

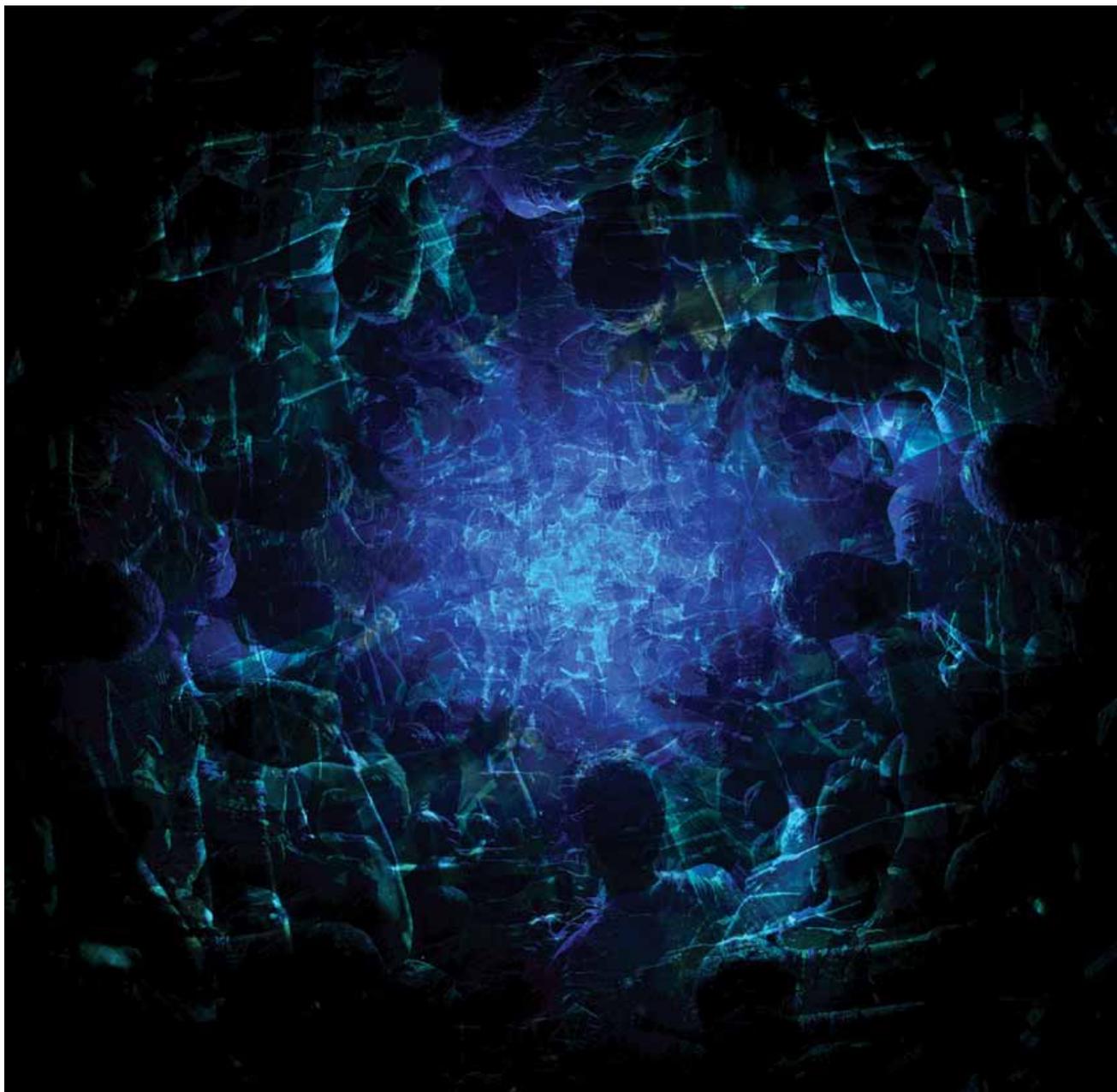
CounterPunch

WAR CRIMES AS POLICY BY NICHOLAS JS DAVIES AND DOUG VALENTINE

THE AFGHANISTAN WAR COMES HOME TO PHILADELPHIA BY DAVID LINDORFF

CALIFORNIA'S FRACKING FRENZY BY JOSHUA FRANK

RAVE ON BY LEE BALLINGER



CounterPunch

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P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jeffrey St. Clair

MANAGING EDITOR
Joshua Frank

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lee Ballinger, Melissa Beattie, Darwin Bond-Graham, Chloe Cockburn, Windy Cooler, Chris Floyd, Kevin Alexander Gray, Steve Horn, Lee Hall, Conn Hallinan, Barbara Rose Johnson, Binoy Kampmark, Christopher Ketcham, David Macaray, Chase Madar, Kim Nicolini, Brenda Norrell, Vijay Prashad, Louis Proyect, Martha Rosenberg, Christine Sheeler, Jan Tucker, Mike Whitney

POETRY EDITOR
Marc Beaudin

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Nathaniel St. Clair

BUSINESS MANAGER & DESIGN PRODUCTION
Becky Grant

SUBSCRIPTIONS & ORDER FULFILLMENT
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN CONSULTATION
Tiffany Wardle

COVER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
Nick Roney

IN MEMORY OF
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Contact Information

CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558
Toll Free 1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

EDITORIAL:
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
BUSINESS: becky@counterpunch.org
SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANDISE:
counterpunch@frontiernet.net

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cover Shock

Your Blind Faith cover was probably the single most ingenious visual satire in the history of American politics. And it's going to take me years to undo the trauma of having seen it.

Marshall Patrick Garvey

Hopelessly Devoted

As devoted as I've been to CounterPunch the Website all these years, I was unprepared for the power and daring of CounterPunch the Mag. The cover is freakin' amazin—and on multiple levels. It takes an image that was shocking at the time, and makes it even more shocking in 2013 (which is the year I believe we're currently in.) Really, it is a stroke of visual genius, and whoever dreamed it up & executed it should be showered with rose-petals. (PS I now see you did credit him--Nick Roney--sir, big props to you.)

John Eskow

Los Angeles, California

And the Winner Is..

Although CP had a tough time in the Hollywood donations dept. due to your stance on the Current Occupant, we both know you did the right thing. And now you're stuck with low-income zhlubbs like me in the cheering section. Oh well. But Ye Gods, the Blind Faith photo parody is my pick for political cover of the

year... and it speaks on so many levels! And let me be perhaps the first pre-order of the CounterPunch Blind Faith t-shirt. Of course, wearing such a shirt might invite all kinds of abuse, but what's life without a few offensive t-shirts? Best,

Ray Hopper

Gainesville, FL

Not Gone, Not Forgotten

Thanks goodness Henry Kissinger has not been forgotten! Christopher Dietrich's superb article should trigger an investigation and recovery of all documents Mr. Kissinger stole—yes, stole—before he left office.

Just as there is no statute of limitations on recovering money from a thief finally captured after years of pursuit, so should Mr. Kissinger be required to turn over all papers generated during his years of government service, tricky-Dick escape clauses notwithstanding. If punitive measures are found to be in order, Mr. Kissinger should face them. He is no more above the law than the American people he deceived.

Willard B. Shapira

Roseville, MN

Propaganda Patrol

Kudos for Stauber's article (The Progressive Movement is a PR Front for Rich Democrats) which deals with a subject that needs much deeper analysis.

Please, much more on this subject.

The cooptation of progressive organizations is nowhere better visible than in the actual lack of reporting on the continuing fallout striking the US from the Fukushima disaster. Knowing that there would be fallout and propaganda, I bought a Geiger counter, and have measured contamination in rain, in imported Japanese foodstuffs such as nori and sushi rice (origins now removed from labeling) and, of course, salmon, halibut and tuna. Yet, reporting has almost exclusively focused on Japan, and the details of what's hitting us here are scant, but more commonly missing entirely.

As a Counterpunch supporter, I've greatly appreciated the uncompromising, hard-hitting analyses and discussion being published. My perception is that it is even better since Cockburn unfortunately left us.

Jim Cronin

Nahcotta, Long Beach

Peninsula, Washington

Proactive Agents

Dear Friends,

I see you have agreed to subsidize my reading for another year. I cannot overstate my gratitude to you; there's literally nothing to do in this solitary cell but read and sleep, and a person can only sleep so long without heavy-duty psych meds. I want to compliment

Jeffrey St. Clar (an apt name!): his prose flows like a John le Carré spy novel in his piece concerning agents provocateur, and I found the entry an exceptional pleasure to read. One is tempted to blame bureaucracies, or in the extreme, all government, for agents entrapping innocent persons to justify their raison d'être, but truly so long as officials deem it expedient to sacrifice others for "the great good"—whether that official is capitalist, socialist or fascist—these incidents will never completely end. This is one hell of a world we live in, isn't it?

Thank You Again,

Richard Ostrander

Estelle Texas Prison Unit

Huntsville, TX

We Will Survive

Dear CounterPunch People, I have been a subscriber since your beginning, or nearly so. When Alex passed I wondered if CounterPunch could survive but no I see I needn't have worried! Thank you so much for your work.

Love and Solidarity,

Robert Palmer

Santa Fe, New Mexico

p.s. Great cover art! Blind Faith indeed!

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PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA
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ROAMING CHARGES

Game of Drones

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

At last we know. The mysterious legal authority for Barack Obama's killer drone program flows from another administration with an elastic interpretation of executive power: that of Richard Nixon.

In a chilling 16-page dossier known simply as the White Paper, one of Obama's statutory brains at the Justice Department cites the 1969 secret bombing of Cambodia as a legal rationale justifying drone strikes, deep inside nations, against which the United States is not officially at war.

This startling disclosure is drafted in the antiseptic prose of an insurance adjuster announcing the denial of a claim based on a pre-existing condition. Yet, the bombing of Cambodia (aka Operation Menu), which involved more than 3,000 air strikes, was almost universally acknowledged as a war crime. Now the Obama administration has officially enshrined that atrocity as precedent for its own killing rampages.

Since Obama's election, the CIA has overseen nearly 320 drone strikes in Pakistan alone, killing more than 3,000 people, as many as 900 of them civilians. Among the dead are at least 176 children. Assassination was never this easy, never so risk-free.

George W. Bush was mocked by liberals for calling himself the Decider. Bush deployed this pathetic bit of oil slang to defend himself against accusations that Cheney and his coterie of Neo-Cons were calling the shots in the Iraq war. But was Bush's posturing any more absurd than the image of Obama piously consulting the homilies of Aquinas, as he personally checks off the names on his drone kill list and watches streaming videos of the writhing bodies shredded by Hellfire missiles?

Bush's murderous psyche at least pre-

sented itself for analysis and explication. Perhaps W's blood lust stemmed from a Freudian fixation on Saddam's pathetic attempt to off his father in Kuwait City. Perhaps it was warped by spasms of subconscious guilt over allowing 9/11 to occur on his watch. What, however, is the driving force behind Obama's savagery? Unlike Bush, who tended to show revealing glimpses of emotional strain, Obama operates with the icy rectitude of a political sociopath. In Obama's game of drones, the atrocities in the name of empire seem consciously geared to some deep political algorithm of power and death.

The Left remains largely insensate to the moral and constitutional transgressions being committed by their champion, leaving only the faintly ludicrous figure of Rand Paul to offer official approbations against these malignant operations. For his troubles, Paul's admirable filibuster against the nomination of John Brennan, master of the drones, to head the CIA is ridiculed as an exercise in paranoia by the likes of Frank Rich and Lawrence O'Donnell.

The professional Left, from the progressive caucus to the robotic minions of Moveon.org, lodge no objections and launch no protests over the administration's acts of sanctimonious violence against the empire's enemies. Worse, they behave like political eunuchs, offering groveling tributes and degrading supplications to their Master, even as Obama defiles their ideological aspirations. The president has offered us a master class in political mesmerism, transforming the anti-war Left into supine functionaries of the imperial management team.

The cyber-Left is kept rigidly in line by the architects of liberal opinion. From David Corn to Rachel Maddow,

the progressive press acts in sinister harmony with the administration's neo-liberal agenda. They seduously ignore Obama's constitutional depredations, and instead devote acres of airspace to the faux clashes over sequestration and gay marriage.

Night after night, we are presented with sideshows, what Hitchcock called the McGuffin in his films, the dramatic diversions designed to distract the audience's attention from the real game being played. Meanwhile, the liberal commentariat is balefully complacent to the rapacity of Obama's remote-control death squadrons, even in the face of somber evidence regarding the drone program's criminal nature. Raid after raid, kill after kill, ruin after ruin, they remain silent. But their silence only serves to emphasize their complicity, their consciousness of guilt. Their fingers too are stained by distant blood.

Even Nixon, the ultimate enforcer, was rocked by insubordinates defecting from his regime, aides and staffers who reached their limit and resigned in disgust. One of them was Roger Morris. Morris, an occasional contributor to CounterPunch, served on the National Security Council during LBJ's administration and continued after Nixon's election under Henry Kissinger. But Morris reached his limit in the spring of 1970, resigning over the covert bombing of Cambodia. How times have changed.

Where are similar figures of conscience in the Obama White House, or even the Democratic Party? Where are the leaks and resignations? Perhaps this is the ultimate object lesson on display in the ongoing persecution of Bradley Manning. Internal dissent, regardless of its legal and moral standing, shall not be tolerated. Indeed, it will be considered sedition and will be smothered by the supreme sanction of the government.

Acts that were once considered outrages against conscience are now routine. Welcome to the age of Murder. gov. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Bernanke's Subprime Bonanza

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Why are auto sales soaring when real wages are falling, unemployment is stuck at 7.9 percent, 48 million people are on food stamps, and middle class families have seen their net worth slashed by 40 percent in the last 6 years?

Answer: QE

Fed chairman Ben Bernanke's bond-buying program has flooded the financial system with liquidity, pushing yields on corporate bonds and US Treasuries to record lows. This has forced investors to sniff out higher returns in more obscure parts of the market, like bonds backed by subprime auto loans. These pools of securities provide financing for borrowers with less-than-stellar credit.

As these bonds have become more popular with yield-seeking investors, lending standards have eased and subprime auto ABS (asset-backed securities) have taken on bubble-like characteristics similar to subprime mortgages prior to the Great Crash of '08.

For now, things are still looking pretty rosy. Loans to subprime borrowers are up 18 percent over the last year, while pools of securities made up of these loans surged to \$18.5 billion in 2012, an improvement of nearly 50 percent. Sales of subprime auto bonds now exceed their peak in 2007. (Another reason to be wary.)

Keep in mind, that subprime auto loans often carry interest rates that are above 20 percent. The high rates are supposed to compensate for the risk of lending to borrowers with poor credit, but, of course, that's just public relations gibberish.

The real reason banks and finance companies keep rates high is to maximize profits off vulnerable working people who are not protected under

current regulations. It's just another example of price gouging by an industry that is famous for taking advantage of its customers.

Still, auto sales have been brisk and are expected to top 15.3 million this year. The stats are impressive until one drills into the data and notices that subprime borrowers are taking a bigger and bigger share of the market (43% of all car loans), that lending standards are easing across-the-board, and new car loans are being stretched beyond 5 years to reduce payments and attract more low income buyers.

In other words, the uptick in car sales is almost entirely attributable to the same type of seductive no-down, E-Z-Pay financing rigmarole that drew millions of credulous borrowers into the subprime mortgage deathtrap.

This isn't about organic demand for new or used vehicles. It's a marketing strategy to put unsophisticated borrowers into straitjacket-loans that will force them to curtail their spending on other essentials.

For example, borrowers with an average credit score of 556 can expect to pay an average rate of 21.4 percent a year. At the same time, investors in subprime auto securities will net somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 percent on their investment.

It's worth noting, that most subprime customers end up borrowing more than the total value of the vehicle in a typical transaction.

In 2012, the average loan-to-value on new cars was 109.55% while the average used car loan-to-value ratio rose to 126.62%.

This is a sign that borrowers are so overextended that they don't even have the wherewithal for additional licensing and registration fees.

How can they possibly be expected to make these payments on time when they're so cash-strapped that they agree to pay a hefty 21% on a loan that is 26% higher than the sticker price?

That's madness. Even so, there's a good chance that the loans from these maxed-out customers will be lumped together with other subprimes, stamped as Triple A by one of the ratings agencies, and sold to a hedge fund, pension fund, or another institutional investor at a slightly higher yield than US Treasuries.

It is only a matter of time before a large percentage of these distressed borrowers default on their loans precipitating another repo-market meltdown.

And it all gets back to central bank policy: the zero rates, the easy money, and the liquidity spigot that's always set on "Open".

While unemployment is still sky-high and GDP is barely tipping 2 percent; stock prices have more than doubled, corporate bond yields are at historic lows, margin debt is back to its pre-crisis highs, and corporations are buying back their own shares hand-over-fist, certain that the "Bernanke Put" will shield them from any unexpected correction.

The Fed's monetary heroin has sparked a gold rush in risk assets, high-yield junk and subprime garbage.

Bernanke has revved up the corporate profit engines and fueled a bonanza in structured debt instruments and derivatives.

Subprime is back and the euphoria on Wall Street is palpable.

How long will it last this time? **CP**



DESERT POST

Monopoly Rules!

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

“Whoever monopolizes is a sinner,” said the Prophet Mohammed. Proverbs 11:26 curses those who hoard grain to get monopoly prices. The *Lex Julia de Annona* of Rome protected the grain supply from monopoly control, and under Diocletian the violation of anti-monopoly laws meant the death penalty for offenders. *Monopolium est injustum et rei publicae injuriosum* went the counsel of the medieval Scholastic doctors, who condemned monopoly profits as *turpe lucrum*, ill-gotten gains offensive to the public good and to God and punishable by eternal damnation. Accordingly, laws across Europe brought the political economy in synch with God’s anti-monopolism. By 1283 Wenceslaus II of Bohemia had outlawed monopoly combinations of ore traders. Medieval towns ensured open markets for peasants to freely trade goods under the moral directive of “just price.” In France, the Parlement of Paris under Louis XII—and again under Francis I, Charles IX, and Henry III—fought to censure guild cartels for raising their service fees at the expense of *la chose publique*.

It was in Elizabethan England, however, that monopolistic practice was first firmly sanctioned by government, through the “industrial monopoly license” system that would become the subject of a defining battle for open markets in English common law. By 1571, “letters of patent”—the antecedents of patent law throughout the Anglo-American world—were being issued for monopolies on the most lucrative industries, the beneficiaries those few “large business men” favored by royal decree who happened also to have the money to bribe the crown

for the privilege. There were letters of patent for soap, saltpeter, salmon-fishing, dredging machines, the production of seed oil, vinegar, wool, and starch, the “dyeing and dressing cloth after the manner of Flanders,” the manufacture of musical and mathematical instruments, beaver hats, and royal playing cards. Monopolists were denounced as “bloodsuckers” and “monsters,” and monopolies were compared to “the frogs of Egypt.” “We have scarcely a room free of them,” complained Sir John Colepepper before Parliament in 1640. “They sip in our cup; they dip in our dish; they sit by our fire.” The English “capitalist financier of large industrial monopolies,” wrote economist Hermann Levy in his history of the period, “[had] made himself unequivocally a dictator of national industry,” operating “without regard for the thousands he injured,” his ascendancy “artificially stimulated by privilege” and helped along by “courtiers” and “the arbitrary evasion of the law by the Crown.”

This form of economic dictatorship sound familiar? Today the global political economy, with the US in the lead, has sunk into an era of unprecedented monopoly control. Single dominant firms, or cartels of those firms, now control the production of—to take just a few examples—Vitamin C, flu vaccine, piston rings, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, semiconductors, home appliances, industrial chemicals, the glass for liquid crystal displays, electronic drivers and motors for computers, basketball shoes, cowboy boots, bottles and bottle caps, and champagne.

We find the monopolists controlling the grain supply, the meat supply, the distribution of groceries and basic household goods; control-

ling fossil fuels through the cooperation of ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, ConocoPhillips, BP and Royal Dutch Shell, which together look very much like a recombinant Standard Oil; dominating defense, telecommunications, banking, tobacco, airlines; even dominating our daily searches on the Web, in the form of the Google portal.

We find the monopolists concentrating 70 percent of all cardboard production under the aegis of a single Portuguese firm; almost 100 percent of US beer production in the hands of two foreign-owned companies; as much as 50 percent of US retail markets in the hands of WalMart; as much as 95 percent of the world’s computers on a single operating platform under the dominion of Microsoft.

So much for “free market” ideology.

In Elizabethan England, Lord Edward Coke, the attorney general and the grandfather of anti-monopolists, fought hard against the monopoly plague, and he ultimately failed. “A man’s trade is accounted his life,” Coke wrote in 1603, “because it maintaineth his life; and therefore the Monopolist that taketh a man’s trade, taketh away his life.” This was against “the very common law,” the Magna Carta, which provided “for any man to use any trade thereby to maintain himself and his family”—the Magna Carta implying that political liberty could not omit economic liberty.

The American war of independence was a revolt, in part, against monopoly corporate power—the colonists wanted open markets free of privilege—so much so that Thomas Jefferson, schooled in Coke’s writings, sought in the Bill of Rights to include alongside freedom of religion and the press the “freedom of commerce against monopolies.” The anti-monopoly amendment would be among the “fettters against doing evil which no honest government should decline” and serve directly as the “guarantee to every one of a free exercise of his industry.”

Of course, no such amendment was included in the Bill of Rights. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Modern Politics Made Simple

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Modern politics can be hard to fathom, a bizarre mix of mind-bending complexities and bone-stupid banalities coming at us in a howling sandstorm of chaotic noise. How to sift the relentless, contradictory arcana of current events and make sense of it all? I find that a simple phrase helps thread the labyrinth—four little words that capture the grand, overarching political philosophy of the age: Fuck Off And Die.

This is the lodestar guiding leaders of every political stripe across the breadth of Western Civilization. If you want to make your way through their billows of bullshit, hold fast to this phrase. It's what they're really saying to you.

Of course, elite attitudes toward the lower orders have never been exactly tender; but in times past, a rather large number of sufficiently quiescent peasants and proles were required to create the wealth for plutocratic plundering and maintain the machinery of power and privilege.

Thus some attention had to be paid to the rabble's basic needs. But now the means of production (to borrow a phrase) are largely mechanized and digitized; you don't need many warm bodies—and certainly not skilled or experienced or well-paid ones—to keep the money rolling in. And perhaps more importantly, the means of *control*—the technologies of violence and surveillance—are now vastly more powerful and pervasive and efficient than ever.

To put it plainly, the elites don't need us anymore—or not *many* of us, anyway. And thanks to runaway population growth—and the greasy mobility of global capital—those few of us they *do* still need to keep the machinery going can be easily replaced, at

any moment, by some other desperate chump trying to avoid destitution.

So there is no longer any reason for elites to concern themselves with the wearisome creatures out there beyond the mansion gates and penthouse glass.

No need to worry about workers' rights: if they get out of line, sack them, or even better, send the whole operation overseas, where sweatshop fodder is thick on the ground and comes dirt cheap.

No need to worry about communities, the personal, social, economic and physical structures that gave a richer embodiment to ordinary life: just strip them, gut them and leave them to die—and when the rot gets bad enough, as in Detroit, send in an unelected “manager” to pick the carcass clean.

And no need to worry about mass uprisings of the dispossessed, debt-ridden, insecure, angry, overwhelmed, isolated, media-dazed rabble. With hyper-militarized police forces, cameras on every corner, spies and provocateurs infesting every possible base of dissent, and gargantuan data-harvesters mining every public move and private click of the populace, repression is a piece of cake.

The Great Crash of '08 gave them the excuse to rip off the mask at last. For five years now, the iron hand of “austerity” has been pressed down hard upon ordinary people.

We had no part in the criminal folly that caused the disaster—yet we are the ones left paying for it, in lost jobs, lost homes, lost services, lost freedoms, lost opportunities, and cramped, crippled, diminished lives.

The infliction of pain on ordinary people is the only game in town. ‘O my gosh,’ our leaders cry, throwing up their soft, unblemished hands, ‘there's just no

more money left, no money for your schools, your roads, your jobs, your pensions, your rights, your benefits, your elderly, your sick, your poor, your vulnerable. The money's all gone, what can we do?’

But of course the money is *not* gone, not at all. A new study—by an inside man, James Henry, former chief economist at McKinsey—shows that up to \$32 trillion has been stashed away by the world's elites in offshore accounts and other hidey-holes.

Even a modest portion of this mountain of swag would completely alleviate the draconian “budget crises” and ludicrous “sequesters” that have been artificially imposed on nation after nation.

All of the suffering, chaos, ruin and degradation being caused by these policies—all the “skin in the game” that's being flayed from the backs of ordinary people—all of it is unnecessary. The money is there to solve these problems—if our leaders *wanted* to solve them.

But they don't. For “austerity” isn't designed to fix our problems; it is instead meant to be a permanent condition, a new normal, the endless, changeless natural order.

It's all out in the open. Obama is eagerly offering to slash the social compact to ribbons. Cameron is driving the poor and sick to their knees. The IMF is breeding Nazis in Greece.

They're not even pretending to care about anyone outside the golden circle anymore.

Fuck off and die: that's it, that's all they've got to say. The rest is show-biz—strip-tease and shell games—to fleece us of our last few coins as they shove us out the exit. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

We Don't Need No Public Education

BY KRISTIN KOLB

A few weeks ago, I sat at the computer grumbling about the gay marriage frenzy—the hot topic that seemed to involve some sort of mass solidarity by sticking red Band-Aid-looking equal signs on one's Facebook page. Here was a true civil rights demonstration—red Band-Aids everywhere. How boring.

As I walked down the block to meet my daughter's school bus, muttering to myself about Emma Goldman's "Marriage and Love," a *Washington Post* headline popped up on my phone, "Barricades Erected Before Mass Protest Against Chicago School Closings."

Barricades? Protest? I thought all we need are Rothko-esque swatches to speak in unison.

In Chicago, thousands of teachers, janitors, lunch ladies, parents, and students were amassing in Daley Plaza to disrupt rush-hour traffic. The city plans to shutter 54 schools, affecting 30,000 students.

Nearly all are elementary schools. And all of them serve students living in the poorest neighborhoods of a city infamous for a horror show of prison-like housing projects. Many of the 30,000, I expect, are the children of the children who grew up in the destitution of Cabrini-Green, the Robert Taylor Homes, the Ida B. Wells Homes, etc.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel—the Sarah Lawrence College ballerina and Obama hack—ordered the barriers to protect the Chicago Board of Education from the lawless parents. (Chicago Public Schools also circulated a memo to principals, ordering them to spy: "Observe and report all information regarding possible protestors, locations, dates and times.")

The Chicago plan is the largest to hit the nation. However, other cities have done the same: Kansas City, Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Baltimore, New York, Los Angeles. What emerges from the ashes of your neighborhood school? Privately owned charter schools funded by taxpayers' dollars. Charter schools typically hire newbie teachers, who are nonunion labor, and receive even more pitiful salaries than unionized public school employees.

The Chicago scheme reminds me of my town, Seattle, where the stench of big money is strong. Last fall, voters approved an initiative to siphon \$100 million a year from public education to fund 40 new charter schools. The charter school bid had been on the ballot for years. But this time, it was truly a battle of the 99 percent versus the 1 percent—or, more accurately, the 99.999999 percent versus the .000001 percent. And guess who won.

Turns out, the Washington initiative was funded almost entirely by five billionaires: Bill Gates and Paul Allen, cofounders of Microsoft, the parents of Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, and Alice Walton, heiress of the Wal-Mart empire. Of the \$11 million spent, 91 percent of funds came from these five people.

The Occupy movement couldn't find a better real-world model of inequality and gross greed. (A similar measure passed in Georgia—partly funded by Walton, among other billionaires.)

Back east in Chicago, is it a surprise that a couple of these same billionaires emerge?

Hello again, Ms. Walton! She threw a half a million dollars at ads and robo calls to "educate" parents.

Meanwhile, the Gates Foundation

delayed granting \$24.5 million to Chicago Public Schools. Andrew Broy, president of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, told the *Chicago Tribune*, "Given what's going on with school (protest) actions in Chicago, the timing makes a lot of sense."

A sleeper article in *The New York Times* dug into much of this back in 2011. Gates' fingerprints are almost universal. He has bankrolled AstroTurf "grassroots" organizations to tout charter schools, not to mention throwing waves of cash at think tanks to comb through research to promote the same. Gates also tossed a few million at the teachers unions to placate them. Brilliant.

What do these billionaires really have in common? A sour distaste for unions. Walton—well, that's a no brainer. The Bezos folks: Amazon has crushed organizing campaigns over and over. Such is the case at Microsoft. Allen, who owns the Portland Trailblazers, smashed the 2006 National Basketball Association labor talks. "Here comes the Grim Reaper," one union negotiator told Yahoo! Sports.

In 2010, Gates spent \$2 million cheerleading the film, "Waiting for Superman," touching propaganda for charter-schools, and smearing Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers.

What altruism. The charity of billionaires is a conduit for union-busting some of the most hard-working, inspirational members of our communities—teachers.

All this reminds me of Paulo Freire's critique of education. He called it the "banking system." The student is an empty account, and the teacher fills it with information. "It transforms students into receiving objects," Freire said. "It attempts to control thinking and action."

Now our nation's schools are becoming bank accounts filled by the coffers of the most rich and powerful. **CP**

War Crimes as Policy

BY NICOLAS JS DAVIES AND DOUGLAS VALENTINE

Last month the *Guardian* and *BBC Arabic* unveiled a documentary exploring the role of retired Colonel James Steele in the recruitment, training and initial deployments of the CIA advised and funded Special Police Commandos in Iraq.

The documentary tells how the Commandos tortured and murdered tens of thousands of Iraqi men and boys. But the Commandos were only one of America's many weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Along with US military forces—which murdered indiscriminately—and various CIA funded death squads—which murdered selectively—and the CIA's rampaging palace guard—and the 5,000 man strong Iraq Special Operations Forces—the Commandos were part of a genocidal campaign that killed about 10% of the Sunni Arabs of Iraq by 2008, and drove about half of all Sunnis from their homes.

Including economic sanctions, and a 50-year history of sabotage and subversion, America and its Iraqi collaborators visited far more death and destruction on Iraq than Saddam Hussein and his regime.

For weeks, American commentators have been cataloguing the horrors. The more honest ones tell how America's hostile military occupation, through an unstated policy of systematic war crimes, probably murdered more than a million Iraqis, displaced around five million, and imprisoned and tortured hundreds of thousands without trial. A few have further explained that the dictatorial administrative detention laws, torture, and executions that characterize the occupation are still in place under Prime Minister Maliki. The prime minister's office, notably, is where the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Bureau is currently ensconced.

All of this meets the definition of genocide in the Genocide Convention, and violates multiple articles of the Geneva Conventions, which guarantee protection to civilians in time of war. But the responsible Americans have gone unpunished for their war crimes, not least of which was falsifying intelligence about Iraq's non-existent weapon of mass destruction as a pretext for the invasion. British legal advisors repeatedly warned their government that invading Iraq would be a crime of aggression, which they called "one of the most serious offenses under international law."

For anyone familiar with the CIA, this was predictable. But the US Government, through secrecy and censorship, destroyed much of the hard evidence of its war crimes, making it harder to prove. And the media is content to revise history and focus public attention on front men like Steele, rather than the institutions—in particular the CIA—for whom they work.

History, however, provides contextual evidence that what happened in Iraq amounts to a policy of carefully planned war crimes. Indeed, the CIA modeled the Iraqi Special Police

Commandos on the Special Police forces it organized and funded in Vietnam. In November 2000, *CounterPunch* published an article describing how Congressman Rob Simmons, while serving as a CIA officer in Vietnam, created the Special Intelligence Force Unit (SIFU) on which the Iraqi Special Police Commandos are very likely modeled. This is only one of many historical examples of the CIA's modus operandi.

There are other examples. As we were reminded by the *Guardian*, Steele headed the US Military Advisor Group in El Salvador (1984-1986), where US advised units were responsible for thousands of cases of torture and extra-judicial killing. They operated in rural and urban areas, but wherever they operated, they were directed against anyone opposing US policy—usually leftists.

The CIA's death squads in El Salvador were periodically moved from one administrative cover to another to confuse investigators. The CIA played this shell game with its Special Police Commandos in Iraq as well, rebranding them as the "National Police" following the exposure of one of their torture centers in November 2005. In its finest Madison Avenue marketing traditions, the CIA renamed the Commandos' predatory Wolf Brigade as the "Freedom Brigade".

In Vietnam, the CIA built an archipelago of secret torture centers to process the hundreds of thousands of detainees kidnapped by its mercenary army of "counter-terror" death squads. All around the world, CIA officers and their Special Forces lackeys teach torture techniques and design the torture centers, often hidden at military posts.

Major Joe Blair, the Director of Instruction at the School of the Americas (1986-9), described training the US gave to Latin American officers as follows: "The doctrine that was taught was that if you want information you use physical abuse...false imprisonment...threats to family members...and killing. If you can't get the information you want, if you can't get that person to shut up or to stop what they're doing, you simply assassinate them, and you assassinate them with one of your death squads."

In 2000, the School of the Americas was rebranded as "WHINSEC", but, as Major Blair testified at a trial of SOA Watch protesters in 2002, "There are no substantive changes besides the name. They teach the identical courses that I taught, and changed the course names and use the same manuals."

General Paul Gorman, who commanded US forces in Central America in the mid-1980's, defined this type of warfare based on war crimes as "a form of warfare repugnant to Americans, a conflict which involves innocents, in which non-combatant casualties may be an explicit object."

Another problem, apart from historical amnesia, is that each war crime is viewed as an isolated incident, and when the dots are connected, the focus is on some shadowy character like Steele. The *Guardian* made an attempt to connect

Steele to Petraeus and Rumsfeld, which again, is commendable. But the fact is that the entire National Security State has been designed and staffed with right-wing ideologues that support the unstated US policy of war crimes for profit.

We know who these security ideologues are. The problem is, they regularly have lunch with the reporters we trust to nail them to the wall.

For example, on March 17, 2013, CNN talking head Fareed Zakaria had Donald Gregg on his show to discuss North Korea. Zakaria introduced Gregg as President Bush the Superior's national security advisor in the 1980s, but did not mention that Gregg, while a CIA region officer in charge in Vietnam, developed the "repugnant" form of warfare based on war crimes described by General Gorman above, or that he oversaw its application in El Salvador through a back-channel "counter-terror" network.

Gregg's plan, used by Steele in El Salvador and then Iraq, requires US advisers to coordinate civilian security services (like the Iraqi Special Police) with military intelligence and civil affairs units to provide death squads and military units

and then photographing that. That led to 96 people in the organization. Using military intel, we took photos of the houses where they lived... then took the photos back to the helicopter where we had the 23 people, who were hooded, and they circled the faces of the cadre."

There's more historical evidence, of course, but this is the plan the CIA exported to El Salvador, and that Steele employed, with some modifications, in Iraq. After finishing with Gregg, Zakaria took a commercial break and returned with Paul Wolfowitz, Bush the Inferior's Deputy Secretary of Defense and proponent of the Iraq War.

Zakaria: "How do you think about as an American policy maker, the issue of—was it worth the price in American lives and treasure? By some estimates \$1 trillion.

Wolfowitz: "I would like as much as anyone to be able to say, let's forget about the Persian Gulf. Let's forget about the larger Middle East. But that part of

In one case, US forces held a general's three sons as hostages to persuade him to turn himself in. Then, instead of releasing his sons as promised, they staged an elaborate mock execution of his 15-year-old youngest son, before torturing the general himself to death.

with information on the location of guerrillas, whose hide-outs are bombed by US warplanes, then ravaged in My Lai-style cordon and search operations in which counter-terror hit teams hunt enemy cadres in their homes.

In Vietnam, Gregg and his CIA companions—many of whom migrated to El Salvador—put together a chart of VC political cadres from "battered" detainees. They'd force the detainees to point out on a map where their comrades were hiding. Then the CIA officers would take the detainees up in a helicopter to point out the hiding places on the ground. A Special Forces or CIA paramilitary unit would then snatch the cadre and bring them to the region's secret torture center, run by a CIA-paid and owned Special Police officer—the kind of guy Steele, and before him Congressman Simmons, advised.

"We brought guys in from the national prison to flesh out the reports," Gregg told me about one particular operation. "We had guys analyzing reports, marking photographs, putting the pictures together on the wall,

the world isn't leaving us alone. Al Qaeda isn't leaving us alone. Pakistan isn't leaving us alone. I think our interests and our values would be advanced if we stick with it."

Zakaria did not ask Wolfowitz what he meant by "leaving us alone." He simply said, "Paul Wolfowitz, pleasure to have you on."

Given the history of America's genocidal wars in Vietnam and Central America, it is unfortunate that the *Guardian* limited itself to establishing that Steele and his administrative boss, General David Petraeus, and his boss Donald Rumsfeld, underwrote systematic torture and extrajudicial killing.

What needs to be stressed is that thousands of Americans, including political bosses like Wolfowitz, and scores of journalists with access, knew that the CIA-owned Ministry of Interior had more than a dozen secret prisons, and they knew what went on in them, as one Iraqi general told the film-makers, "drilling, murder, torture—the ugliest sorts of torture I've ever seen."

Likewise, the composition of and operations of Special Police death squads, an American interviewee said, “were discussed openly, wherever it was, at staff meetings,” and were “common knowledge across Baghdad.”

It is a testament to the power of US “information warfare” that this policy of war crimes comes as a surprise to the general public. Such is the power of National Security State insiders David Corn and Michael Isikoff, who happily turn the policy of calculated war crimes into the “hubris” of a handful of sexy mad patriots that the Establishment is glad to sacrifice on the pseudo-altar of public theatre.

Certainly people have to be reminded, and the young have to learn, that America’s long-standing policy of war crimes for profit cannot exist without the complicity of the mainstream media, who exploit our natural inclination to believe the best of “our” leaders and especially of our soldiers. As George Orwell wrote in 1945, “The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but

morale—to make us, and our journalists, feel good about our belligerent nationalism—about being complicit in the war crimes perpetrated by the Perles, Frums, and Feiths.

After the CIA death squads eliminated the senior leadership of the Iraqi government, they eliminated “mid-level” Baath Party members, the middle class of Iraq. Cover was provided by Newsweek, which quoted an army officer who said, “The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists. From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.”

How did they do this? In one case, US forces held a general’s three sons as hostages to persuade him to turn himself in. Then, instead of releasing his sons as promised, they staged an elaborate mock execution of his 15-year-old youngest son, before torturing the general himself to death.

All of it covered up. Not one victim featured on TV.

If you were to believe the *New York Times*—the newspaper of record—it doesn’t know the names of the senior CIA of-

Seymour Hersh described it in a bloodless manner that made it seem necessary and, at worst, a mistake. But war crimes are not a mistake; they are a “repugnant” and thoroughly intentional form of warfare.

he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.”

Belligerent nationalism is often understood as the essence of what it means to be a “patriotic” American, and this veneration for the nation is taught to all budding reporters at journalism schools, along with the Code of Silence. Which is why, when insider Seymour Hersh reported that the CIA and Israel were training US Special Forces assassination teams for deployment in Iraq, on the CIA’s Phoenix program model, he described it in a bloodless manner that made it seem necessary and, at worst, a mistake.

But war crimes are not a mistake; they are a “repugnant” and thoroughly intentional form of warfare.

Hersh quoted a former CIA station chief as saying, “We have to resuscitate Iraqi intelligence, holding our nose, and have Delta and agency shooters break down doors and take them”—the insurgents—“out.”

Hold our noses, Hersh suggested, and commit war crimes. And when Amy Goodman interviewed him about it, she did not ask if what he described constituted a policy of war crimes. And when Zakaria looked at Wolfowitz, he failed to question him about the war crimes he plotted and committed.

All this psychological warfare is waged in the name of

officers in Iraq behind these sorts of barbaric practices. Or publishers and editors may claim that the Intelligence Identity Protection Act prevents them from naming names, but they could easily describe the jobs, and tell us what’s being done. They could finesse the law, but they don’t even do that, and that’s the Big Secret upon which the policy of war crimes utterly depends.

The *Times* conceals the simple truths that undermine our so-called “democracy.” Truths, like how the CIA nurtured the exile leadership it installed in Iraq, and organized and funded the Ministry of Interior as its private domain, replete with a computerized list of every Iraqi citizen and every detail of their lives.

The *Times* could at least describe the CIA as “Keeper of the Hit Lists: Blackmail Central.”

But they won’t, because it’s a family affair. As we well know, the Iraqi National Congress was headed by Ahmed Chalabi, the CIA-sponsored source on the myth of weapons of mass destruction, hand-delivered to *Times* reporter Judy Miller, now a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Chalabi’s lies, and Miller’s dutiful reporting of them, were the pretext for the war on Iraq.

What is never mentioned is that the INC was founded and funded by the CIA, and that another of its leaders was the

exiled General Hassan al-Naqib, whose son, Falah al-Naqib, then became the CIA's handpicked Interim Interior Minister in Iraq and appointed his uncle General Thavit to lead the Special Police Commandos.

Times reporters undoubtedly lunch with Uncle Thavit and his CIA case officer.

The *Times* doesn't explain the CIA's precious methods of dominance: that any American working for the Interior Ministry, or prime minister's office, was reporting to a publicly acknowledged administrative boss, usually in the military or State Department, and secretly to a CIA case officer, his operational boss. Or that every unit in the Special Commandos had a CIA case officer handing out hit lists to its American "Special Police Transition Team". Up to forty-five Americans, mostly Special Forces, worked with each Iraqi unit. These teams were in round-the-clock communication with their CIA bosses via the Special Police Command Center, and there is no record of the Special Police ever conducting operations without US supervision, even as they massacred tens of thousands of people.

Every militia and Iraqi Special Forces unit had a CIA case officer doing likewise. Every Iraqi politician and ministry officer has a CIA case officer too. And *Times* reporters drink with these advisors inside the Green Zone. It's the secret that enables atrocity.

American journalists do not report the truth. Consider their deference to the Interior Ministry's CIA advisor Steven Casteel after his Special Police Commandos launched their reign of terror in Baghdad. Hersh's sanitized reports of a Phoenix-style terror campaign in Iraq were conveniently forgotten and instead they regurgitated Casteel's black propaganda—that all atrocities were either rumor or innuendo or perpetrated by "insurgents in stolen police uniforms."

Forget about what Hersh said about "mistakes." Such an explanation was as ludicrous as General Petraeus claiming that the Iraqis formed the Special Police Commandos on "their own initiative."

Knight Ridder did not mention that Casteel had managed DEA operations in Latin America and been the DEA's Chief of Intelligence before being sent to Iraq, or that the CIA has controlled the DEA's overseas targeting for 40 years, on a purely political basis. Casteel had served as a CIA lackey in

Latin America, attacking left wing drug traffickers and letting right wing traffickers flourish, supporting the CIA sponsored Los Pepes-AUC death squads who were responsible for about 75% of civilian deaths in the Colombian civil war over the next 10 years.

To its credit, *Knight Ridder* did investigate Commando atrocities, and might have uncovered the whole story, except that its Iraqi reporter, Yasser Salihee, was shot and killed by an American sniper in June 2005. And while it had sufficient evidence to debunk Casteel's cover story, it instead blamed the abuses on infiltration of the good guy Commandos by bad guy "Shiite militias".

After the exposure of the al-Jadiriya torture center, journalists reported that heads would roll. But a major CIA asset,

Deputy Interior Minister Adnan al-Asadi, maintained command of the National (formerly Special) Police, undermining the reforms promised by the new Interior Minister, Jawad al-Bulani.

Asadi remains in that position, his forces embedded and deeply implicated in persistent human rights

abuses in Iraq, where prisons are still rife with rape, torture, executions (judicial and extra-judicial) and disappearances. During Arab Spring demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Baghdad in March 2011, demonstrators spotted Asadi on a rooftop directing snipers as they shot peaceful protesters in the square below.

The *Guardian* and the *BBC* made a good start, but US journalists need to break the Code of Silence and launch an ongoing investigation into the full extent of US command and control of the Special Police Commandos and all the other death squads and torture centers the United States brought to Iraq. The investigation must seriously examine the roles of the CIA and of US Special Forces, including the secret Joint Special Operations Command and the "Nightstalkers" who worked with the Wolf Brigade in 2005. The investigation must lead to accountability for each and every war crime committed.

American journalists were glad to demonize Saddam Hussein for his war crimes—real and imagined. Now they need to identify and humanize the up to 1,800 dead bodies that piled up every month in Baghdad, and to follow up with Iraqi human rights groups like the Organization for Follow-



US troops during a raid in Fallujah. Photo: Department of Defense.

Up and Monitoring, who matched 92% of the bodies of execution victims with names and descriptions of people detained by US-led Interior Ministry forces.

America's ruling National Security State, under the Obama regime, has expanded, through the CIA, "covert" paramilitary operations from 60 countries in 2008 to 120 nations. If we ever to have a whiff of true democracy, we need our journalists to reveal the extent to which the CIA commands and controls these operations, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we need them to explain, on a daily basis, how the National Security State corrupts intelligence and "news" for the same racist imperial purposes that have defined US foreign policy since the Vietnam War. **CP**

DOUG VALENTINE is the author of five books, including *The Phoenix Program*, and *A Crow's Dream*, his first book poems. See www.douglasvalentine.com or write to him at douglasvalentine77@gmail.com

NICOLAS J. S. DAVIES is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq* (Nimble Books: 2010), with a foreword by Benjamin Ferencz, a chief investigator and the only surviving prosecutor from the Nuremberg war crimes trials, and the founding father of the International Criminal Court. You can reach Nicolas at peacetopower@aol.com.

Rave On

BY LEE BALLINGER

While the mess that was Woodstock has been turned into a Sixties fairy tale, raves are accorded a place in the cultural pantheon well below Altamont, the infamous Rolling Stones show where a fan was beaten to death by Hells Angels.

Raves began as small, semi-secret, late-night affairs but they have now broadened beyond their humble origins, morphing into multi-day electronic dance music (EDM) festivals. Electric Daisy Carnival and Ultra Music Festival have drawn as many as 230,000 fans to events where fans spend as much time looking at each other as they do looking at the stage and, as Billboard dance music editor Kerri Mason describes, "sing along to beats instead of words."

Is bigger better? The front page of the February 2 *Los Angeles Times* was dominated by the headline "A fatal toll on concertgoers as raves boost cities' income." The first sentence reveals the article's agenda: "On the edge of the Mojave, music promoter Pasquale Rotella staged a rave eleven years ago that ended with a coroner's wagon rolling down desert roads." It went on to describe the spectacular growth of the rave scene in the 21st century as emerging "from an Ecstasy-fueled underground of urban warehouses."

Drug use doesn't begin at raves, it begins when children as young as three are diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and are placed on Ritalin. As of 2010, according to the National Health Interview Survey, 5.2 million kids between the ages of 3 and 17 have been di-

agnosed with ADHD. According to the University of Utah's Genetic Science Learning Center, "Ritalin is a stimulant like cocaine" and "may cause changes in the brain over time." Further, up to "50% of adolescents in drug treatment centers report abusing Ritalin." Yet a vague evaluation by a doctor or teacher of too much "squirminess" can lead a youngster to spend an adolescence on meds. The none too subtle message? If you have a problem, pop a pill.

It comes as no surprise that many of America's students are "squirmy." Our schools are rapidly becoming assembly lines centered around standardized testing. Critical thinking has no place in such factories, especially not when the programs that help youngsters channel the natural energy surging through their bodies and brains—music, art, sports—are being cut back or eliminated.

Hundreds of thousands of young men and women emerge from our educational system only to wind up as victims of another legal drug-dispensing machine, the military. The Pentagon doesn't trust you can be all that you can be on your own, so it ensures that drugs are routinely given out to overcome sleep deprivation, illness, or anything else that might interfere with combat operations. In Afghanistan, two F-16 pilots who mistakenly bombed a Canadian infantry unit said they'd been pressured into taking amphetamines to sharpen their senses. To sharpen their senses? That's why some people go to raves and take ecstasy.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 38,329 people died of drug overdoses in the US in 2010. Yet only an infinitesimal number of those deaths were caused by ecstasy. 22,000 of the overdose casualties were due to prescription drugs. Could there be a connection between the epidemic of prescription drug overdoses and the fact that millions of kids have been placed on prescription meds at school? The media doesn't explore that connection because prescription drugs are sold by Big Pharma. Ecstasy is sold by local drug dealers who have no political power and are fair game for tabloids like the *Los Angeles Times*.

If there is a sincere concern about drugs at public events, why isn't anyone calling for a ban on the Super Bowl or the World Series? Drugs of one kind or another are present at all major sporting events and death and serious injury to sports fans happen frequently, often the result of drug abuse. Besides drugs, there is the issue of basic public safety. When two racing fans were killed by an out of control race car on March 17 at Marysville Raceway Park near Sacramento just a few weeks after 33 fans were injured by wreck debris at Daytona International Speedway in Florida, the incidents were treated as, yes, unfortunate, but really just another day at the track.

This double standard leads to an almost comical level of hypocrisy. James Penman, the city attorney for San Bernardino, California, has tried to ban raves at the National Orange Show Events Center, saying "The city should have

zero tolerance for any activity in which drugs are an integral part.” Yet Penman doesn’t seem troubled by the events held at the nearby Auto Club Speedway, where dangerous drugs such as alcohol and tobacco are an integral part of the festivities.

People have indeed died of drug overdoses at raves. That much is true and that much is tragic. We are led by our media masters to focus solely on that fact like a dog that’s not housebroken having its nose pushed into its excrement on the kitchen floor. If we break free of that grip, we can see that raves aren’t mostly about drugs.

Given the size of the EDM audience today you might think it would be easy for major newspapers to find fans happy to explain why they go to raves. But the rave audience remains on mass media mute. I assume that anyone who writes for a living knows how to conduct a Google search, so the reasons for this oversight must go beyond a lack of training. With just a couple of clicks of the mouse, I found these, among many other illuminating quotes:

music fan Matt Fanale, who DJs as Eurotic, adds that “With the world as depressing as it has been lately, people want to lose themselves with thousands of others.”

Another Wisconsin DJ, Vinnie Toma, says: “Kids who are in college right now, or even several years out, there aren’t as many opportunities, and they’ve racked up tons of school debt. It can fuel a lifestyle that’s all about partying and pushing difficult emotions away.”

The serious problems that so many people now share fuel a need for communal gathering places. Raves help to fill that void as other opportunities for community are being closed off. College is now unaffordable for the majority of potential students. Libraries and recreation centers are closing. In many states, teenagers are banned by law from being in a car together. The camaraderie once found at work, however menial or temporary, is disappearing along with the jobs. 6.5 million teens and young adults are neither employed nor in school.

The rave scene has grown in lockstep with the growth of war and unemployment or, as Kerri Mason puts it, EDM is “a generational opt-out from recession anxiety.”

“[Electronic dance music] happened in concert venues and arenas,” Billboard dance editor Kerri Mason writes, “. . . it happened in parks and open fields, where young people wore fuzzy animal ears and talked about peace, love, unity, and respect—all without irony.”

“As far as a music culture goes, EDM is the one which will accept the kids on the outliers, the ones who get bullied, the ones who feel they may not quite fit in. This community is exceptional in its ability to bond all types together, and I am not exaggerating when I say it saves lives. Our audience is intelligent and kind. . . . unprecedented in their drive to proactively support each other.”—Grammy-nominated producer/DJ Kaskade

Emilie, who blogs as Rolling Stone Raver, described her experience at Camp Bisco Eleven as one of camping, making new friends (“They were the true embodiment of peace, love, unity, and respect”), enjoying music and having “philosophical discussions with one of the greatest senses of community I have ever felt.”

The rave scene has grown in lockstep with the growth of war and unemployment or, as Kerri Mason puts it, EDM is “a generational opt-out from recession anxiety.” Wisconsin

The youthful frustration and energy that powers the rave scene has caught the eye of America’s city fathers. Many municipalities face huge budget deficits and are eager to host raves, even though they often act as if they’ve made a deal with the devil. Judge Dave Barkemeyer issued a permit for a massive rave in Milam County, Texas, not because it serves culture or youth but because “it brings in a fair amount of commerce.”

An unprincipled pact has been made but it isn’t with rave promoters. It’s with corporations. Immediately after World War II, corporations paid 49% of all taxes. Now it’s 7%. That’s why cities are going broke. Municipal leaders have stood by and let this happen, often aiding and abetting corporate neglect with tax abatements and free land.

It’s not just municipalities which seek to profit from raves. The growth of EDM is attracting corporate interest as well. Robert F.X. Sillerman’s SFX Entertainment, owner of American Idol and Elvis Presley Enterprises, is in the process of investing upwards of \$1 billion in buying up local and regional dance music promotion companies. Mega concert promotion firm Live Nation has acquired two major rave promoters: England’s Cream and Los Angeles’s HARD Events. As big rave events become more corporate, that may provide them with a degree of political protection but it will intensify pressure on the underground scene, which doesn’t deal with

things like permits and has always had trouble with the cops.

The hysteria about raves accelerates the morphing of the so-called war on drugs into a war on youth. As Jeff Chang chillingly describes in his classic history of hip-hop, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, we are witnessing a shift from a politics of abandonment to a politics of containment.

One form of that containment is legislation, such as the Rave Act introduced by current vice-president Joe Biden and passed nearly unanimously by Congress in 2003. This law makes event organizers liable for prison time and \$250,000 fines on the basis of allegations (not proof) of drug use. The danger in the as yet unenforced Rave Act isn't so much in its possible implementation but in the way it amplifies the irrational fear of youth. In turn, this breeds acceptance of the growth of police power in all its forms, from Homeland Security to cameras on the corner.

The same could be said of a bill introduced in 2011 by California State Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, a Democrat who attempted to establish her cultural cred by claiming to be a friend of poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Ma proposed to ban any event that takes place at night and features prerecorded music. Was her target karaoke? Wedding receptions? Of course not. Ma's bill failed to win passage but succeeded in further poisoning the body politic.

We need an open national discussion about drugs, how they affect society, and what to do about it. But the corporations with vested interests in certain drugs will not allow it. With the Supreme Court's approval of corporate personhood, corporations now buy off the political process. Under the banner of "money is speech," they make huge donations to Democrats and Republicans, both of whom are in the thrall of Big Pharma and the phony war on drugs. The rave audience, millions strong, is in a position to break through this wall of silence and get us talking to each other. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER co-edits Rock & Rap Confidential. Free email subscriptions are available by writing rockrap@aol.com

The Afghanistan War Comes Home to Philadelphia

BY DAVE LINDORFF

Maple Glen War Zone

Although I have been a journalist now for 40 years, I have, by design, never sought an assignment as a war correspondent. The idea of dodging enemy bullets, avoiding mines, and of course "friendly" fire, has never appealed to me. And yet, this week I find that I am now a war correspondent in a combat zone in spite of myself.

Yesterday I learned, courtesy of my congressional representative, Republican Pat Meehan, that my neighborhood, the Upper Dublin and Horsham area of Montgomery

County, PA, is being made into a front-line battle zone in the Afghanistan War.

Not that Rep. Meehan put it that way. No. His announcement was that Montgomery County was going to get 250 new jobs thanks to a decision by the Pentagon to set up a new piloting facility for Reaper drones at the currently mothballed Willow Grove Naval Air Station. This new drone piloting facility, like the ones in Nevada and upstate New York, will be flying drones not locally using the Willow Grove facility's huge airfield, but in Afghanistan, Pakistan and wherever else they're fighting the so-called War on Terror.

With this decision, the war has literally come home. Two miles from my house, to be exact.

According to a report in the *Lansdale Patch*, a local weekly, the US Air Force "has chosen the Pennsylvania Air National Guard's 111th Fighter Wing, located at the 238-acre Horsham Air Guard Station, adjacent to the shuttered Willow Grove air base to take on a new Remotely Piloted Aircraft mission."

Effective October 1 the Air Force will have established, in already existing buildings on the unused base, a ground-control station for the MQ-9 Reaper. This is the drone that has been responsible for most of the drone killings during the Obama administration's over four-year expanded use of drone warfare, and that has, according to the organization Drones Watch, been responsible for the documented deaths of over 172 children.

Col. Howard "Chip" Eissler, commander of the Pennsylvania National Guard's 111th Fighter Wing, which had been flying A-10 Warthog ground attack jets from the base on training runs for years until the base was shut down, issued a press release saying, "This is an exciting time for our wing, and our airmen are energized to embrace this new mission."

Two-person military teams control each Reaper from a virtual cockpit, with one serving as pilot and the other as a sensor operator. The drones, which carry deadly high-density explosive Hellfire missiles, would not be flying locally, but rather in war theaters or on missions in countries where the US is not at war, but where the Obama White House deems "enemies" to be located.

Left unsaid in the hoopla over the supposed 250 new jobs (only 75 of which would be full-time), is what it means to have combat personnel responsible for killing, operating in a densely populated suburb of a major city like Philadelphia.

"I'll get back to you on that," a press spokesman for Rep. Meehan said, when I asked him about whether the congressman had thought about the security issues involved in locating a drone piloting operation in Horsham. He never did return the call, even after a second one leaving a reminder message.

John Braxton, a leading local peace activist and founding member of US Labor Against the War (USLAW), said "We need jobs, but we need jobs for a sustainable world, not drone piloting jobs. I'm sorry to learn that our region has to

play a part in illegal and immoral operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” He added, “Morality aside, it certainly doesn’t make sense to put one of these operations in a populated area. If someone decided to retaliate against the drone strikes here, it could cause a lot of injuries and deaths.” Braxton also speculated that while the Pentagon is stressing that no drones will be flying locally from the base’s airfield for domestic purposes, “These things do tend to get out of hand once they get started.”

Charles Rossi, president of the Philadelphia chapter of Veterans for Peace, said, “This is really sad. One of the things that bothers me is that they’re bringing this operation into a very populated area. That’s a major mistake. It’s a terrible, terrible idea. I’m not surprised that Pat Meehan thinks it’s great, but what a lousy idea!”

Most attorneys familiar with the laws of war agree that the pilots of the drones, because they are uniformed military personnel and are pulling the trigger on missiles that are intended to kill people, are combat troops, which would make

one is who has the right to fight in war, and the other is what US military personnel and locations are legitimate targets.” He says the US is, rather absurdly, claiming that since the Taliban, while formerly the Afghan government and military, were ousted from power in 2001, they no longer represent a country or a government and thus have no legitimacy. “Therefore if they kill a US military person it is considered murder.” He says the US position is that a Taliban fighter has no legal right even to shoot back in defense if fired upon by an American soldier.

“The US is arguing that in Afghanistan, only one side can legally fight, and this is clearly absurd,” he says. He points out that even if the US position were correct that the Taliban fighters are not lawful combatants, they would retain the right of self-defense, and he adds, “that would apply to attacking people who are controlling drones that are shooting at you.”

David Glazier, a former Naval officer and ship’s captain who is now a professor of international law specializing in

All military bases in the US are potential legitimate targets of an enemy in wartime, whether they are actively piloting drones, or just training or housing troops. But as Glazier points out, “The fact that Willow Grove air base would be operating the drones does make it a more attractive target for an enemy.”

the Willow Grove base a “legitimate” target for enemy attack. (The Pentagon made it clear the drone pilots are combat soldiers when it created a special award for those who are “wounded in battle” with such injuries as carpal tunnel or tennis elbow, though under protests from regular winners of such awards, this one was downgraded to below a Purple Heart). As well, because soldiers are soldiers whether they are on duty or off duty and out of uniform, even when those pilots punch out of the job and go home, they are “legitimate” targets.

The exception is attorneys working for the military. A JAG attorney at the US Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas, who declined to give his name, argued that while the base would be a legitimate target in a “declared conventional war” it would not be a legitimate target of the Taliban, since the US does not believe Taliban fighters are “lawful combatants” under the laws of war. This is a controversial view, however.

As Jules Lobel, a professor of international law at the University of Pittsburgh, explains, “What the US has done in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan is collapse two concepts:

the law of war at Loyola University in Los Angeles, agrees with Lobel, stating, “The US position that the Taliban are not lawful combatants and thus cannot legally kill US troops is unprecedented in the history of warfare. What they are saying is that only the US can shoot in Afghanistan, and that’s not an armed conflict. That’s a human hunting expedition!” Lobel adds, “If they really are claiming that then everyone in the CIA involved in the drone killing program, right up to the head of the agency is a war criminal, because they’re not in the military.”

Lobel’s position is also backed by Michael Ratner, president emeritus of the Center for Constitutional Rights. Says Ratner, “We believe that both the Taliban and the people piloting the drones are combatants. The bottom line is that people who are in a shooting war are combatants. So Willow Grove is becoming a front in the war. The Philadelphia area has become a front. Is Willow Grove air base a legitimate target for the Taliban? All I know is I wouldn’t want a drone base near my house!”

Louise Blank, an attorney specializing in the laws of war and director of the International Humanitarian Law Clinic at

Emory University adds, “Technically, putting the drone pilots in Willow Grove creates a front line target, since all military sites are legitimate targets in this conflict.”

Blank is right that in some sense, the question of the legitimacy of Willow Grove’s new drone piloting base as a Taliban target is irrelevant. *All* military bases in the US are potential legitimate targets of an enemy in wartime, whether they are actively piloting drones, or just training or housing troops. But as Glazier points out, “The fact that Willow Grove air base would be operating the drones does make it a more attractive target for an enemy.”

That’s a fact that isn’t being considered by the politicians and military brass who are touting the jobs the new facility will be bringing to this suburb just north of Philadelphia. **CP**

DAVE LINDORFF is a founding member of *This Can’t Be Happening!*, an online newspaper collective, and is a contributor to *Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion*.

California’s Fracking Frenzy Is the Next Western Oil Boom on the Horizon?

BY JOSHUA FRANK

California’s Gold Rush may have ended well over a century and a half ago, but there are new prospectors in town and these suits aren’t toting tattered tents and rusty old pans. Instead the new California pioneers employ geologists and lease expensive extraction equipment. Yet, in many ways it is still the Wild West out here in the land of sun and sea, and many are hoping to strike it rich.

Fracking, or the act of blasting a mix of water, sand and chemicals underground to force oil or natural gas to the surface, is sweeping the Golden State. Currently fracking operations are taking place in nine California counties and many are worried it’s just the beginning. While opposition to fracking in Wyoming, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania gains momentum, critics of the process in California are just now gearing up for what looks like a long fight ahead—a battle certain to be fraught with industry lies, flawed science and old-fashion fossil-fueled greed.

Opponents argue that uncontrolled fracking emits large amounts of methane and other air pollutants and undermines efforts to head off catastrophic climate change. They also cite numerous instances across the country where groundwater supplies have been contaminated by nearby fracking operations. Additionally, in a place like California where water wars are already intense, fracking could accelerate the crisis—for example, a single horizontal well can use more than 5 million gallons per frack.

At the heart of fracking’s potential future in California is the illustrious Monterey Shale formation, which covers 1,750 square miles from Central to Southern California and holds

an estimated 15.4 billion barrels of oil. Unlike many other states where independent operators and drillers dominate the landscape, it’s major oil companies like Occidental Petroleum and Venoco that have operated in California for decades. Yet most of these oilmen have played it safe, opting to not explore the vast deposits of the Monterey Shale because of its limited access and complex geology. Nevertheless, advancements in fracking technology are changing all of that, and fast.

Oil production in the state has been declining for years, yet California is still one of the top oil producers in the country, fourth overall, trailing only Texas, North Dakota and Alaska. If fracking can take off in California as it has in North Dakota recently, the state could experience an oil surge that could make the Golden State the largest oil producer in the US, almost immediately.

“If nothing is done, large parts of our state could be transformed into industrialized oil and gas zones ... as we’ve seen in other places like Pennsylvania and North Dakota,” says Kassie Siegel, a lawyer for the feisty Center for Biological Diversity (CBD). “Fracking the 15 billion barrels of oil in the Monterey shale is like lighting the fuse on a carbon bomb that would shatter California’s efforts to address the climate crisis. Given California’s leadership in addressing climate change, if we can’t stop a fracking boom in California, it’s difficult to see how we get our nation off of fossil fuels.”

First on the chopping block are public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Prices have skyrocketed within the Monterey Shale formation in the last few years, in some cases the BLM is scoring \$2,000 an acre for parcels that used to go for a mere 2 bucks. No doubt the companies leasing up the land are betting on a frack-friendly future, where once untouchable oil reserves soon will be within easy reach.

On April 8, CBD and others won a major legal victory in California that could impact federal land leases across the country where fracking is involved. In response to a lawsuit the groups filed in 2011 against the BLM, a federal judge ruled the Obama administration violated the National Environmental Policy Act when it auctioned off 2,700 acres of land to oil speculators in Monterey County. The judge said the BLM relied on outdated studies that ignored the potentially damaging effects of fracking in the area. It was the first time a federal court acknowledged that fracking could cause environmental damage.

While there are a myriad of environmental issues facing California, fracking is the most important among them argues Siegel.

“There is absolutely a danger of California being transformed almost overnight, as other areas of the country have been when the fracking boom hits,” says Siegal. “In other parts of the country, we’ve seen contaminated water. We’ve seen people who live near oil and gas wells complaining of health effects.”

Siegal and others are hoping Gov. Jerry Brown and state officials in Sacramento don't cave to industry demands, mainly hiding behind trade secrets so they do not have to disclose the chemicals they use when fracking.

Gov. Brown's first effort to tackle fracking was considered meager at best. In December 2012 the Brown administration put forth a tepid proposal that would require fracking operators to disclose their plans to the state 10 days before ramping their operations. These companies would have to post the list of chemicals used to the online database "FracFocus" along with the locations they plan to frack. Since FracFocus is not subject to public record laws, companies may claim "trade secrets" exemptions to withhold the names of the chemicals used in their fracking.

"The road we're headed down will heap a cloak of secrecy around trade secrets," says Bill Allayaud of the Environmental Working Group.

Several California state lawmakers also voiced doubts about Brown's proposal to regulate fracking, saying it didn't go nearly far enough to protect public health and safety. Brown's timid attempt to govern fracking also left the regulatory efforts of the practice to the industry itself.

Brown's logic, however, is transparent: less oversight means more tax revenue and job creation. Or at least that appears to be the myth he's ascribing to.

"We want to get the greenhouse gas emissions down, but we also want to keep our economy going. That's that balance that's required," Brown told a group of reporters at a recent "clean energy" event. "The fossil fuel deposits in California are incredible, the potential is extraordinary."

A new study appears to back up Brown's insistence that fracking in California would be good for business and the state's depleted bank account. The report, released by USC and the Communications Institute, titled "The Monterey Shale and California's Economic Future," estimates that fracking could generate half a million new jobs by 2015 and 2.8

million by 2020 in California. The media quickly latched on and so did the industry group that funded it —the Western States Petroleum Association, a fossil fuel lobby shop based in the state capital of Sacramento.

"Clearly, the Monterey Shale is a game-changing economic opportunity that California can't afford to ignore," WSPA asserts in a press release. "This opportunity is especially important to the communities in the San Joaquin Valley that

have experienced extremely high unemployment and economic challenges for far too long. The great San Joaquin Valley will be the primary beneficiary of the jobs, wealth and government revenues that will flow from the Monterey Shale. It's their time to flourish."

The *Los Angeles Times* was also quick to point out that the "study forecasts that the state could reap oil-related tax revenue of \$4.5 billion in 2015 and \$24.6 billion by 2020."

No doubt the oil industry got their money's worth. The study is now consistently cited for the "fact" that fracking the Monterey Shale would be a boon for the economy as well as a huge job creator. However, anti-frackers aren't backing down.

"[If] you read the study itself, the authors admit that the data they had

wasn't good enough to make any reliable projections, that their assumptions were extremely optimistic, and that the assessment is only 'preliminary,'" counters Siegal of CBD. "The study ignores environmental damages and ignores the impacts to other industries like agriculture and tourism that employ far more people in California ... It's a cost-benefit analysis that has no reliable information on the benefits and ignores all of the costs. In the body of the report, the authors admit that their findings have little or no policy value for all these reasons."

What all of this means is clear: California is in the throes of a fight for its economic and environmental future. Fracking opponents aren't buying the industry's job creation arguments. They also believe a further degraded environment



Critics of fracking in California are concerned with impacts on local waterways, especially in coastal areas such as those in Monterey County.
Photo Courtesy of Chelsea Mosher.

Early in the Dirty War, five priests and seminarians were gunned down inside the San Patricio church in Buenos Aires. On the carpet of the chapel a message had been scrawled: “These leftists were killed for being indoctrinators of virgin minds.”

will only destroy the precious lands that make California a unique, vibrant state.

The new oil barons, on the other hand, are preparing for a fracking frenzy, likely to be rubber stamped by complicit politicians and a complacent media. **CP**

JOSHUA FRANK is managing editor of *CounterPunch*.

The Gospel of the Slums Cardinal Bergoglio and Liberation Theology in Argentina

BY DANIEL EDWARDS

Buenos Aires.

Almost the very minute that white smoke started rising from the chimney of the Vatican palace, and the identity of the new Pope was confirmed, a mobilization was in place. Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo, site of the government palace and the city cathedral, was soon filled with the devout, celebrating an occasion that many must have believed would never have arrived in their lifetime. Jorge Bergoglio, archbishop of Argentina’s capital city, would henceforth be known as Francis I, and thousands were descending on the iconic plaza to show their joy at the news.

The revelation that the new head of the Roman Catholic church, following the sensational resignation of Benedict XVI, had many in tears. An eclectic mix of believers stated that the first pope from the Americas would usher in a new age of prosperity and piety for the region, and Argentina first and foremost; others, somewhat more ambitiously, heralded the end of the polarization of the state that would somehow be solved by the election of the figurehead. While the celebrations continued, however, and local media remained hanging on every word to emanate from Rome, others placed a more critical eye on the new pontiff.

La Garganta Poderosa, a left-wing magazine that dedicates itself to highlighting the struggles and culture of the millions of Argentines that live in shanty towns (Villas Miserias, usually shortened in everyday parlance to simply Villas), chose to highlight the gaping breach between Bergoglio and the catholic priests that work day to day making a difference in the country’s most precarious, vulnerable and impoverished neighborhoods, invoking the spirit

of Carlos Mugica and contemporary hero of the poor, José María ‘Pepe’ Di Paolo. “We had a feeling that the new pope would not be a Villero, nor an heir of Mugica, nor Father Pepe’s ally. We don’t care: In the Villas, *habemus Pepem*.”

But who are these figures, the minority of priests that leave behind cushy parishes and their privileged positions to work with those in most need? Investigating the work of the tragic Father Carlos Mugica exposes at its very roots the contradictions in Catholicism that continue to weaken the institution from the inside.

Born to an affluent family—his father was a conservative politician, his mother the daughter of wealthy landowners—Mugica turned his back on a life as a lawyer to enter the priesthood. Just three years later, in 1951, he had begun to work with vulnerable families, and what he saw in Buenos Aires’ Santa Rosa de Lima parish was already pushing him towards militancy. Father Carlos would become an iconic figure for his work in Villa 31, a sprawling neighborhood of self-built homes and dirt roads a stone’s throw away from the city’s most affluent zones, a living, breathing example of the inequality and economic injustice that continues to blight Argentina and South America to this day.

His work followed the teachings of Liberation Theology, a strain of the Catholic faith which teaches that poverty is a sin and must be combated, by working with the poorest communities and encouraging them to fight against their miseries. Most popular in Latin America, among priests such as Mugica, unsurprisingly such a radical outlook was less than well received by the conservative heads of the church. Benedict XVI, Francis’ successor, was one of its most outspoken critics; while applauding some aspects, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger denounced the interpretation of a socially-active Christianity and church as a “Marxist myth”. Proponents of Liberation Theology from the 1970s onwards were discouraged from discussing their radical beliefs, and at times completely prohibited from teaching under the name of the church, with sometimes violent repercussions. Moreover, it was this work that made Mugica a marked man.

The Argentine’s contemporary, Brazilian clergyman and social activist Helder Camara, summed up the ambivalent attitude of the catholic hierarchy to the work carried out by the likes of himself and Mugica. “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist,” the priest explained in one polemic out-

burst, and in neighboring Argentina the reaction was identical. A call from the politically-active Movement of Priests for the Third World (in Spanish, MSTM), a group based in the teachings Liberation Theology of which Carlos was a sympathizer, to support socialist revolutionary movements led to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires banning such declarations from the clergy in 1969. The continuing support and cooperation with trade unions, Peronists and other progressive movements, meanwhile, as well as their part in mobilizing Villa populations to resist forced removals from their homes and fight for better conditions, meant that priests, teachers and any individual working with Argentina's poor became a legitimate target as right-wing reactionary violence exploded in the 1970s.

Mugica, who had led the residents of Villa 31 on marches to keep their homes, knew that he was in grave danger. Death threats were a regular part of his life during the final days, and his demise was little more than a coldly-executed, state-

sanctioned execution. Argentina was still a democracy, albeit one in chaos due to terrorism from both left and right, and death squads such as the quasi-fascist AAA (Argentine Anti-communist Alliance) were operating with near-impunity in a chilling glimpse of what was to come under the imminent military dictatorship. On May 11th, 1974, Mugica was ambushed at the door of his parish church in Villa Luro by a man believed to be the head of the AAA, Rodolfo Eduardo Almiron, who peppered the priest's abdomen and thorax with bullets from a Mac-10 submachine gun. Carlos died in minutes, with his final words "Now more than ever, we have to stand together with the people". His assassination, however, was just a taste of the horrors to come.

Mugica's ideological companions, the so-called 'Curas Villeros' (Villa priests), were targeted alongside left-wing militants, trade unionists and students during Argentina's Dirty War; the name given to the bloody dictatorship ushered in by General Jorge Videla in 1976 and which would last until 1983 with a purported total of 30,000 'disappeared', de-

tained and killed by the military. The most emblematic case came early in the oppression, when five priests and seminarians were gunned down inside the San Patricio church in Buenos Aires. On the carpet of the chapel a message had been scrawled: "These leftists were killed for being indoctrinators of virgin minds, and for being MTSM", and with the return of democracy courts heard that the murders were carried out on the orders of the admiral in charge of notorious clandestine detention centre ESMA. But not everyone in the church suffered with the military in charge.

Testimony from former ESMA torturer Adolfo Scilingo, recorded in 1997, affirmed that catholic officials were heavily complicit in the mistreatment and murder of political prisoners

during the dictatorship; even going as far as choosing the preferred method of disposal. Inmates judged to no longer be useful to military interrogators were drugged, bound and thrown out of airborne planes into the Rio de la Plata estuary; and according



Father Carlos Mugica

to Scilingo, this was carried out with full approval from the clergy.

"The ecclesiastical hierarchy was consulted and a method was adopted that the church considered Christian: that people would take off in flight and not make their destination. Answering doubts from some marines, it was clarified that 'The subversives would be thrown out in the middle of the flight'. After the trips, the chaplains would try to console us—bringing up a bible verse that speaks of 'separating the weeds from the wheat'".

The presence of priests and chaplains at the torture centres is doubted by few now, due to testimony from the likes of journalist Miriam Lewin who affirmed she caught a glimpse of an official in bishop or archbishop's robes while being transferred, hooded and bound, inside the ESMA. At least one priest, Christian van Werner, has been openly convicted for his role in the slaughters, and in 2007 the clergyman was convicted on counts of murder, torture and deprivation of liberty, sentenced to life prison. The church itself declared

through an official statement in 2012 that “We feel committed to promote a more complete study of those events, in order to search for the truth, in the belief this will set us free”, while stopping short of making a full apology or recognition of its role—even as figures such as coup leader Videla revealed the advice and consultations they carried out with senior ecclesiastical figures.

The role of Bergoglio, at that time a Jesuit priest in the neighborhood of Villa Devoto, in this dark period of Argentine history remains rather less clear. At best, he took the stance of the majority of the population while their neighbors and friends were disappearing from their homes, refusing to confront the dictatorship through understandable fears of reprisals. But more serious accusations have been tabled. A book published by democratic activist Emilio Mignone in 1985 highlights the critical attitude Bergoglio expressed with regards to two priests in his parish, Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics, maintaining that such a view towards their activist stances could have been interpreted as a green light for capture. The pair were indeed detained and tortured

promoting a less decadent, more austere papacy. Supporters also point to his work in Argentina’s poorer parishes, and his professed friendship with the above-mentioned Father Pepe, as evidence that this is a figure that will not abandon believers at the lowest level of subsistence.

On the other hand, Bergoglio’s recent conduct also speaks volumes. President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s populist-nationalist program which integrates progressive social thought with some nods to socialist economic policy had placed the Argentine head of state at loggerheads with the archbishop, who has not shied away from expressing his criticism of such forward-thinking initiatives. Referring to the landmark decision in 2010 to legalize gay marriage, becoming the first country in Latin America to take such a step, Bergoglio put out the call to religious figures across the country to begin a “Holy War”, to fight the “destructive pretension against God’s will.” Just days after Francis’ accession to the Holy Seat, a young homosexual was brutally beaten by schoolchildren who allegedly told him, “With an Argentine Pope, there will be no more Argentine fags”.

“Francis I may have given food to the poor, but he never questioned why millions in Argentina live in shanty towns, scarping a subsistence-level existence on a handful of dollars a day.”

during the dictatorship, but since the new Pope’s election Jalics—his partner having recently passed away—denied that it was due to Jorge’s complaint.

Suspicion, however, has been cast on the ex-cardinal’s refusal for many years to appear as a witness in trials related to alleged crimes against humanity, and journalist Horacio Verbitsky for one has never backed down from the testimony he received in the writing of *El Silencio (The Silence)* in which he cited five priests who affirmed Bergoglio’s collaboration. Estela de la Cuadra, co-founder of the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo organization that seeks to uncover the crimes of the military, stated, “There is a hypocrisy that is related to the church’s entire conduct, and that of Bergoglio in particular. There have been all types of trials and Bergoglio systematically refuses to support them.”

For progressives, then, Francis I remains an ambiguous figure. Early signs from his first days at the Vatican, where he declined the customary gold ring in favor of a silver band, as well as inviting Uruguayan ‘Cura Villero’ Gonzalo Amelius to the Vatican, speak of a Pope that at the very least is not secluded in an ivory tower, and who is committed to

A similar fiery rhetoric was evidenced in his opposition to abortion, still illegal in Argentina as in the vast majority of South America: exhorting supporters to resist what he called the “culture of death” that motivates those in favor of abortion and euthanasia. A growing section of Argentina’s conservative middle and upper classes, tired of what they see as an administration that values the rights of the poor and of marginalized minorities, homosexuals and immigrants, over their right to continue accumulating wealth, becomes ever more vocal and aggressive in their resistance to Cristina’s progressive politics; with Bergoglio in the Vatican, there is more than one Argentine that will tell you that the end is nigh for Fernández and her left-leaning, ‘Chavista’ ideology.

There is little sense in denouncing Christianity, or even the Catholic Church itself, as a fundamentally backwards, damaging institution. Examples abound of what can happen when good, humble people use their faith to make a positive difference, entering the public sphere to make the world a better place. We mourn the passing of Venezuela’s firebrand activist and president Hugo Chávez, but we should never forget that even for ‘El Comandante’, Jesus played as big a

part in his formation as any left-wing thinker. Chávez once called Christ “the greatest socialist in history”, and in his final days turned to religion and repeated his faith in God to cure him of his illness.

The vehicle of Catholicism in South America can be a vehicle of great goodness, a way to reach out to a continent that was converted by force at sword point but yet still hangs on in great numbers to the words of justice and peace on earth that are preached in the bible yet so rarely adhered to by those entrusted to protect the well-being of their citizens. Amongst rapidly secularizing populations, more often than not it is the poorest, those receiving the most limited educations and who live on the edge of oblivion every day in crime-ridden, unsanitary and unplanned settlements who cling on fiercest to Jesus’ teachings. And yet, as can be seen in the examples of Carlos Mugica, the clergymen that perished in the massacre in San Patricio and countless other cases across the globe, Helder Camara’s prophetic statement still holds true. Helping the poor is to be applauded, but to help them see that the instigators of their misery reside in government palaces and cathedrals is tantamount to treason and communism. The activists may work adorned in the hammer and sickle, anarchist red and black or with a crucifix and priests’ robes, but if their message is one of resistance and consciousness then the reaction from our ruling classes is likely to be identical.

Francis I may have given food to the poor, but he never questioned why hundreds of thousands in Buenos Aires and millions in Argentina live in shanty towns, scraping a subsistence-level existence on a handful of dollars a day. This refusal to look the poverty surrounding him in the face and ask why this is so means that our new pontiff is as far removed from heroes such as Father Mugica as Hugo Chávez sat from the Venezuelan elites that for years pillaged the oil-rich nation to the detriment of its poorest. We most likely will never see a disciple of Mugica sitting in the Vatican, but it is these activists, not Bergoglio and the cardinals that elected him, that are truly committed to putting the bible’s words into action. **CP**

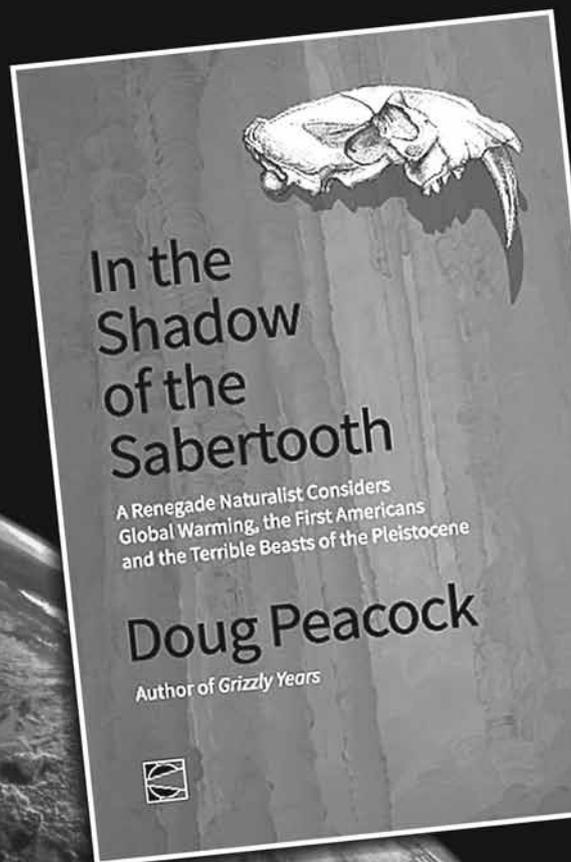
DANIEL EDWARDS is a journalist based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“

**Doug Peacock is
is a direct literary descendant
of Thoreau, with a few genes
from Audubon and his mentor,
Edward Abbey, thrown in for
good measure.**

”

**— Phil Caputo,
Pulitzer Prize Winner**



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CULTURE & REVIEWS

Nanook of the North, Revisited

BY LOUIS PROYECT

Introducing a screening of Robert J. Flaherty's 1922 masterpiece "Nanook of the North" at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian in New York on March 3rd, Inuit throat-singer Tanya Tagaq, there to provide musical accompaniment, warned the audience that her people were *not* cheerful despite the words that appear near the beginning:

The sterility of the soil and the rigor of the climate no other race could survive; yet here, utterly dependent upon animal life, which is their sole source of food, live the most cheerful people in all the world--the fearless, lovable, happy-go-lucky Eskimo.

When Flaherty began filming, the word documentary did not exist. If required to depict the Inuit in *cinéma vérité* fashion, the director would never have bothered since his professed goal was to show the Inuit as they lived before they became corrupted by outside civilization. This meant, for example, directing Nanook to hunt seals with a handcrafted harpoon rather than a rifle, as was customary at the time.

In a 1990 documentary titled "Nanook Revisited" that does aspire to historical accuracy, the production team went to Inukjuak, the village in northern Quebec where Flaherty shot his film, to interview relatives of Nanook's contemporaries as well as knowledgeable villagers. The manager of the local television station, Moses Nowkawalk, was both amused and annoyed by inaccuracies. For example,

Flaherty had Nanook looking mystified by a phonograph player and taking a bite out of a record but Nowkawalk points out that the villagers had been listening to records for years. A cruder version of this scene took place in the 1980 narrative film "The Gods Must Be Crazy" with Kalahari Bushmen, worshipping a Coke bottle tossed out of a airplane.

Much of "Nanook of the North" involves reenactment. For example, one of the most memorable scenes depicts Nanook building an igloo in the way it was done from time immemorial. After the job is completed, the family streams in and waits for night to descend. They tuck themselves into bed (a platform of snow covered by fur) looking as blissed out as models in a Sleepy's mattress commercial. Since it would have been impossible to film inside the dark interior of an igloo, Flaherty instructed Nanook to create only half of one, leaving the interior exposed to light as well as bitter cold. Despite the "cheerful" look of its inhabitants, they are suffering—all for the cause of cinema.

The greatest fiction of all were the characters themselves, who understood that they were actors in a drama built on the premise that they were living the lives of their ancestors. Nanook, which means hunter in the Inuit language, was actually named Allakariallak. His two wives in the film were not really his. Instead, during the course of filming they became Flaherty's mistresses, one giving birth to his son Josephie with whom Flaherty never made contact.

Paddy Aqiatasuk, who became a soapstone sculptor of international renown, eventually adopted Josephie Flaherty. In 1953 the Canadian government forced Paddy's family and two other families to relocate to Ellesmere Island at the far northern reaches of Hudson Bay. Although only 87 Inuit

were exiled, the cruelty and the racism matched that of the forced march of the Cherokees to Oklahoma known as the "trail of tears".

In another documentary committed to the accurate portrayal of Inuit life, titled "Martha of the North", we learn about the suffering of those Inuit families. The Martha of the title is Josephie's daughter and the main subject of the film. She is visiting Ellesmere Island for the first time since her childhood exile. After Martha Flaherty reached adulthood, she became one of the Inuit nation's leading activists for human rights. One can understand the passion of her commitment given the terrible injustices she faced as a child.

The Canadian government, and more particularly the Royal Mounties who supervised the relocation, had a reductionist view of Inuit life. Since the natives were accustomed to frigid conditions and to hunting, why would they object to being moved further north?

For a companion guide to "Martha of the North", it is difficult to imagine anything more sensitively written and well-researched than Melanie McGrath's 2006 "The Long Exile". Here she describes the initial reaction of Paddy and other Inuit to their new surroundings:

And so the days passed and after the second or third week of patchy hunting and endless trips into the mountains for ice and heather, Paddy Aqiatasuk, as camp leader, came to the conclusion that the Lindstrom Peninsula was unsurvivable. He had serious misgivings about the camp's ability even to survive the winter unless they were moved. The shale beach was too narrow and steep and the sheer cliffs behind made it impossible to watch for caribou or polar bears. There was no proper water source and insufficient heather or plant material for fuel.

Growing more and more miserable with conditions on Ellesmere

Island, Paddy convinced his stepson Josephie to join him in the far north. While Josephie was happy to be reunited with Paddy, he was appalled by conditions that forced him and his family to take desperate measures. With food in short supply, the Inuit families began to take long treks on a daily basis to find quarry. On one such trip, the two young sons of Thomasie Amagoalik fell through thin ice and drowned. Meanwhile Josephie brought his young daughter Martha with him on polar bear hunts, as she recounts in the documentary. It was a miracle that she managed to survive such ordeals. When game was not available, the Inuit had no other choice but to dig through the garbage dump of the Royal Mounties looking for scraps just like homeless people. In a very real sense, they were homeless.

If the “trail of tears” was a nation-building exercise on the part of the young and imperial-minded American neighbor to its south, Canada had similar ambitions. In 1953 the Arctic was a contested region with various great powers seeking to control as much territory as possible in the hope that precious resources were in the offing. In the forced settlement of Inuit families to the far north, the Canadian government hoped to establish a legal territorial claim through facts on the ground. This race is ongoing. In September 2012, a Russian submarine lowered a “holy memory capsule” blessed by an Archbishop into the water near the North Pole in a similar bid.

The “scramble for the Arctic” was a typical colonizing project. In “Nanook and His Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922” (Critical Inquiry, Autumn 2000), Shari Huhndorf cites an article by Admiral Peary published in the December 1903 National Geographic:

As a matter of prestige [gaining the Pole] is worthwhile...

As a matter of patriotism based upon the obligations of

our manifest destiny, it is worth while. The North American world segment is our home, our birthright, our destiny. The boundaries of that segment are the Atlantic and the Pacific, the Isthmus and the Pole.... Believe me, the winning of the North Pole will be one of the great milestones of history, like the discovery of the New World by Columbus and the conquest of the Old by Alexander...

Let us attain it, then. It is our privilege and our duty. Let us capture the prize and win the race which the nations of the civilized world have been struggling for for nearly four centuries, the prize which is the last great geographical prize the earth has to offer... What a splendid feat for this great and wealthy country if, having girdled the earth, we might reach the north and south and plant “Old Glory” on each Pole. How the imagination stirs at the thought!

Robert J. Flaherty, an Irishman, came to Canada in the same spirit. Before he became a filmmaker, he worked for a mining company surveying the land for marketable resources. In the course of his travels, he became infatuated with the Inuit and then decided to make a film about them. Combining art and commerce, he received funding from the Revillon Frères fur company in the same way that a documentary about the Olympics might get financial backing from Nike today.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was fascination with the Inuit who were considered unspoiled by an industrial society that was becoming less free even as it was capable of producing consumer goods by the truckload. The Inuit were seen as “noble savages” who were not only capable of living off the grid but being “cheerful” all the while. In reality, however, they were integrated into capitalist property relations just as most native peoples of

Canada were. Companies like Revillon Frères relied heavily on the Inuit or the Blackfoot Indians to hunt and trap beaver and fox for the European luxury market. During the Great Depression, the price of fox pelts declined drastically, throwing the Inuit into economic ruin.

For people like Robert Flaherty, there was a tendency to view the Inuit as they used to be rather than as they were. While he was much more respectful toward them than Admiral Peary who regarded them as childish and backward (even as he relied on them to survive in the far north), he could not accept them on their own terms.

If Flaherty was a product of his age, the same can be said of the renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, from whom a more enlightened attitude might be expected. Despite his professed objection to racism, Boas paid Admiral Peary to bring some “specimens” back to New York where they could be studied at the Museum of Natural History. Like Napoleon Chagnon’s Yanomami, the Inuit were supposedly a people who were a throwback to the stone ages even though they were accustomed to trading furs in exchange for steel knives and rifles. When the Inuit began dying from diseases for which they had no resistance, a survivor demanded that his father’s bones be returned to their homeland. Boas could not be bothered, telling a reporter “the museum had as good a right to it as any other institution authorized to claim bodies.”

Is it any wonder why Tanya Tagaq did not feel cheerful?

As part of a worldwide resistance to white domination, native peoples have been fighting for their rights everywhere in the world, including the Inuit. Among their greatest grievances was the exile to Ellesmere Island. In 1987 the Inuit filed a claim against the Canadian government seeking \$10 million in damages and an apology. After stonewalling for over a decade,

the government acceded to all the Inuit demands. On August 18, 2010 the Minister of Indian Affairs wrote:

We would like to express our deepest sorrow for the extreme hardship and suffering caused by the relocation. The families were separated from their home communities and extended families by more than a thousand kilometres. They were not provided with adequate shelter and supplies. They were not properly informed of how far away and how different from Inukjuak their new homes would be, and they were not aware that they would be separated into two communities once they arrived in the High Arctic. Moreover, the Government failed to act on its promise to return anyone that did not wish to stay in the High Arctic to their old homes.

Of even greater significance was the creation of the province of Nunavut on April 1, 1999. This new Canadian province that included Ellesmere Island was to be the homeland of the Inuit people with their language enjoying the same status as English. Not long after Nunavut came into existence, an employee of Nunavut Arctic College showed up on the Marxism mailing list I moderate. With my sympathy for indigenous struggles, I welcomed him eagerly. He identified the issues that confronted the Inuit historically in a post to the list:

The Hudson Bay Company from

the UK was concerned with furs and instant wealth. The original banalities of the original investors (aristocracy) couldn't see the usefulness of Canada as a land, what they wanted was trading posts to supply the wealth from the north. The different clergy came along too, hanging on the coat-tails of mighty in order to establish their own bridgehead.



Film Still from *Nanook of the North*

There have been many stories told of sexual abuse of aboriginal kids who were forced away to residential schools by the clergy. They were forbidden to use their own languages and mistreated in different ways.

As a symbol of Inuit self-determination, Nunavut is just the tip of the iceberg (pun intended) of a nation seeking to define its own culture and economic destiny. Although it was not intended to be a corrective to "Nanook of the North", the 2001 narrative film "Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner" was the first ever to be made by the Inuit. It is based on a tale handed down through generations via oral traditions. The screenwriter Paul Apak Angilirq, who died in 1998 before the film was com-

pleted, gave an interview to Nancy Wachowich, a Scottish professor. In response to her question about whether the film will be different from others made about the Inuit, he replied:

There are a number of differences between what we are doing and other movies that have been produced regarding our Inuit culture. This movie will be based on an Inuit legend, and also it is all going to be in Inuktitut. And also, all of the actors will have to be Inuk. No Japanese or whoever else who pretend to be Inuit. You know. It will be done the Inuit way. We want things presented in the movie the way they would have happened in real life. That is what we are going to do.

It will be done the Inuit way. That would be the best way to bring the Nanook saga to a just conclusion. **CP**

LOU PROYECT reviews films for *CounterPunch*, blogs at <http://louis-proyect.wordpress.com> and is the moderator of the Marxism mailing list..

FILM NOTES: *Nanook of the North* can be seen on Youtube at http://youtube.com/watch?v=yW6d6B_R2nM. *Nanook Revisited* can be borrowed from well-stocked research libraries, such as Columbia University's. *Martha of the North* is online at <http://blip.tv/free-speech-tv/marth-of-the-north-5929368>. Finally, "Fast Runner" is available as a DVD from Netflix.

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