989, has felt the direct impact of the sanctions. He watched his family’s situation improve under former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s administration (1999-2013) and has watched them suffer under the weight of US sanctions, from President Barack Obama’s 2015 executive order to the even more severe sanctions policies imposed by the Trump administration, which have continued under the Biden administration.

“Sanctions imposed by the US government on Venezuela killed my father. Because he couldn’t find anticoagulants, he developed blood clots that led to his death”, he told the crowd, a story that he has repeated many times in meetings and rallies over the years.

“[That is] something you could easily walk up to a CVS and get right here. Sanctions killed my uncle because the medications that he needed to save his life could not be imported because of the killer sanctions. My family’s story is not unique. ... Every day, people die as a consequence of US-imposed sanctions”.

On June 21 – the same day that Figarella and other activists

INSIGHTS

met with Rep. McGovern's office to thank the congressman and discuss next steps to gain support for his June 14 letter, and exactly two weeks after Venezuela was blocked from purchasing Covid-19 vaccines as a result of the sanctions on June 7 – Figarella's aunt died from COVID-19 in Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela.

Rep. McGovern has a long history of standing on the side of human rights, from opposing the brutal state violence in El Salvador in the 1980s to fighting hunger in the United States to condemning the 2019 coup in Bolivia – also at the behest of his constituents – to, most recently, standing against the genocidal blanket sanctions in Venezuela.

Though activists in his district insist that all sanctions must be lifted, that US refiner Citgo Petroleum Corporation's assets must be returned to the Venezuelan state-owned oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela SA*, and that the US must cease recognition of so-called interim President Juan Guaidó, the congressman's call to lift the broad and most brutal sanctions is nonetheless a tremendous step forward for human rights.

"Venezuela has an oil- and import-dependent economy, and even targeted sanctions limit the government's ability to purchase necessary goods for the general population", organizers wrote in a letter to Rep. McGovern on March 19.

After hearing activists' stories, demands, and perspectives at the

March 24 rally, the congressman told the crowd: "The bottom line is I think we do agree that our policy toward Venezuela [is] one [that] has been harmful to the Venezuelan people; it has resulted in needless death; it has resulted in people not getting the medical supplies that quite frankly can keep them alive. ... We have an obligation to speak...".

As Rep. McGovern indicated, further action is unlikely to happen without public pressure. "I... want people to understand the value of activism", he said to the crowd. "I wouldn't be here today, I wouldn't be saying [I plan] to raise this with the Biden people tomorrow when I talk to them if you hadn't come here today."

On May 28, after two months of reaching out to Rep. McGovern via

phone and email, organisers once again rallied at the congressman's office asking him to come through on his word. On June 14, the congressman released the open letter to Biden (dated May 28). Now it is up to his colleagues and President Biden to follow suit, and up to the public to hold them to their word and to the values they preach. **CT**

Celina della Croce is a coordinator at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research as well as an organiser, activist, and advocate for social justice. Previously, she worked in the labour movement with the Service Employees International Union and the Fight for \$15, organising for economic, racial, and immigrant justice. This article was produced by Globetrotter.

T.J. THOMPSON

To fight poverty, cut Pentagon budget

I grew up on the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp in southern Virginia. We lived in a sewage-ravaged, bug-infested trailer park. I didn't realise we were poor at first – I thought that's just how things were.

But it was a difficult place to grow up, and as I got older, I wanted to escape. So I took what I thought was my only chance to get out of poverty – I joined the military.

Now I know why they say poverty is a "back door draft".

After deploying to the Persian Gulf in 2003 and experiencing unspeakable horrors, my military duty finally ended and I took the best job available to me – working in the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Virginia.

The work was hazardous. I spent hours each day climbing around in tanks and voids on submarines that had to be certified

INSIGHTS

safe to enter. There was always welding, grinding, sandblasting, and paint chipping going on. When I started coughing up black sludge, I knew I had to escape again.

Poverty, I learned, is one long escape attempt after another.

By then I was married with children. I got myself into culinary school on the path to a better life. Then the Great Recession hit. As the economy collapsed around us, we often had to choose between paying bills and buying groceries.

These years of trauma wreaked havoc on my mental health. I got some cookie-cutter, drug-based mental health treatment from the Veterans Administration, but that made things worse. At times the VA treatment had me in lockdown 24/7. I was treated as a number, not as an individual.

I'm sharing this because stories like mine are all too common, but we don't hear them very often – especially around holidays like the Fourth of July.

More than 30,000 veterans have taken their own lives since 9/11, and over 8-million Americans fell into poverty last year. Yet our country continues to spend hundreds of billions of dollars each year on wars and the Pentagon, instead of building real paths out of poverty for people who grew up like I did.

Corporations and the military-industrial complex profit from our poverty. They get cheap labour and fatter profit margins. The rest of us deal with the interlocking effects of poverty – like poor health, trauma, poisonous living conditions, and all kinds of structural barriers to opportunities.

This is a political choice. And we

can choose differently.

For me, things turned a corner when I found Veterans for Peace, a non-profit organisation of veterans like me who understand that prioritising federal spending on war and weapons over social programs keeps people down.

Veterans for Peace helped connect me to holistic treatment and support that heals rather than harms. It also connected me to the bigger movement against poverty – like the Fight for \$15, in which low-wage workers fight for our own economic empowerment by demanding a fair wage.

Finally, I found the Poor People's Campaign, which follows in the steps of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s efforts to end poverty in this country. Veterans for Peace became a sponsoring member of The Poor People's campaign,

making the connections between militarism and poverty.

We believe that to truly fight poverty, we must slash the Pentagon budget. We can cut our annual military spending by at least \$350-billion and still keep ourselves safe while building a more equitable society.

For me, the military wasn't a way out of poverty. Instead, militarism is why so many of us are poor in the first place. But if more low-wage workers, veterans, and others work together, we can make the investments we need to choose human decency over war, trauma, and poverty. **CT**

J. Thompson is a post-9/11 veteran of the US Navy from Virginia and a member of Veterans For Peace and the Poor People's Campaign. This op-ed was distributed by www.OtherWords.org.

NEEL BHATT

Why do we hate sound of our own voice?

As a surgeon who specialises in treating patients with voice problems, I routinely record my patients speaking. For me, these recordings are incredibly valuable. They allow me to track slight changes in their voices from visit to visit, and it helps confirm whether surgery or voice therapy led to improvements.

Yet I'm surprised by how dif-

ficult these sessions can be for my patients. Many become visibly uncomfortable upon hearing their voice played back to them.

"Do I really sound like that?" they wonder, wincing.

(Yes, you do.)

Some become so unsettled they refuse outright to listen to the recording – much less go over the subtle changes I want to highlight.

INSIGHTS

The discomfort we have over hearing our voices in audio recordings is probably due to a mix of physiology and psychology.

For one, the sound from an audio recording is transmitted differently to your brain than the sound generated when you speak.

When listening to a recording of your voice, the sound travels through the air and into your ears – what’s referred to as “air conduction”. The sound energy vibrates the ear drum and small ear bones. These bones then transmit the sound vibrations to the cochlea, which stimulates nerve axons that send the auditory signal to the brain.

However, when you speak, the sound from your voice reaches the inner ear in a different way. While some of the sound is transmitted through air conduction, much of the sound is internally conducted directly through your skull bones. When you hear your own voice when you speak, it’s due to a blend of both external and internal conduction, and internal bone conduction appears to boost the lower frequencies.

For this reason, people generally perceive their voice as deeper and richer when they speak. The recorded voice, in comparison, can sound thinner and higher pitched, which many find cringeworthy.

There’s a second reason hearing a recording of your voice can be so disconcerting. It really is a new voice – one that exposes a difference between your self-perception and reality. Because your voice is unique and an important component of self-identity, this mismatch

can be jarring. Suddenly you realise other people have been hearing something else all along.

Even though we may actually sound more like our recorded voice to others, I think the reason so many of us squirm upon hearing it is not that the recorded voice is necessarily worse than our perceived voice. Instead, we’re simply more used to hearing ourselves sound a certain way.

A study published in 2005 had patients with voice problems rate their own voices when presented with recordings of them. They also had clinicians rate the voices. The

researchers found that patients, across the board, tended to more negatively rate the quality of their recorded voice compared with the objective assessments of clinicians.

So if the voice in your head castigates the voice coming out of a recording device, it’s probably your inner critic overreacting – and you’re judging yourself a bit too harshly. **CT**

Neel Bhatt is Assistant Professor of Otolaryngology, UW Medicine, University of Washington. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

TREVOR GRUNDY

Keep right on 'til the end of the Rhodes

Parents with loads of money and political commentators with lots of opinions don’t normally concern themselves with what’s going on at two of the world’s best-known universities, Oxford and Cambridge. Normally, they confine their interest in who wins the annual boat race on the River Thames.

Not any longer.

In not-so-merry England, honeycombed as it is with social, economic, political and climate problems, whether a statue of the Victorian entrepreneur Cecil John Rhodes should stand or not stand outside Oriel College at Oxford University is occupying the best minds of the day.

The Rhodes statue row has been going on for several years. The campaign over whether it should be removed or made to face the wall like a naughty child in a school-room, has been led by young Africans, many of them recipients of scholarships organised at the start of the last century by the person they most love to hate.

Oriel is where Rhodes spent time, paying for his fees with uncut diamonds dug out of the ground in 19th-century South Africa, the country which he helped open up, develop – and exploit.

After lots of thought and adding up (no statue/no more Rhodes Scholarships) Oriel College decided

INSIGHTS

to keep the statue standing and facing some of the world's best off and most privileged young people in the world.

And because of that, 150 Oxford University academics are now boycotting Oriel College. In this unprecedented move, dons are refusing to give tutorials to undergraduates from Oriel or attend talks there.

They explained, "Faced with Oriel's stubborn attachment to a statue that glorifies colonialism and the wealth it produced for the college, we feel we have no choice but to withdrawn all discretionary work and goodwill collaborations".

Then, in a further blow which Oscar Wilde would have said was hitting below the intellect, students at Magdalen College (founded in 1485) voted to remove a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II from their common room because to some she represents the face of modern colonialism.

First Rhodes. Now the Queen. Where is all this taking us, ask conservative commentators?

"Oxford shudders at small revolution", screamed a headline in the *Times* (June 19, 2021). It described one of the *Brideshead Revisited* lookalike colleges supporting the Oriel boycott as "the People's Republic of Worcester".

America's former communist sympathiser and now arch-conservative Janet Daley said in the *Daily Telegraph* (June 19, 2021) that Britain's new Far-Left wants to extinguish free expression itself. She wrote, "The West now seems prepared to give up on what is probably its greatest gift to the



SHOULD HE STAY OR SHOULD HE GO? The Cecil Rhodes statue at Oriel College, Oxford University.

world: reasoned disagreement. The idea that some views are too 'toxic' to be heard, let alone rebutted, is to extinguish the very thing that has made it possible for even people who don't know what they're talking about to have a voice".

And the Eton College and Cambridge University educated biographer of Margaret Thatcher, Lord (Charles) Moore wonders if his old university is being fast turned into the People's Republic of China after reports that a group calling itself Culture Shift is selling a software package to universities that allows the anonymous monitoring of politically incorrect remarks by students or tutors.

A report in the *Times* (June 5, 2021) said that leading universities have been accused of stifling free speech by selling software called the Report-Support Tool that allows students to report

anonymously micro-aggressions [defined as a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group such as a racial or ethnic minority].

One example of a micro-aggression is telling someone to "cheer up and not look so depressed". Another is asking a person of mixed-race where they come from.

The organisation selling this software was founded in 2018 by Gemma McCall, Stuart Bradley and Carl Sadd. They signed a partnership with Universities UK and secured a £1.35-million in venture capital funding last year.

Helen Pluckrose, founder of an advice group called Counterweight, said, "We're seeing a huge rise in Woke capitalism. The people who run these services are normally white middle-class people who are earning thousands of pounds telling other white people that they are racist and need them to advise them how to think and behave".

Charles Moore said students are able to report anonymously, or report with contacts. "If you do the former, you can give the name of the person you are accusing: but neither that person nor the authorities will ever know your name or be able to check the truth of your claim". He added, "It is impossible not to laugh but one should not doubt the seriousness of the operation". **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist who lived and worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996. His website is www.trevorgrundy.news.

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