

CounterPunch

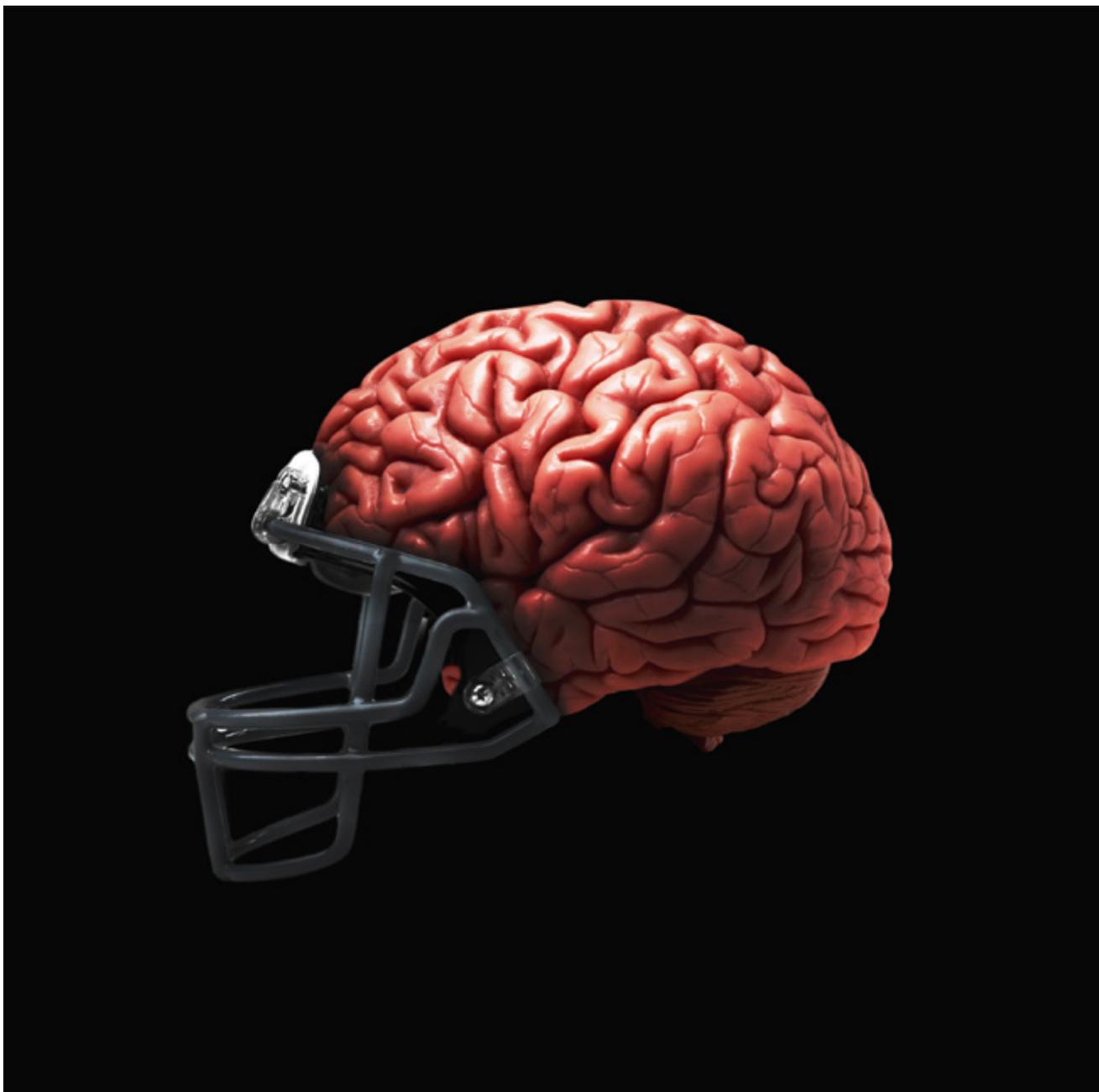
THE DECAY OF AMERICAN MEDIA BY PATRICK L. SMITH

THE BRAIN GAME: NFL FACES THIRD AND LONG BY DAVID MACARAY

THE STAN THAT NEVER WAS: CHINA AND THE UYGHURS BY PETER LEE

THE BLOODY HISTORY OF COTTON BY LEE BALLINGER

SCHOOL OF MORAL STATECRAFT BY CHRIS FLOYD



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Cover Image: Brain Game by Nick Roney

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Socialism, The Future Of

Lee Ballinger writes in his article "Dreaming the Future" in Counter Punch Volume 21 Number 9 an introduction that begins with pre-agricultural humans living lives of subsistence and desperation. From which he moves on to the early agriculturalists, a few of which had the time to consider the meaning of life. And the advent of industry that promised to solve the problems of scarcity. He ends with a discussion of the ability of modern technology to eliminate scarcity and of the possible role of dreaming in shaping a socialism for today. Bunk.

The tens of thousands of years of modern human existence that predated agriculture were composed of populations that grew, supported the specialization of work (clothes and medicine), groups that moved to follow the availability of food, both plant and animal, traded for rare substances like salt obtained at great distances, and left luminous paintings deep in caves. Paintings that evoke in us questions of the meaning of life.

People, especially those that live close to their food supply, know that food scarcity happens: the food supply is interrupted by weather, natural disasters, and human intervention. Families and larger groups have been migrating for all of human existence following their food supply. It's our determination to stay put in our homes that is often at odds with the local availability of

food. Modern industrial food transportation systems have arisen to satisfy this desire.

A brief look at the beginning of industrialism, the so-called Industrial Revolution, reveals that it was founded on the confluence of a wealth of natural resources (iron, coal, water), scientific endeavors that built, for example, a workable steam engine, and money realized from the slave-driven sugar trade. Many steam-powered factories were built with the sugar wealth by working-class men who became quite rich from their efforts. The fate of the factory workers was much different: forced off their land and into the factories by government soldiers and kept there by laws, they lived lives of subsistence and desperation.

Industrialism did not, in my readings at least, promote itself with the lure of the dispatch of scarcity. Indeed, it created its own.

The socialistic notion of "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs" is a fantasy. No amount of dreaming, drug-induced or otherwise, will bring this into a functioning, enduring way of life.

Lenin's ideas of socialism, perhaps the most pure form ever attempted, lasted five years after the Russian Revolution until they were co-opted by Stalin and others. To me this illustrates the all-too-human desire for power and wealth. It is not realistic to think that this desire, and the other of the seven deadly sins, can be

eradicated. Let's get realistic and look to political forms that can limit the damage.

This is indeed what the founders of the USA attempted to do with the Constitution—provide a form of governance that minimized the chances of the mis-use of power. They themselves accepted the natural domination of free white male landowners, a hegemony that has been gradually reduced through constitutional amendments.

I believe the dilemma faced by America today is the result of the intrusion of the economic system of Capitalism into government. The success of capitalism in the 1800s was its superiority over the aristocracy. Today it is its superiority over democracy.

Susan Dorey, San Rafael, CA

All That Jazz

I have been thinking for some time about St. Clair's Oct. 31 essay on Ken Burns and his jazz series, the gist of which I agree with. But I would make the principal sinner Wynton Marsalis, an inveterate self-promoter, whom I remember Oscar Peterson brushing off as a dilettante who can't make up his mind where he wants to base his musical legacy.

I was particularly struck in the Burns series by one of the "interminable" interviews with Marsalis in which he claims that the trumpet is the most demanding of jazz instruments! Just by the remotest coincidence it happens to be his instrument. As someone who monkeyed (without much

aesthetic success) with some of them, I would reply - all instruments are very demanding if played well; the real test is how easy it is to get away with sloppy, technically inferior playing - and I would rate the trumpet near the top in terms of that facility. The most demanding instrument I ever tried - and failed on - is the clarinet. It has no inherent logic to the keys; the two registers are virtually two instruments; and it is unforgiving to sloppy embouchures.

The ending of the Burns series was particularly stupid. Why focus on Dexter Gordon? Sure, he was a fine player, in an era when they were becoming scarce - something on which you and I will have to agree to disagree. But to depict him as the savior of the idiom and the icon of a jazz revival is absurd.

Also I find this search for the grand father-figure that ran through the series to be silly. There seems little scope for disagreement that in the roster of greats, Armstrong and Ellington rank high. But that roster is neither cardinal nor even ordinal. There are others whose influence was demonstrably huge in different directions, but there is no way of really assigning an overall ranking.

Lastly, I guess, while Burns - and Marsalis - certainly fall into the category of musical hero worshipers, their biggest sin seems to me to try to worship their own self-declared genius. And to me that, not their occasional deprecation of a lot of post-1970s jazz (about which I share some of their skepticism) is their real offense.

RT Naylor, Montreal, Quebec



ROAMING CHARGES

The Age of SurrealPolitick

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

I have a soft spot for Harry Reid. Not for his politics, which remain mostly retrograde, but for the man. He is pug-nacious and unvarnished, a real street fighter. Reid has a voice like scratched vinyl, but he is a straight shooter, who rarely speaks cryptically. When he takes a stand, he doesn't flinch under fire.

In a time of political clones, Reid is an original, a working-class Westerner, whose mother, Inez, was a laundress and father a miner, who killed himself during a period of prolonged unemployment. Reid grew up in the desert outpost of Searchlight, in a company hovel without a toilet or a telephone. He put himself through college and law school and clawed his way through the hard-scrabble terrain of Nevada politics from the ground up.

In sum, Harry Reid embodies every quality Barack Obama lacks. Thus it didn't surprise me that Reid dumped most of the blame for the annihilation of the Democrats in the elections at Obama's doorstep. Obama, as if paralyzed by some deep psychological fissure, refuses to battle for his own policies, even when the fate of his own party hangs in the balance. Reid, the former boxer, can't stomach such timidity at times of crisis. Reid is right about Obama, if not for all the right reasons.

For his part, Obama, visibly dazed by the losses, inexplicably cast blame on Latino and black voters, slamming the low turnout among minority voters. He all but called them lazy and ungrateful. One might be tempted to read this bizarre outburst as a kind of subliminal self-loathing, a form of toxic projection. There is a vindictive quality to the Obama persona that strikes out most viciously at those who he believes should love him the most.

Blacks and Hispanics were righ-

teously irked by the president's callous condemnations. After all, the turnout from white progressives, women and unionists was equally deflated. Still the American underclass should have taken credit for the debacle. After all, they've endured the most savage body blows from the Obama incumbency across the past six bleak years.

After the coast-to-coast trouncing, Obama remained in a desultory state as he plotted his next move, the president as somnambulist. Rarely has a major political figure taken such pride in thinking long and deeply over policy matters only to arrive at dumb and un-inspired decisions.

Take Obama's post-election executive action on immigration. At best it was a half-measure, which explicitly exempted the more than two million people deported by Obama himself. This was followed by Obama's timorous and inchoate response to Ferguson, where he couldn't muster an authentic sentiment of moral disgust. Blacks and Hispanics have many reasons to feel enraged about the president's indifferent attitude toward the cruel circumstances of their lives.

The Democrats' death embrace with neoliberalism has gone almost unchallenged since the rise of Jimmy Carter, the grip tightening with each successive election. Now it has all but strangled the life out of the party. The victims of neoliberalism once constituted the Democrats' popular base. Now the Party has become a tomb for its ancient New Deal factions and all the hedge fund dark money in the world won't summon the old troops back to life.

In their place, the mandarins of the DNC have welcomed some of the most malign forces on the American political scene: bond traders and venture capital-

ists, dot.com tycoons and arms manufacturers, private equity sharks and union-busting CEOs, nuclear energy zealots and the shock troops of the Israel lobby. We have officially entered the age of SurrealPolitick.

Even though the prickly word "inequality" rarely surfaced in the fall campaigns, it is almost an inviolate rule of American politics that all elections, when you drill into the deep demographic strata, are about the economy. Obama's recovery is an illusion manufactured by shopworn parlor tricks from the Federal Reserve. Few are buying it any more. The economy remains entropic, the heat steadily leaking away. The mood of the nation is sour. The country is mired in a kind of slow-motion dissolution.

But I am ever the optimist. I think this election was about more than the dismal economic circumstances. I believe the election was a mass expression of contempt: for Obama, for the Democrats, for the whole rancid system that promises hope and delivers only deprivation and more war. Sooner or later the bill for these betrayals comes due. A price must be paid.

The contradictions of the Democratic Party have reached the cracking point. Who would defend a party which refuses to defend its own most vulnerable adherents? Who would defend a party that sedulously squelches each new spark of idealist fervor, from Occupy Wall Street to the Dream Defenders, while maniacally pursuing job-killing trade pacts like the TPP? It should be torn asunder, before it collapses from its own internal state of decay.

Barack Obama offered himself as an outsider, a new kind of political figure, who would challenge the prevailing forces of corporate thievery and military adventurism. In the end, he proved to be their unapologetic agent.

That then is the tragedy of Obama, the president who wouldn't stand his ground. From his fall, let a new resistance rise. **CP**



DIAMONDS AND RUST

Vindication of Love

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

Dave Colarusso is not accustomed to a stage. Most people aren't, actually. Then death comes to someone close, and they rise, or fall, to the occasion. Dave looked out at the crowd at Bernard Baran's memorial and said, "Loving Bee was the easiest thing I've ever done"; said it plain and pure the way a person might who has known one true feeling in life and still can't quite believe his luck.

The two had met in a Massachusetts penitentiary, first as friends, the one supporting the other in an ugly place, where Dave, so it seemed, had been in greater danger of sinking. Not that Bee was safe. He was a slight kid of 19 when he was sentenced to three consecutive life terms, and he suffered almost immediately. But he also set his mind against theft, soul-theft, the final triumph of the violence system that landed him where he was. Dave he took by the hand, rescued, and one day they found they were in love.

He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

In the photograph projected large against a wall beside the stage, Bee is free and beautiful. It is summertime, probably in Boston, maybe at a Pride parade; he is wearing a baseball cap, tank top and a countenance of joyous goodness.

If you have never heard the name, I suppose you want to know what Baran was in for. I suppose I must explain, though that was neither the focus of the memorial nor the reason for my telling this story now.

Bernard Baran was the first day care worker to be falsely prosecuted, con-

victed and put away as a dangerous pervert during America's Satanic panic years. That was in Pittsfield in 1984. His trial was a sham, a fact affirmed by a court after years of dedicated advocacy coordinated by the National Center for Reason and Justice. Baran was released in 2006. He was 41. He died suddenly on September 1, 2014, at 49.

The accusations were a travesty, fueled by homophobia and family crisis. Lately it has emerged that the prosecutor, Daniel Ford, withheld from the defense exculpatory unedited videotaped interviews with the purported child victims. Stoking hysteria vaulted Ford to higher things; he became a Superior Court judge five years after robbing Bee of his youth. As Harvey Silverglate, one of Baran's appeals lawyers, argues, Ford should be stripped of his post. Any prosecutor who pursues a wrongful conviction and breaks rules of trial should face consequences.

The case always deserved more attention, but in life it never outshone the man. In death, Dave Colarusso's talk, especially, rescued Bee's memory from the amber of corruption.

"We took our love serious," Dave said.

His Fitchburg accent bore the weight of his own lost years. How long had he been imprisoned? Massachusetts still produces people who talk this way, but the accent is moving to the margins. Dave, a working-class man, an ex-con, a homosexual, speaking tenderly of his love, their love and life, in public, without euphemism, was speaking the oldest language of all.

From the same stage, Baran's mother, Bertha Shaw, described her gay child: a 6-year-old appearing at the top of the stairs just-so in white trousers before an amusement park outing, brushing dirt

off his pantleg through the day, joining a marching band from the sidelines of a parade, dancing down the street in his tucked-up summer outfit. The child with a keen sense of his own body, his own appearance—"his way," she called it—this child would have to endure, later, rapes and beatings and moment-to-moment punishment of the senses. He would put on love, as they say, and he would save his soul.

Perhaps he was always campy, Bertha's "special boy." But once inside, camp became his armor, his assertion of himself, even if the lines of self and stylization might blur in performance. As with the tough guy, the ascetic, the wise one, the camp performance—to one who bothers to know himself—is a multi-hued jacket, protective but revealing, too. Twenty-one years Bee was inside for something he didn't do, longer than he'd known life outside. At final count, he would dance back into his cell before the awful clang of the door shutting him in for the night. He did not dance because he was happy, but he was happy still to love dancing.

When Bee's straight older brother spoke, he asked his wife to stand near. Her hand was on his shoulder as the stocky man quivered. In childhood, he said, he took it as his job to protect Bee from the cruelty of other kids. He is plagued—and this he never managed to say while Bee lived—by the knowledge that he could not protect him from the greatest cruelty; but struck, too, thinking now that his little gay brother had been far stronger than he, far tougher, and for that realization, along with his immense loss, he wept.

"We took our love serious."

In so many ways external life makes love hard. So many ways we deceive ourselves that love is secondary to politics or work or oppression; that it can come later, after we've handled the really important matters, once we've sprung the prison bars of the Man's or our own construction. There is no later, only now. This is the final gift from one brave and brazen man. We love, or we perish. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

School of Moral Statecraft

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Although we live in an age of outrages that keep the mind in a state of continual embogglment, it was still something of a shock to see the brazen hypocrisy displayed by the Lords of the West last month when they “confronted” Vladimir Putin at the five-star freakshow known as the G20. As the breathless headlines in the entirely free and not-at-all government-influenced Western media related, the paragons of the “Anglosphere” lined up to deliver some stark home truths to the Russian honcho about his wanton “interference” in the sovereign affairs of another country.

No doubt the Kremlin mountaineer was shaking in his boots from the tongue-lashings ladled out by the pasty-faced PR flack, David Cameron, the gibbering, land-raping woman-hating twit, Tony Abbot, and that oozing mass of bile in a suit, Stephen Harper. (Oh, there were giants in those days, our grandchildren will surely say of the heroes who walk among us.)

But the squeakings of these pips were as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal to the moral thunder of the Prince of Peace his own self, Barack Nobel Obama, when he took his turn at the stern finger-wagging. A man who for six years has directed a worldwide campaign of drone terrorism, reserving the right to intervene in any country, anywhere, with deadly force, with public bombs and private murder, a man who began his term by green-lighting a brutal coup in Honduras that overthrew a democratically elected government and ushered in a reign of society-devouring crime and chaos, a man who joined with hand-picked oligarchs to pour \$5 billion into a campaign to overthrow the democratically elected

government in Ukraine (entering into an alliance with armed, avowedly neo-fascist factions to bring about the final blow)...this is the man who had the DU-plated brass to publicly admonish another national leader in these terms:

“We’re also very firm on the need to uphold core international principles, and one of those principles is you don’t invade other countries or finance proxies and support them in ways that break up a country that has mechanisms for democratic elections.” Never let it be said that the American elite doesn’t have a sense of humor. For not only was the leader of the world’s chief invader, intervener and subverter of other nations—including Ukraine—hawking this hypocrisy in public, he was delivering it as a criticism of unseemly intervention in...Ukraine! This comedy tour-de-force recalls the brilliant work of Obama’s predecessor, George Diddly Bush, who used to leave ‘em laughing in the aisles with his blasts at “foreign nations interfering in Iraq”—even as he was happily killing thousands of innocent Iraqis with a foreign invading army. These guys are a riot.

But perhaps we should tread more lightly here. After all, in our brave new Cold War world, to utter criticism of the Ukrainian upheaval is to find oneself lambasted as a “Putin apologist” or a “blinker Russophile” foolishly swallowing Kremlin propaganda...and probably in the pay of Kremlin gold.

This tedious reaction is as old as the hills, of course. I’m sure that when Cato the Elder (the John McCain of ancient Rome) ended every speech with “Furthermore, Carthage must be destroyed!” anyone who objected was invariably denounced as a “Punic apologist” or a “Didoist appeaser.” The

idea that you cannot criticize your own country’s dangerous policies without automatically being a supporter (or “lover”) of the regimes targeted by those policies is primitive and puerile in the extreme—which, naturally, makes it the prevailing attitude in America’s super-sophisticated and deeply nuanced political discourse today.

That Putin’s Kremlin regime is vile should go without saying. In fact, it is more vile than most of our newfangled Cold Warriors know. Their main objection to Putin is that he does not show proper, cowering deference to American dictates on foreign policy and economic exploitation. If he got with the Potomac program, if he kowtowed to the “Washington consensus” and let our big dogs eat anywhere and everywhere they like, why then, our leaders would still be looking deep into his eyes and seeing a soulmate, as Diddy did in days of old.

But they could not give a damn about the actual lives of actual Russian people. They were happy to see millions of Russians go under in the neo-liberal “Shock Doctrine” unleashed by the properly deferential Yeltsin administration. And if Vlad got his mind right with the Man, they would just as happily turn a blind eye to the deprivations of today’s Putinistan—a ghastly conglomerate of Tea Party crankery, authoritarian religiosity in the Saudi manner, and old-fashioned hardball oligarchism, in the Rockefeller-Morgan-Koch-Omidyar style.

The situation on the ground is grim in Russia right now, as my friends there can amply testify. But the West’s aggressive machinations only intensify the siege mentality that ‘justifies’ authoritarian rule. (A dynamic running rampant in the Western ‘democracies’ as well.) Putin might be a putz, but as a “threat” to “core international principles,” he is an absolute piker next to our pious Western paladins, whose interventions and proxies have brought whole nations (Libya, Syria, Iraq, et al) to violent ruin—and promise to set many more aflame. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Washington's Enemies List

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Vladimir Putin might be the most popular leader of our time. According to a survey conducted by the Levada Center in August, the Russian President's public approval ratings stand at a towering 87 percent, the highest of any leader in the world today. Putin's popularity has been boosted by domestic policies which have revitalized the Russian economy, lifted millions out of poverty, improved education, expanded health care and the strengthened the pension system. He's also credited with having brought Russia back from the brink of disaster following years of misrule under the drunken Yeltsin who allowed the country to be looted by voracious oligarchs and their neoliberal allies from the U.S. In short, Putin has been good for Russia and the Russian people are appreciative.

But while Putin may be widely admired in his own country, the reverse is true in the U.S. where politicians and the media berate him at every opportunity calling him a KGB thug, a coldblooded autocrat or a "new Hitler." Why is that? Why is Putin loved by Russians but reviled by Americans?

In the U.S., public perceptions are largely shaped by what people read in the media. But the U.S. media is universally hostile towards Putin because they see him as a threat to their interests. Putin has repeatedly criticized the way the U.S. conducts its foreign policy and he has taken steps to curb U.S. power by forming critical alliances that challenge America's dominant role in the world. Naturally, Washington is not happy about this, which is why the media has been deployed to demonize Putin whenever they can.

The war in Ukraine has created many opportunities to smear Putin as a reck-

less aggressor and a warmonger. Just last week numerous articles reported that "a column of 32 Russian tanks and truckloads of troops" had been sent over the border to help "pro-Russian separatists." Moscow quickly denied the claims and said the reports were nonsense, but the damage had been done. Hours later, the Pentagon acknowledged that the report was false and that there was "no evidence" of a Russian invasion. Readers who follow developments in Ukraine closely, know that the big-name news organizations run fake reports like this all the time. It's a type of information warfare intended to turn public opinion against Russia and Putin. And it works, too. In a recent survey, Gallup found that "Americans' views of Russia and Putin are the worst in years". A full 63% of Americans view Putin unfavorably. This is the power of propaganda.

Washington's animus towards Putin can be traced back to a speech he gave in Munich on February 12, 2007. This is where he lambasted the "unipolar world" model as "pernicious" and denounced the U.S.'s self-serving supervision of global security.

"Today we are witnessing a nearly-uncontained hyper-use of military force in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts," Putin said. "We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. One state...has overstepped its national borders in every way...And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasize this—no one feels safe."

The day after Munich, Putin delivered another blistering salvo at an International Economic Forum in St Petersburg. In that speech, he demand-

ed "a new architecture for economic relations requiring an alternative global financial center that will make the ruble the reserve currency." He added that the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the IMF are "archaic, undemocratic and inflexible" and do not "reflect the new balance of power."

So in less than 24 hours, Putin had blasted all the institutions responsible for America's exalted position as the world's only superpower. Is it any wonder why Washington decided to put him on the enemies list?

Even so, Putin has never backed down. In fact, he's gotten more blunt as time goes by. In a speech last month at Valdai Club, he accused the U.S. of jettisoning the global security system, that's been in place since World War II, and replacing it with nothing. "Having declared itself the winner of the Cold War", the U.S. no longer feels like it has to play by the rules. It simply pursues its own interests without the slightest regard for the laws that have been put in place to minimize aggression.

"International law has been forced to retreat over and over by the onslaught of legal nihilism," said Putin. "Objectivity and justice have been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Arbitrary interpretations have replaced legal norms. At the same time, total control of the mass media has made it possible to portray white as black and black as white."

How can anyone dispute this? Even the idea of national sovereignty, which is the cornerstone of international relations, has been thrown on the scrapheap. The United States simply refuses to accept any higher authority than itself. As George Bush senior said following the fall of the Berlin Wall, from now on, "What we say goes." While that maxim might work for Washington, it's hardly a credible blueprint for global security.

Putin is right, we need a rules-based system that will help prevent, manage or resolve crises. Otherwise, we're doomed. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

The Radiation Zone

BY KRISTIN KOLB

The waiting room for radiation therapy at the cancer centre is either a frightening tunnel of doom, or a self-help coffee klatch (“Laughter is the best medicine, chuckle, chuckle!”), depending on the day of the week. No matter what the ambience, cable news plays in front of us – cancer patients and caregivers.

I’ve now submitted myself, arms fixed, eyes open, to the machine fueled by Cobalt 60 some 13 times. There are 15 more sessions planned. The radiotherapy device looks like a large, old-school telephone that maneuvers serpentine around my body, zapping my chest at three different angles. On the computer monitor, I see what reminds me of my own 3D death mask on the screen, to remind the technicians of the precise angles and calculations required for the proper beam.

“Just move your arm a teeny 2 degrees in, Kristin, and hold it.” That way we miss your heart. DO NOT touch the machine. Don’t move, but breathe.”

Then the techs scurry away, bolt the foot-wide metal door, the red alarm lights up, and the jack-hammer sounds begin, as the machine circles my body in three cacophonous zaps. It’s more like ZAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAP.

Then it’s all done. “Enjoy your day.”

One fake boob is half deflated for this daily ritual. The other is swelling with radioactivity, like it’s going to burst when I lie down to rest. 15 more, I say.

A friend told me that cancer treatment was described to him as running two marathons, and radiation was the equivalent of daily wind sprints after that. I’m no Iron Woman, but what he says feels correct. I want diversions

and eye candy to keep me from thinking about the machine I meet every morning, alone, with alarms blaring.

Jenni Diski has been writing flawlessly in the *London Review of Books* lately about her cancer treatment. I can’t compete or compare. I never met Doris Lessing. Just a plebian here. But one thing she mentions is that she’s never watched another person die. And having cancer is her first real experience with bodily decline, watching herself die.

I can understand this. My mother is healthier than I am. As is this rest of the family. My grandparents died in their 80s from what we used to call “old age.”

Then there is my father. I was estranged from him when he died. My half-sister saw a “selfie” I took after my hair started growing back, and then sent me a photo of him shortly after he was diagnosed with lung cancer at 75. He is sitting at his epic wooden desk, in front of his law books. His hands are crossed, “oak-like” according to my friend, Jim Lipton. But his eyes deceive him. They are full of both strength and sorrow. My sister, Keily, sent it to me to show how much I remind her of him. Strength and sorrow, or in her words, “haunting.”

On the day of the Grand Jury verdict regarding the murder of Michael Brown, in my home state of Missouri, where my father practiced law and pro bono supported civil rights cases, I sat in the radiation therapy waiting room, amongst the coffee and pastries of three women who had finished their treatment. CNN was on. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon was bull-shitting. I was crooning my neck to listen to what was happening at home.

In the waiting room, I was offered

cinnamon rolls and drinks. “No thanks. I’m off caffeine and sugar.”

Then I was accosted by the partner of a woman with my exact same cancer. She’s an “energy healer” and told me my aura was “dark blue” – I’m obviously lonely and she had to “block my light.”

This was when the media in my home state of Missouri was sitting and spinning, waiting for a riot.

I went in and got zapped to fucking Foreigner on the radio.

A few days later, the waiting room was quiet, and I listened to New York Mayor Bill de Blasio soft-rock his way through a speech about the horrifying death of Eric Garner, then I got zapped to Air Supply.

“I can’t breathe,” Garner wheezed. I don’t have to tell you the scene. You know.

Neither can I. My heart is a mess. But I have a choice to stop it, the treatment, don’t I? Go to naturopaths, Vitamin C injections, yoga, et al. That’s for rich folk.

I can tell you one thing. My cancer treatment has been endless surprises. The brutal deaths occurring in the United States due to racism, and on my hometown turf, are nothing but the same in, same out. No surprises.

How any of this is happening, cancer, shooting, choking – young death – in the 21st Century, well, that’s the mystery to me. **CP**

The Decay of American Media

Toward a Poor Journalism

BY PATRICK L. SMITH

One evening a half-dozen years ago, I stayed at the house of Albert Maysles, the noted documentary filmmaker, in upper Manhattan. I had just flown in from Hong Kong, where I was living at the time. This was my first trip back to the States in some years.

Something strange—strange to me—happened over dinner. We had not quite finished when someone looked at the kitchen clock and exclaimed, “*The Colbert Report* is on in three minutes!” In half that time the table was empty and we all had seats around the television set. No one—no one other than I—seemed to think this abrupt migration needed explaining.

I had never before seen a show such as Stephen Colbert’s. I knew nothing of the commonly understood genealogy: Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show* begat *The Colbert Report*, even as it has more recently begotten John Oliver’s *Last Week Tonight*. “Fake news” is now a broadcasting genre. I confess I still do not watch these programs much. But I go back to that evening, when the phenomenon came at me all at once. “First thought best thought,” Ginsberg used to say. And my first thought about this new kind of humor—comedians cast as news presenters—disturbs me as much now as it did then.

Fake news shows are a particular kind of satire. They are political, plainly, but this did not strike me, and does not now, as their salient feature. They are first of all media satire. They are about an official version of the truth, and the media’s participation in the production and dissemination of this untrue truth. They are finally about what we, consumers and users of information, know to be the true truth—or at least a truer truth—and the distance between this truth and the official version. As a friend explained that evening in a truth-telling filmmaker’s living room, “It’s humor, but it’s where we get ‘the news.’ It’s funny because it’s so far from what the media tell us. That’s ‘the joke.’”

“You’ll get used to it,” someone else added.

I never have. As I went upstairs that night, that first thought was, “This is what the Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians did during the later Soviet period.” All was text and subtext: This was their joke. Authentic communication was openly secret, buried within the orthodoxy. Satire was more than a comic device: It was a mask one wore to preserve some shred of authenticity in public space. If all culture is subculture, as I have

long thought, the East Europeans gave a perfect example. And our mainstream media, where these programs appear, have entered their East European phase. The Czechs did not use the term “fake news,” surely. But for them it would have been a misnomer, upside down, as it is for television-viewing Americans in the early 21st century. The fake news is what is satirized, the satire is the real.

It is treacherous to posit the golden age of anything, and especially so if the topic is the American press. Doris Kearns Goodwin, the hagiographer of “great Americans,” recently assigned the label to the Progressive Era, and Bill Keller, the former executive editor of *The New York Times*, called Kearns’s book “a pretty grand story” in his review of it. It is that—a story—but it does not hold up otherwise. The noted muckrakers of the time—Steffens, Tarbell, Sinclair Lewis—wrote an alternative truth in opposition. There was nothing otherwise golden going on. Mainstream journalism was Hearst and Pulitzer, who fear-mongered among white Americans with the “yellow peril” theme and got war fever going as Roosevelt made up reasons to start the Spanish-American War. This was the story, not the sidebar, and good enough to begin a critique of the press as we have it with mention of this period. Relations between the media and power have rarely been healthy since.

Even without some golden age as reference, American media are well on in a critical period of decay—critical to any paying-attention practitioner and also to what little remains of American democracy. Readers of this magazine will not find the thought that mainstream media are unreliable at all surprising. But the betrayal of ordinary readers and viewers has reached an extreme—so generating a deserved mistrust that is probably without precedent. A startling proportion of people are at least faintly aware that they are being misled, incessantly treated to lies as to events, causality, responsibility, and motive. There is as much or more misinformation and disinformation as at the height of the Cold War decades.

There is very much more of what I call “the power of leaving out,” the untruth of omission. This one finds in every edition of every major newspaper, on every wire service, and in every broadcast news report. It is especially prevalent in coverage of foreign affairs. Washington’s authorization of last year’s coup in Egypt has had one mention in the mainstream American press, and this appears to have been a slip of the tongue, never repeated. The Obama administration backed a coup in Kiev and now backs a government that is the first anywhere since 1945 to equip and field Nazi militias. Mention of these too-large-to-evade facts are so few and so attenuated that reality is deprived of any reality. This is the power of leaving out.

The extreme just noted is alarming and has come upon us over the past dozen years. Since 2001 American media have committed themselves to totalizing what now amounts to a parallel reality. Ukraine, wherein this extreme has worsened

measurably, is a textbook example. The coup earlier this year and the war that followed had little to do with democratic principles and everything to do with (1) wresting Crimea's Black Sea naval installations from Moscow's control and (2) gaining access to natural gas resources for Chevron and other energy corporations. These realities are documented; I have seen not a single mention of either in mainstream American media.

We have seen this elsewhere and read our Orwell and must put aside what versions of "it can't happen here" may linger within us. This is a capitulation to a pernicious assignment: to transform the national discourse into spectacle. Thinking in terms of public space, we now live in a strategic hamlet. "We are destroying the village to save it" was the thought behind the Pentagon's Vietnam-era euphemism. We can borrow it in that our media have all but destroyed our public space in the name of preserving it. I would defend these assertions against any charge of exaggeration.

* * *

There are things to do in response to this new circumstance. But before proceeding to them it is best to understand the pathology that has led the press and its users into this moment of crisis.

Since 1945, after which American primacy reached its high point, the nation's media have had two moments when they faced the same fundamental choice. These came in 1947, when the Truman administration started the Cold War by backing the Greek monarchy against a democratic insurgency, and in 2001, when the second Bush administration declared its "war on terror." In each case the media were forced into a choice they never should have accepted or made. This was between their professional standards and ethics, however well or badly they lived by them, and patriotic loyalty. In each case they made the mistake of choosing, and twice they chose wrongly.

The Cold War decades were without question the single most shameful passage in the modern history of the American press. This is why so little is ever said today about what newspapers and broadcasters did during this time. The record is clear and perfectly available. But one finds no desire to examine it with the intent of learning from error. I have often argued in our post-2001 context that the best way for a journalist to be a good American is to be a good journalist. With exceptions, this thought was absent from the 1950s through the 1980s. Fear ruled, not less in the press than in film and elsewhere. One was a patriot first, only then a professional. In effect, a journalist following this dictum was neither, of course. The Watergate period was one exception, but the power the press exercised, and the independence it displayed, led quickly to a reconsolidation of power over it once Reagan assumed the presidency. American media had a very bad Cold War, in short, and in my view they have never

recovered.

Now to the second decisive moment.

Last summer, after she was fired as Bill Keller's successor at the *Times*, Jill Abramson gave a speech at the Chautauqua Institution, an old convocation of well-intended self-improvers in upstate New York. In it, Abramson described and then explained the media's response to the September 11th attacks in New York and Washington. She was the *Times*' Washington bureau chief when, immediately afterward, Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary, convened every influential editor in the capital on a conference call. This was the defining encounter, as Abramson described it:

The purpose of his call was to make an agreement with the press—this was just days after 9/11—that we not publish any stories that would go into details about the sources and methods of our intelligence programs. I have to say, that in the wake of 9/11, all of us readily agreed to that.

A minute or so later on the podium, Abramson reflected thus:

It wasn't complicated to withhold such information. And for some years, really quite a few years, I don't think the press, in general, did publish any stories that upset the Bush White House or seemed to breach that agreement.

Elsewhere in her presentation, Abramson offered a personal view that stands as the clearest example I have ever heard or read of the error I described above: "Journalists are Americans, too," she said in defense of all the withheld stories and all the leaving out that flowed from the pact with Fleischer. "I consider myself...to be a patriot."

The second moment of decision was a straight-ahead reprise of the first, which is what you get when you refuse to look at the past and learn from it, and the years since speak for themselves. In each case, there was a question of identity: What is the media's relationship to power? Is it, in the old spirit of "the Fourth Estate," a freestanding pole of power, or is it an adjunct of political and military power and the power of prevailing ideology? In our context, consider simply the consequences had the American press resisted (as others outside America did) Bush's definition of the war on terror as war. A critical distance would have been restored, and it is very possible we would now have a government less violent and reckless abroad and less intrusive everywhere.

As it has happened, the mainstream press now fails its public incessantly. There is a straight line with many markers between its indefensible coverage of the WMD fabrications preceding the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the lapses in coverage of the NSA, coverage of the coups in Egypt and Ukraine, of Syria and across the Middle East and elsewhere. As this list sug-

“Our media have all but destroyed our public space in the name of preserving it.”

gests, the betrayals of principle and responsibility are worst in cases of events abroad and national security. To me, this reflects our historical moment: In America’s late-imperial phase, the preservation of power and primacy now becomes an ever more desperate project. Given the identity they have chosen for themselves at critical moments, the media must make their commitment to official text total—so creating the elaborate subtext, a vast unsayable next to the sayable. This is a distinction most of us know and make even if we are not consciously aware of it.

* * *

In her post-*Times* pose as media critic, Abramson speaks often of “our mandate to keep all of you informed,” as she put it in the Chautauqua lecture. The phrase is only apparently innocuous. In it we find the original sin that now leads media on their course of self-destruction. To understand this we have to go back to the 1920s and two of the period’s prominent thinkers, Walter Lippmann and John Dewey.

Dewey, the noted social reformer, and Lippmann, the journalist and public intellectual, were concerned with the same new question. America was busy industrializing, urbanizing, and corporatizing. Power in the post-World War I era was suddenly more complex and opaque. What is the fate, then, of the citizen in a mass democracy? How could people keep up with all that occurred around them? And what, therefore, was the proper function of the press?

What comes down to us as the Lippmann-Dewey debate is well-known among journalism professors and a few thoughtful journalists. Oddly, the two never debated: They simply published different positions on these questions. Lippmann, high priest in the American cult of the expert, had little faith in a democratic citizenry. Political affairs and policy were to be the preserve of a sequestered elite. Journalists were to be part of this elite, their task being to convey information downward from the mount—“to keep all of you informed,” in Abramson’s phrase. She and almost all her mainstream colleagues are Lippmannites, in a word.

Dewey was with Lippmann in more respects than is commonly understood. Neither thought the average citizen able to grasp current events beyond those of very immediate interest. But he was suspicious of any notion that the press was to act as the tribune-like bearer of news from the cloistered universe of experts outward to the less capable masses. Dewey, of a communitarian bent, saw the press as public space wherein took place an infinitely sided exchange. Its job was to give

readers all available perspectives, so enabling them to judge independently of interests. Between Dewey and Lippmann, roughly speaking, lay the difference between popular and elite democracy, Jefferson and Hamilton.

There is a large irony here. Lippmann, like many a disillusioned socialist after him, advertised himself as a democratic realist. But his faith in the integrity and disinterest of a trained elite was hopelessly idealistic. Dewey was an idealist, but his argument that the press should be embedded in its community and stand at a distance from political and corporate power was and remains unassailably realistic. Implicitly, Lippmann posited a passive citizenry, Dewey one of activists. Many commentators have weighed in on Lippmann-Dewey over the decades. Among the better of them is E.J. Dionne, the *Washington Post* columnist, who took up the topic in his 1996 book on progressive Democrats, *They Only Look Dead*: “Journalism ought to be where facts, convictions, and argument meet...The press, by seeing its role as informing the public, abandons its role as an agency for carrying on the conversation of our culture.”

This abandonment is now more or less complete. We live amid the inevitable outcome of the two moments of decision described earlier, when media sealed their fate as Lippmannites. Standing at the far end of the second of these decisive moments, it is easy to see where it has led the profession. The stance of the journalist in the face of power must by definition be adversarial. For any reporter or editor who assumes the Lippmannite position, the job description changes from journalist to clerk. And this is what American journalists, by and large, have made of themselves: With notable exceptions, they manage the bulletin boards of the political, policy-making, defense, and security cliques wherein American power now resides.

* * *

It is impossible to look upon this impasse and leave it without response. Who will carry on the conversation of our culture? As anyone who travels outside America knows, our press has left many Americans strikingly ignorant relative to others as to the world around us and our nation’s place in it. This is perilous. How to replace this ignorance with knowledge and understanding?

My answers begin with this: The place of alternative media such as *CounterPunch* has already begun to change fundamentally. Among mainstream media we see a hollowing out in which no future is apparent: They retain influence as they

surrender credibility. All mainstream journalism, on and off the battlefield, effectively becomes “embedded journalism.” This process will continue, influence ever dwindling. And it places a new weight of responsibility on so-called alternative media. I have never cared for this term, and now, ever more plainly, these media provide not “alternative” narrative and interpretation but authentic versions of the same. They publish and broadcast less “against” media more powerful than they but “for” perfectly ordinary, discernible truths. They are the antidote to ignorance.

There is also the responsibility all of us bear, but journalists in particular, to history. Mainstream journalists do not often produce history’s first draft, as the old adage goes, however much they may or may not have done so in the past. Journalism in our time and by the evidence in many others, is the first draft of the accounting of things power intends to deploy to keep truth out of the history books. It is important now for journalists outside the mainstream to recognize the burden this places upon them. They are the historian’s true friends and bear the duty the historian imposes. Plainly and simply, this means forcing the great unsayable into what is said. It is to push the naked emperor squarely into the conversation. And this is done whenever journalists speak the unspoken language. This is the task of those truly responsible among them.

* * *

It will be evident by now that I advocate a top-to-bottom renovation. By this I mean an act of restoration accomplished over a period of time, a recovery of journalism as an autonomous institution. How and where this is done is an inside-outside question. In the “where” box, the job might get done within established media, but this is far from certain and a generational project even in the best outcome. And alternative media are again essential in any case: Only in their presence will mainstream organs accept any obligation to evolve.

As to the “how”—what exactly re-imagined media might look like—there are countless answers. We already have numerous examples of the process in motion, but there is a lot of territory still unexplored. My own thinking draws from an unlikely source. Some readers will remember Jerzy Grotowski, the Polish theater director and theorist prominent in the late 1960s. His most influential book, published in 1968, was called *Towards a Poor Theater*, and I name my thesis in tribute: I urge journalists to work toward a poor journalism.

Grotowski’s project rested on a radical stripping away. Theater by his time was encrusted with convention, artifice, and “plastic elements”—elaborate costume and makeup, lighting, sets, and so on. Lots of distracting junk at the expense of purity, in short. With naturalism the principle, the proscenium had become a prison, confining actors and audiences alike. Performers wore “life masks,” alienated not just

from their audiences but, more poignantly, from their own thoughts, emotions, and bodies. A play, in short, was mere spectacle. This Grotowski called “rich theater.”

Poor theater arose from the simple question, What is theater? When all not essential is taken away, what remains? Grotowski’s answers were two. When rich theater’s furnishings were removed, including the proscenium, it transformed the performer-audience relationship: They entered into the rawest kind of direct contact possible. Two, there was performance, the actors. In his Polish Theater Laboratory, Grotowski trained them for years—in movement and muscle control, psychological and emotional training—to equip them to connect, above all and as honestly as possible, with themselves—and only then with an audience. This was poor theater, the object being “to cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness.” (Anyone who saw Beck and Malina’s Living Theater at this time, or Joe Chaikin’s Open Theater, has an idea of what Grotowski meant.)

We borrow and bend Grotowski’s question, then. What is journalism before it is anything else? A few dozen journalism graduates scattered around the world will know my answer: It is seeing and saying, at bottom nothing more. Scrape away the superfluous and the conventions and you have reporting, observation, and writing or speaking or filming. All the rest is eligible for removal, and the craft’s accreted encumbrances are simply too numerous to name. Many derive from unhealthy relationships with power—political power, corporate power, financial power (via the stock market listings of media companies), bureaucratic power, the power of editorial hierarchies, the power of embedded ethical corruptions. All these must be scrubbed clean. The journalist as seer and sayer discards almost all of the intricate conventions familiar to anyone practicing the craft. There is no beholden-ness to come between the journalist and the work.

Among the too-numerous-to-list problems, three are egregious. One is the corrupting of accuracy and honesty in exchange for access. No journalist alive does not know the unwritten rules of “the access game.” All offers to bargain on the point should be withdrawn. Two is the self-censorship transmitted throughout the system. This has been prevalent and customary for so long as to be more pernicious than the overt variety. Once journalism reclaims its proper place, this can recede and disappear.

Three concerns language. To assume the language of institutions and the language of sources and those covered—civilian casualties are “collateral damage,” flesh-and-blood soldiers are “boots on the ground,” the coup in Egypt last year was “the restoration of democracy,” and so on infinitely—is to work in false language. It is to make the journalist a collaborator. It is the single most effective device forcing journalists into the state of alienation from self that is common among them. The language of obscurantist bureaucrats is required at one or another organ according to its proximity to power,

the *Times* being Exhibit A. Orwell described the way false language devastates our ability to think clearly—precisely its purpose—in “Politics and the English Language,” published in the spring of 1946, and the problem as we have it is seven decades’ worth of worse.

I describe a cleansing process only in brief, but its point should be plain. Rich journalism creates distance between readers and journalists and—miss this not—between journalists wearing the “life-masks” of the profession and themselves—what they truly know and think and think should be said. These distances—journalist from reader, journalist from himself or herself—are now fixed in the culture of the craft. Fake news programs, returning to our starting point, are satires of an alienation that cannot be mentioned. Poor journalism is intended to erase these distances and this alienation—to discard the proscenium, we can say, and make the journalist whole, integrated, not a stranger to himself—filling our emptiness, in Grotowski’s phrase.

This may come across as an angelic idea of what can be done to remedy a dysfunction in our media culture now not short of dangerous. I usually quote Bergson in response to these kinds of charges: “It is no use maintaining that any leap forward does not imply a creative effort. That would be to forget that most great reforms appeared at first impracticable, as in fact they were.” Any journalist who may read this essay can think of it this way: To the extent this project seems impractical is precisely the extent it needs to get done.

* * *

One other aspect of this renovation project—of the many I cannot cover here—must be mentioned briefly. To introduce it, this:

A dozen or so years ago the Overseas Press Club, a long moribund and lately revived institution in New York, gave one of its annual prizes to Amy Goodman, noted host of *Democracy Now!* Tom “Greatest Generation” Brokaw was the master of ceremonies at the awards dinner, attended by several hundred correspondents and editors. Goodman took the podium, refused the prize, and began to explain why in the admirably direct manner she is known for. Brokaw instantly intervened to force her away from the microphone: “No, no, no..., We don’t accept this kind of..., You can’t...,” and so on. Not until numerous of us shouted him down was Goodman able to finish.

A disgraceful display by any measure, and here is the point of the tale: Journalists have to get poor in the ordinary meaning of this term if the profession is to reclaim its integrity. I do not refer to reporters and editors paid ordinary salaries for (the best of them) honorable work that would be more honorable were the craft cleaner. I refer to the upper ranks—the Brokaws, Bill Kellers, and so on. As Brokaw’s outburst made perfectly clear, these people are vastly too invest-

ed in the elite they aspire to join and defend. Whatever they may have been as they came up in the craft, too much money and aggrandizement has ruined them. Their work is purely clerical.

In a single word, journalists must become and remain unincorporated, and this I mean in all senses of the term. “Disenfranchised” will also do. The unique place they occupy, in society but not altogether of it, must be observed—honored, even. This requires mechanisms allowing them a significant distance from power so that they can remain faithful to their own consciousness of themselves and their ethics. Money does not serve this purpose; modest living does. And power here includes the power of media owners. In my view, a system of tenure would be one mechanism addressing these specific problems. The journalist would have the economic security he or she deserves and distance—as in protection—from the people writing the checks.

To some this may come over bitterly. My responses are two. First, I was in the mainstream media for decades and know the power of the poisonous paycheck, as I call it, only too well. Second, I mention what I was told long years ago at one of the New York tabloids (with pride on the part of the teller): Back then the Bureau of Labor Statistics classified journalists as blue-collar workers. And this is just where we should be if we are ever to be free enough to do unsullied work. It is the precondition of authentic disinterest and immunity from intimidation. The adversarial position in the face of power, mentioned earlier, requires this—a kind of disinvestment. Let all aspiration and imagination soar, I argue, but the work and clean hands are the rewards, not places at high table, where the food is processed anyway. **CP**

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The Brain Game

The NFL Faces Third and Long

By DAVID MACARAY

In its ability to diagnose and treat injuries, the extent to which sports medicine has improved over the course of, say, the last forty years is remarkable. It wasn’t that long ago when the only choice the team physician had to treat a star athlete’s leg pain was to take x-rays (to make sure there was no fracture), prescribe anti-inflammatories, apply liniment, and have

him soak it in the whirlpool.

Compare those limitations with today's advances. Microscopic muscle tears, ever so slightly inflamed tendons, and minor ligament damage can now be scoped out on a near-molecular level. In fact, it's been argued that the reason today's athletes seem to suffer more injuries than in years past is purely the result of technological advances. CT scans and MRIs can now reveal injuries or defects that were heretofore "undiagnosable."

Baseball people tell this joke: Question: How did they say "Tommy John surgery" in the 1960s? Answer: "My arm hurts." Former Dodger manager Tommy Lasorda likes to recount how, when he played baseball in the 1950s, the team had only one trainer, and all he did was walk around with a bottle of rubbing alcohol...most of which he'd already drunk by the seventh inning.

As for professional football, there have been scores of promising careers cut short by catastrophic injuries which, today, could be mended with surgical procedures that have become more or less routine. A name that typically comes up in those conversations is that of Gale Sayers ("The Kansas Comet"), the gifted but injury-plagued running back of the Chicago Bears.

Another startling difference between then and now is the comparative awareness of head injuries. Previously, when a wide receiver wobbled unsteadily off the field after being clobbered, the broadcaster would chuckle and describe him as "having had his bell rung." No one mentioned concussions. In fact, if the play-by-play guys had publicly cautioned the team to check for something called a "brain concussion," they likely would have been considered alarmists or busy-bodies.

There are plenty of reasons to be critical of the National Football League's commissioner, Roger Stokoe Goodell, a lifelong sports aficionado and privileged son of former U.S. Senator Charles Goodell (R-NY). Clearly, he has shown himself to be more a follower than a leader. Because he serves at the pleasure of the League's owners, Goodell has developed an impressive array of bureaucratic survival skills, which is to say, he realizes you don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Given America's adoration of sports in general and football in particular (pro football is our most popular sport, made to order for the medium of television), the NFL commissioner is a coveted and prestigious position—more desirable even than being CEO of Universal Studios or the Exxon Corporation. Indeed, former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, an ardent football fan who was briefly engaged to ex-Denver Bronco wide receiver Rick Upchurch, has admitted that it's a job she herself would love to have someday.

And how cool would it be to have Ms. Rice as commissioner? Cool and appropriate. The deceitful, propaganda-spewing, war-mongering Margaret Thatcher-wannabe who helped lay waste to Iraq, placed in charge of America's most brutal, entertaining and profitable game. Perfect. Also, let it be said

that NFL commissioner is a well-paying gig. According to Bloomberg Businessweek, the commish made \$74 million over the past two years.

Not to nitpick, but here are four things Roger Goodell can rightly be criticized for: His attempt to lowball NFL referees, only to have the League embarrassed by the startling incompetence of their replacements; his unwillingness to insist that the Washington Redskins change their nickname from a reference to aboriginal skin pigmentation to something less anachronistic; his gutless response to players accused of spousal abuse (obviously, boys will be boys, and his bosses don't want their star players suspended); and his suggesting with a straight face that the NFL will soon have teams in Europe.

As for playing football in Europe, this was no trivial thing. Goodell wasn't simply announcing that the League would be increasing the number of exhibition games played across the pond; he was boasting that the NFL would, in fact, be establishing franchises in places like London and Barcelona, which, as the players' union has pointed out, would be a logistical nightmare.

Where would the players and families live? Where would the kids go to school? What's the currency? What language is spoken? Would they practice in Spain? Would they fly to Phoenix for a game, fly back to Spain for team meetings and more practice, and then fly to Dallas for another game, then back to Spain, all in the same week? Players don't like being traded from one coast to the other, much less being told they've been traded to another continent.

Also, it's jingoistic and conceited of Goodell and the owners to assume that the world is waiting with bated breath to be introduced to American-style football. These countries already have their own games, thank you very much. They have their own sports cultures, their own sports heroes, their own athletic traditions.

Just because Coca-Cola happens to sell very well in Europe, and there are close to 70 Wal-Mart stores in China, doesn't mean the whole world is lining up to copy us. Believing they can set up NFL teams in European cities (like Starbucks franchises) is just one more example of American arrogance and the entrepreneurial impulse gone awry.

Speaking of which, if a meaningful international presence is what American professional sports is truly seeking, then it missed a golden opportunity back in the 1970s when baseball chose not to place a major league team in Mexico City. It would have been a perfect fit. Not only is the game extremely popular in Mexico, but today's major league rosters are filled with Latin American ballplayers.

One of the prime arguments against placing a team in Mexico City was that it would be too far for the Eastern teams to travel. Really? Mexico is too far away? If major league baseball honestly believed long-distance travel was a deal breaker, why did they put a team in Montreal (a hockey town,

for crying out loud), in 1969, and force the Dodgers, Padres, and Giants to fly there?

Back to Goodell. As slick as the commissioner is, the one thing he can't be criticized for is the brain concussion epidemic affecting current and former NFL players. This problem was something he inherited, not something he created or allowed to happen. Professional football players (the NFL was established in 1920, the same year the ACLU was founded and women were given the right to vote) have been suffering catastrophic injuries, including brain damage, all the way back to before the days of Bronko Nagurski.

One might ask, what exactly is a "concussion"? Simply put, it is defined as a minor or major TBI (traumatic brain injury) that occurs when the brain bounces against the inside of the skull. It should be noted that a direct blow to the head is not required to cause one; a player can sustain a concussion simply by having his central mass struck hard enough for his head to snap back and his brain to bounce off the skull's interior.

While those violent helmet-to-helmet collisions we've all seen on TV (repeatedly shown in titillating slo-mo) can obviously result in brain trauma, so can something as seemingly innocuous as a quarterback falling backwards and striking his head on the artificial turf. The thing to remember about helmets—even those super-deluxe models manufactured by the Riddell Corporation—is that they were invented specifically to prevent skull fractures, and in that regard they've been spectacularly successful.

Something else to remember: While the concussive force with which players are being hammered increased exponentially with the arrival of Dick Butkus, Ronnie Lott, Ray Lewis and company, players have been getting their brains scrambled for well over a century. And as much as we'd like to lay the problem at someone's feet, that phenomenon can't be blamed on Commissioner Goodell or his predecessors, Paul Tagliabue and Pete Rozelle.

And let's not forget that, even though the gesture was as transparent as cellophane and was made out of a combined sense of panic, self-defense and fear of future liability, it was Goodell and his NFL masters who finally sought to "address" the issue by agreeing to pony up \$765 million to settle the lawsuit filed by more than 4,500 former players. Even by today's inflated standards, \$765 million is a sizeable amount.

Unfortunately, because recent studies predict that as many as 30 percent of NFL players will suffer brain injuries (and an even higher percentage will suffer knee injuries), as generous as that \$765 million settlement appears to be, it probably isn't anywhere close to sufficient. Just consider the estimates of treating the physical and psychological ailments of military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and compare them to the real numbers. The costs of treatments are already many times greater than predicted.

The truth of the matter is that the "blame game" doesn't

really apply to brain concussions or knee injuries, not if the goal is to avoid tough decisions and, instead, pin the rap on somebody. Even though everyone from President Obama to the U.S. Congress to Jesse Jackson to MSNBC is now discussing the issue of concussions with the appropriate gravitas, those discussions aren't likely to reveal any smoking gun.

Although it's true that profit-minded owners have always been callously aware that those potentially injurious tackles and made-for-instant-replay collisions are extremely popular with fans and media (for tax purposes, owners are allowed to "depreciate" their players, the same way factory owners can depreciate machinery), there's no denying a fundamental fact: With or without the monetary component, football is an inherently violent sport.

Indeed, going all the way back to before helmets of any sort—even those tiny leather ones that now appear ridiculous—were made mandatory (the NCAA didn't require helmets until 1939, and the NFL not until 1943), football has always been a bloody gladiatorial spectacle, a glorified form of controlled mayhem. It's the nature of the game.

And because, since time immemorial, rugged boys and aggressive young men have rejoiced in knocking the stuffing out of each other, when you offer large sums of money (or college scholarships) to do exactly that, you're going to have no shortage of volunteers, even with the specter of serious injury looming in the background. Tell an athletically gifted high school or college kid that he has three chances in ten of being seriously injured, he might consider those odds to be quite favorable.

As the man said, pro football and brain concussions go together like vodka and regrets. Which is precisely why some pundits have reached the radical conclusion that the only viable "solution" to the concussion problem is to ban the sport entirely. That or go from tackle football to flag football. Don't laugh; that suggestion has been made in earnest.

It will surprise many to learn that, around the turn of the 20th century, banning the game of football was not out of the question. In 1905, the public outcry over the stunning brutality of the sport had reached the point where President Theodore Roosevelt himself felt it necessary to intervene. Accordingly, he summoned the football coaches and staff of Harvard, Yale and Princeton University, and challenged them to come up with ways of making the game safer.

How brutal was football, circa 1905? It was brutal enough to have become a national scandal. Incredibly, in that year alone, 18 high school and college players died from injuries. *The Washington Post* reported that from 1900 to 1905, inclusive, at least 45 football players had died from injuries sustained during games. The following is taken from the *Post*, October 15, 1905:

"Nearly every death may be traced to 'unnecessary roughness.' Picked up unconscious from beneath a mass of other players, it was generally found that the victim had been

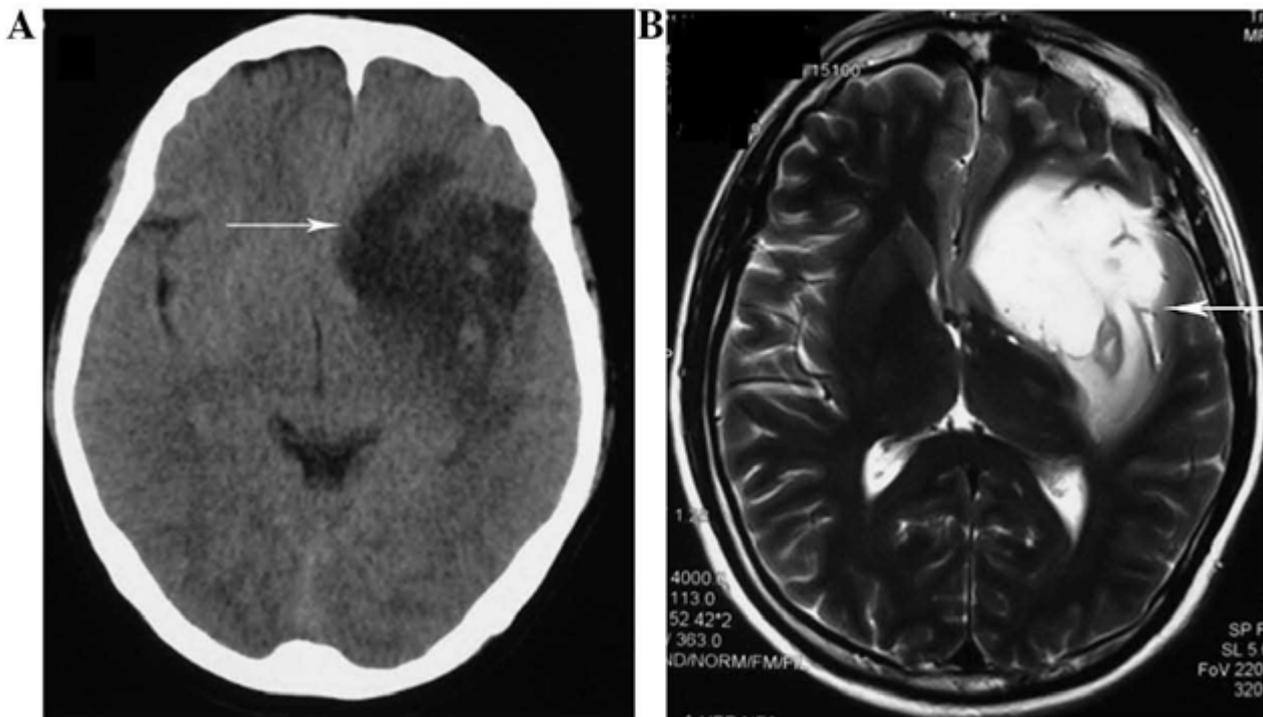
kicked in the head or stomach, so as to cause internal injuries or concussion of the brain, which, sooner or later, ended life.”

The fact that 18 young men died in a single year is staggering enough; that it occurred in high school and college football games, and not at the professional level, where the hardest hitters play the game for money, makes it almost unfathomable. Yet, the death count was so alarming, a lurid cartoon appeared in the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* showing the Grim Reaper straddling a goal post.

According to reports, it was the death of one player in

programs entirely. Others changed from football to the less brutal game of rugby. For many college campuses, tackle football was now deemed “too dangerous.”

So what, if anything, does all this mean for today’s NFL—particularly after it has already settled the lawsuit? Yes, football is wildly popular, and yes, it’s hugely profitable, and yes, you have to be tough to play it, and yes, brain concussions are endemic to the game, and yes, something needs to be done. But what? What specifically can the NFL do to curtail these injuries? When one considers all the possible ramifications,



Brain scan of trauma sustained by former NFL linebacker Junior Seau

particular, Harold Moore, a popular running back at Union College, that precipitated Roosevelt’s call for action. In a game against NYU, Moore died of a cerebral hemorrhage after being kicked in the head. Take a moment to consider these numbers. What would the public’s response be today if 18 NFL players died from injuries during the same season?

What came out of those Roosevelt-led meetings were some fairly significant rule changes. For one, the forward pass was now made legal. This was done in the hope that defenses would be forced to spread out a bit instead of being concentrated along the line of scrimmage, waiting to “pile-drive” the ball carrier. For another, a player was ruled “down” (and the action stopped) when he fell to the ground. Apparently, before this rule, the defense could continue to assault the ball-carrier as he lay on the field.

In the wake of all the negative publicity, several colleges—including Duke, Columbia and Northwestern University—decided to throw in the towel and suspend their football

it’s more than just a knotty problem; it’s an existential crisis capable of threatening the future of the game.

Understandably, the League is currently exploring the least painful and least disruptive solutions. Alas, one of those hypothetical solutions sounds suspiciously close to a “non-solution.” It’s been suggested that the NFL effectively “corral” the problem by setting up a permanent two or three billion dollar endowment to treat players—past and present—who have or will have suffered brain injuries.

In the view of some hardliners and purists, the NFL should do two things: It should behave generously and magnanimously toward players with serious injuries, but it should remain coldly fatalistic in regard to the game itself. It should accept the fact that, just as bullfighters get gored, and race car drivers get killed doing what they do, football players (even high school kids) are going to have their share of brain concussions.

Rather than going overboard in trying to prevent concus-

sions, the NFL should set up a “treatment” fund and, simultaneously, consider taking steps to deflect future liability by requiring players to sign disclaimers or waivers, absolving the owners of any “blame” for subsequent head injuries. Take the position that, just as people know the risks of smoking cigarettes (yet millions still smoke), boys and men who willingly play the game of football know the risks of concussions. Do that and be done with it.

But if those estimates are anywhere close to correct, and 30 percent of NFL players are expected to suffer brain injuries, this becomes a whole other deal. With or without signed waivers, people have argued that those numbers are simply too disturbing to ignore. Not only would we not tolerate a 30 percent injury rate in any other “dangerous” profession (loggers, coal miners, commercial fishermen, etc.), we wouldn’t allow it in our household pets.

It’s true. Does anyone honestly believe we would allow 30 percent of our pet cats and dogs to be seriously injured? Clearly, this concussion issue has reached crisis proportions. There have already been several NFL suicides associated with injury-related dementia, including Pro Bowl linebacker Junior Seau who, in 2012, tragically took his own life. You’d have to be blind, deaf and dumb and a presidential candidate not to realize the concussion problem needs to be fixed.

Yet, when it comes to the actual “fixing,” there are few options. In fact, there seem to be only two: improved rules and improved equipment. To the League’s credit, some rules have already been changed. They’ve adopted a universal concussion protocol; helmet-to-helmet hits aren’t allowed; rolling blocks aimed at the knees are illegal; players aren’t allowed to unload on “defenseless” receivers; and “unnecessary roughness” of the quarterback is being called more often (purists argue that it’s being called too often).

As for improved equipment, don’t hold your breath. There’s only so much you can do with padding and acrylics. That said, demonstrating their willingness to leave no stone unturned, it’s been reported that helmet manufacturers have conducted research on the internal skulls of woodpeckers in an attempt to learn how these unique creatures can spend their lives banging their noggins against trees without suffering headaches or injury.

Unsettling as it is to visualize scientists decapitating these helpless birds and peering inside their tiny heads, it also raises a philosophical question: Who can say with certainty that woodpeckers don’t suffer headaches? Obviously, no one knows what these birds “feel.” For woodpeckers, the compulsion to drill holes in trees is an instinct, something they were born to do (with or without the pain), just as it can be argued that it’s an “instinct” for red-blooded male homo sapiens to want to knock the crap out of each other, without having to be formally “taught” to do so.

Back to equipment: Outlandish as it seems, it’s even been suggested that the NFL go back to those flimsy leather

helmets of yesteryear, a move that would prevent players from harboring a false sense of security. To wit, it would stop them from using their helmets as battering rams or spears. After all, who’s going to want to plow head-first into someone when all he’s wearing for protection is something resembling a leather shower cap?

It has already been noted that some people (believing that desperate times call for desperate measures) have called for the NFL to adopt a “no contact” version of the game. Moving screens and shoving would still be allowed, but blocking and tackling would not.

This “enlightened,” no-contact version of the game would retain all the brainy strategy and deceptive tactics of old-fashioned tackle football—as well as all its speed and virtuoso athleticism—but no one (or a miniscule number) would suffer broken bones or concussions.

On a purely intellectual level, this argument makes sense. Considering the gargantuan size and tremendous horsepower generated by today’s players, the only sure-fire way of insuring that the brain doesn’t get bounced around inside their skulls is to remove violent physical contact from the equation. Again, it’s an established fact: If you absorb enough of those punishing hits during a career, the cumulative effect can be devastating.

Still, one doesn’t have to be a cynic to take the view that even with all the controversy surrounding concussions, nothing substantive, much less radical or revolutionary, is going to change in professional football. Some players will continue to have reservations, indignant pundits will continue to seize the moral high ground, the media will continue to pay lip service, and large sums of money will continue to change hands, but little of any consequence will actually change.

To embrace that view, all one need do is consider a competing sport where concussions, hemorrhages, fractured jaws, and broken eye orbits are the desired goal and not merely an unfortunate by-product. Of course, we’re speaking of professional boxing. Even if we go back only as far as the early 20th century, the record will show that there have been hundreds of prize-fighters killed in the ring, beaten to death by their opponents.

So despite all the hand-wringing, let’s not pretend that a comprehensive “institutional approach” to reducing football brain injuries is waiting in the wings, because it isn’t. And the reason it isn’t is because there is no simple remedy available. But fortuitously for the NFL, until the infinitely more violent sport of professional boxing (or mixed martial arts for that matter) is outlawed, the League has been provided with a convenient buffer, one that shelters it from anything too drastic or deleterious being called for.

Which, in part, is why—despite the frenzy of negative publicity—the NFL welcomes the on-going debate about how to deal with players accused of spousal abuse. That’s because

the continued discussion of a topic as socially repugnant as spousal abuse effectively moves the conversation away from the messy topics of brain concussions and dementia.

Players who have beaten their wives or girlfriends may present a public relations problem for the League, but it's a problem that's manageable—a problem that can be readily addressed, even if it results in harsher than preferred penalties, including lifetime expulsions, being imposed on the game's star players.

If banning perpetual wife-beaters for life is what it takes, then so be it. Anything that simultaneously draws attention away from brain concussions, and makes NFL ownership appear decisive and resolute, is going to be welcomed. It's fair to say that Condoleezza Rice herself would approve. **CP**

DAVID MACARAY is a playwright and the author of *It's Never Been Easy: Essays on Modern Labor*.

The Stan That Never Was China and the Uyghurs

BY PETER LEE

Ambrose Bierce famously said that “War is God’s way of teaching Americans geography.”

God, with some on-planet help, is probably scheduling a lesson on Central Asia.

Central Asia is Stan-land, that is to say a group of nations of largely Turkic-speaking peoples, many of which started out as Soviet Socialist Republics under the USSR, and then received independence when the Soviet Union fell apart.

There’s Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. And there’s Kazakhstan, the big one. There’s oil and gas out there, and pipelines. Pepe Escobar coined the term “Pipelineistan” to describe how economic, security, and political issues, for the great powers at least, all revolve around the question of what pipelines would be allowed to deliver the region’s energy riches to which beneficiaries.

And there’s the Stan that never was, Uyghurstan, struggling to emerge from beneath the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”, which forms the northwest quartile of the People’s Republic of China.

There are ten million Uyghurs in the “XUAR”, forming a “stateless nation” i.e. a cohesive ethnic group with aspirations to independence, aspirations that have paradoxically been strengthened by Chinese efforts to simultaneously oppress, co-opt, and assimilate them.

To date, the PRC has enjoyed a relatively free hand in Xinjiang.

As the United States has “pivoted” into the Western Pacific and cultivated the anti-PRC inclinations of Japan, the

Philippines, Vietnam, Burma, and a number of other Asian states, the PRC has sought respite by “pivoting” into Central Asia.

In Central Asia, China can pursue its energy-slurping, exporting, and resource-acquisition ambitions beyond the oppressive shadow of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. U.S. forces are withdrawing from another Stan, Afghanistan, giving China more room to expand its influence.

In an unhappy coincidence, the U.S. decided to play the big man in Europe and wrest Ukraine out of the orbit of Russia. As a result Russia, which was supposed to play the Central Asian role of suspicious counterweight to China has, instead, been thrust willy-nilly into the PRC’s arms.

But all is not beer and skittles for China in Central Asia, especially in Xinjiang.

China’s hold on the region now called Xinjiang has always been tenuous and provisional. Losing Xinjiang has been a harbinger of imperial decline, a history of which the masters of Zhongnanhai are undoubtedly well aware.

But hanging on to Xinjiang is neither cheap nor easy. Its history over the last three hundred years is of autonomy under weak governments and even brief flashes of independence. From 1865 to 1877 Yakub Beg ruled most of the region as emir from Kashgar, today the main oasis city of southern Xinjiang. In 1933, Kashgar was also the seat of a brief “Republic of East Turkestan”.

When the forces of the People’s Liberation Army moved into Xinjiang in the 1940s, the CCP adopted a slate of policies that have shown considerable continuity to this day.

As a matter of divide and rule, administrative borders are drawn to split the Uyghur population into a number of separate districts. Some of these districts are classified as “autonomous” districts of other ethnic groups, even if they were not in the majority, so that they would be administered by non-Uyghur ethnic officials.

The major Uyghur population centers and transportation arteries are shadowed by military colonies, colloquially known as Bingtuan, designed to be self-sustaining units that engaged in economic pursuits while deterring and, as needed, suppressing Uyghur resistance.

In education, a program of Mandarin education attempts to wean Uyghur youth away from their ethnic identity.

Religious practice is discouraged (non-religious comportment was encouraged in schools and used as a criterion for advancement in the party and government).

Particularly in the north, nomadism is discouraged and conversion to fixed animal husbandry encouraged, in order to integrate Uyghurs more solidly into the social and political matrix of the PRC system.

And immigration of Han (i.e. ethnic Chinese) settlers is encouraged to dilute the Uyghur majority. This policy is the most successful and the most resented. Uyghurs, once a dominant majority in Xinjiang, are down to 40% of the

“The Uyghurs of Xinjiang may end up with the worst of both worlds: at war and without a nation.”

XUAR's population today, about the same percentage as Han Chinese. Xinjiang exerts a classic frontierland attraction on Han migrants from the interior, offering opportunity to less educated and polished strivers who don't mix well with the Uyghur nationality. In fact, they often don't mix at all, with Hans and Uyghurs often occupying separate residential districts and even using their own time zones (Beijing time for Hans and local time for Uyghurs).

A relatively perfunctory “hearts and minds” outreach has usually served as a counterpoint to control policies, except when nationwide governance broke down during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, and rule (or more accurately, near-anarchy and misrule) was a matter of wildly applied sticks and no carrots at all.

In the 1990s, challenged by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the stans across the border, the CCP did try something new with a program of political and economic liberalization. Hu Yaobang, the darling of China's more liberal reformers, embarked on a “united front” approach to encourage Xinjiang minorities enter the Communist Party and occupy various posts from the localities on up.

The experiment, from the CCP's perspective, has been judged a failure. Underqualified and undermotivated locals were slotted into party posts at the local level and were either co-opted (i.e. advanced interests of the locals at the expense of the party) or were unable to work effectively with the higher ups. As a result, the Communist Party management of Xinjiang is seen as a major headache; the locals can't be trusted with the job, and qualified and talented Han cadres are not enthusiastic about serving in a difficult, sometimes dangerous, and usually quite unprofitable hardship post.

Economic liberalization in the 1990s did allow fortunes to be made among select Uyghur entrepreneurs. The details are unknown to me, but enrichment in 1990s PRC often involved preferential access to import and export permits and bank credit, all highly valued and fungible commodities, and in Beijing there was a resentful perception in some quarters that Uyghurs were being given excessive preferences in pursuit of some political objectives.

If so, preferential policies and prosperity did not translate into permanent loyalty or, for that matter, perception of any identity of interests between Uyghur business leaders and the CCP.

It is perhaps noteworthy that two wealthy Uyghurs, Rebiya Khadeer and Ilham Tothi, both became outspoken advocates of Uyghur interests—and were stripped of their fortunes by the PRC.

Thanks to Western pressure, Rebiya Khadeer—who was known for a time as “the fourth richest person in China” but forfeited her wealth and privileged position as a delegate to the National People's Congress with her statements in support of Uyghur rights—was able to make it to the West, establish herself as the leader of the World Uyghur Congress and achieve a certain international prominence as the “Mother of the Uyghurs”.

Ilham Tothi, a scholar who became one of the richest Uyghurs in Beijing by consulting and transacting business as he taught at the Nationalities University, was stripped of his wealth and hounded back to Xinjiang. There, he taught economics and tried to walk the tightrope between acceptable advocacy and criminal dissent and failed, at least in the eyes of the Communist Party. The PRC blocked his opportunity to go to the United States in 2010 for one year as a visiting fellow at Indiana University, and, in 2014, shocked the international community by arresting sentencing him to life imprisonment for “separatism”—and stripping him of his remaining property.

Sixty five years of Han occupation have not reconciled many Uyghurs to Han rule. Instead, in a display of dialectical materialism that would perhaps have pleased Marx, if not the CCP, the further exertion of PRC control over Xinjiang has directly contributed to a stronger sense of Uyghur identity, grievance, and nationalism. PRC efforts to ingratiate itself with the people of Xinjiang by investment in infrastructure and public services have served to strengthen a sense of unity and ethnic integration across the region. Massive investment in the strategically important but rather low-quality and expensive Karamay oil field has simply fed resentment that the Uyghur patrimony is getting siphoned off to China.

This unhappiness has translated into unhappiness, resistance, unrest...and maybe more.

There have been several spectacular incidents of violence involving Uyghurs, ranging from urban ethnic rioting between Uyghurs and Hans as occurred in Urumchi in 2013; bloody village clashes that have claimed dozens and allegedly hundreds of lives on both sides, seemingly triggered by local outrage at some government injustice, and usually involve murderous hacking and chopping by the Uyghur side and a lethal hail of gunfire by PRC security units; and the spectacular incident in Beijing—filmed by security cameras and played at Ilham Tothi's trial—in which an SUV driven by a group of Uyghurs and flying a jihadi flag barreled through the crowd of tourists at Tiananmen Square, killing two and injuring forty before crashing into security barriers and exploding

into flame.

The issue of Uyghur violence is an extremely fraught question, even what to call it. Should the “T” word—“terrorism” be invoked?

The PRC promiscuously applies the term to most Uyghur-related clashes. People outside the PRC who are concerned with Uyghur affairs in Xinjiang—the Uyghur diaspora, human rights watchers, and academics—balk at accepting the “terror” framing and thereby seeming to give the PRC further license to surveil, harass, detain, beat, imprison, and kill Uyghurs.

To the dismay of Uyghur supporters, after 9/11 the U.S. government yielded to Chinese importunities and designated the “East Turkestan Islamic Movement” as a terrorist organization. However, it is an open question as to whether this propaganda coup for China marked a significant upgrade in the PRC’s cooperation with the United States on Uyghur violence.

It is widely believed that ETIM doesn’t exist in any meaningful form, so it is possible that the U.S. decided it would only acquiesce to a terror designation that would require no meaningful action against Uyghurs outside of the PRC.

This suspicion is also supported by the rather remarkable fact that the famous Uyghurs of Guantanamo, who were at the heart of a political firestorm concerning their repatriation in 2009, had already been deemed eligible for release by the Bush administration—not necessarily because they were all not militants (some of them admitted to training at the al Qaeda camp at Bora Bora, albeit, it was insisted, at the most rudimentary level), but because the U.S. had determined to its satisfaction that if they were militants their activities would be directed only against the PRC and not against the interests of the United States: “non-enemy combatants” was the term of art.

The PRC’s netizens have noted resentfully that incidents of Uyghur-related violence were not the occasion for terror victim condolences by the United States, and Western news coverage usually contained some reference to what looked like the extenuating circumstance of PRC oppression in Xinjiang.

Things came to a head with a March 1, 2014 attack on the Kunming railroad station. Ten blade-wielding Uyghur attackers burst into the station, hacked to death 29 people, and wounded another 143 before most of them were killed by Chinese security forces.

To the fury of the official PRC media and Chinese nationalists, western outlets coyly used quotation marks around the word “terrorist” (the BBC helpfully explained that the use of the term “terrorist” without attribution should be “avoided”) and the U.S. Embassy in Beijing confined itself to characterizing the event as a “terrible and senseless violent act”. Western media further excused its resistance to characterizing the Grand Guignol scene at the railroad station as terrorism because of historical concerns that the PRC hyped and mis-

represented Uyghur violence for public relations purposes, while denying Western journalists the opportunity to independently investigate and verify the regime’s claims.

After three days of Chinese indignation, Jan Psaki, the State Department spokesperson, was prevailed upon to grudgingly cough up this diplomatic hairball:

“Based on the information reported by the Chinese media, this appears to be an act of terrorism targeting random members of the public, so we are calling this an act of terrorism.”

In a nice compromise, the United States maintained its principled skepticism and the moral high ground, at least in its view, and the PRC got to say the U.S. had agreed Kunming was terrorism.

Specialists in Uyghur affairs, for their part, strongly suspect that the Kunming outrage was a horrific one-off by a group of Uyghurs that had planned to exfiltrate the PRC for whatever reason, found their way blocked by PRC border guards and the willingness of neighboring states to engage in refolement (the illegal and involuntary return of refugees to their nation of origin), and expressed their rage in the murderous outbreak.

Resistance to characterizing violence in Xinjiang as terrorism remains strong. While discussing a subsequent high profile outrage (the fatal hatcheting of the imam of Kashgar’s Id Khan mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang and indeed all of the PRC, as retribution for the cleric’s collaboration with the authorities), the *New York Times* used the formulation “a growing number of terrorist-style attacks” to describe the various incidents that had bedeviled the XUAR.

Ironically, the reason that acts that are “terrifying” do not quite satisfy the formal definition of “terrorism” is probably not because of a unique Uyghur disinclination toward politically-inspired violence; it is because PRC suppression within China has been harsh enough, and its regional security initiatives effective enough, that Uyghur violence has not achieved the convergence of doctrine, organization, and means sufficient to pursue a coherent political strategy through violence and intimidation i.e. terrorism.

It is perhaps best to consider the Uyghur dilemma as a decolonization struggle, in which the subjugated eventually turn to violence and terror to exhaust, demoralize, and eventually evict the colonial power if and when peaceful struggle fails.

Unfortunately for advocates of peaceful coexistence, perhaps through greater autonomy and respect for Uyghur rights, there is every sign that the PRC has looked at the current widespread sense of grievance, recalled the failure of liberalization in the 1990s, considered the deficiencies of the party and military organizations inside the XUAR:

...and fast-forwarded to the anti-terrorism end-game by imposing a worst-case, highly intrusive security regime that will maximize the Han demographic advantage, make significant investments in the local

police and military forces and expansion of the surveillance network, and aggressively co-opt or neutralize Uyghur resistance, all without considering political compromise.

In other words, the window for Uyghur political agency and principled resistance under the current regime by peaceful means, if not completely shut, has closed to a narrow gap. What's left may look a lot like terrorism.

The Chinese Communist Party's General Secretary, Xi Jinping has designated Xinjiang as a critical issue for the PRC.

In April of 2014 he visited the XUAR in a trip that was lavishly reported by the state news agencies. If the visit had a message, it was "more of the same".

Xi started his tour with a visit to the key Xinjiang security agencies: the People's Armed Police, or PAP, which was created to handle the domestic unrest portfolio after the PLA performed dismally during the 1989 disturbances in Beijing; then the PLA garrison; and then the Bingtuan. Xi tried to imbue the troops with revolutionary brio, backhandedly acknowledging that Xinjiang was an undesirable and unpopular posting and implying that any thought of restraining or moderating the behavior of these troops, with their relatively fragile discipline and morale, is dicey business.

In another indication of the relatively precarious health of the party apparatus in Xinjiang, Xi visited a local official's family and remarked that 200,000 higher level cadres were rotated to lower-level organizations in March 2014, a practice employed when the local cadres are not up to snuff. Significantly, a task of the visiting work teams was to promote "religious harmonization", in other words attempting to elicit patriotic behavior from the local religious establishment.

Xi met with Muslim and Buddhist religious leaders and, rather than making any concessions to Uyghur sensibilities—the concerted CCP campaign to discourage religious observance and, through it, inhibit Uyghur solidarity infuriates many Uyghurs—Xi sent the stern message that the religious establishment, together with the party and the state, shares responsibility for serving economic construction and ensuring that the XUAR did not slide into chaos.

During his visit, Xi talked up the prospects for economic development and prosperity in the midst of the Central Asian boom and the PRC's increasing economic integration with the Stans, the so-called "Silk Road Economic Belt". He also addressed a Uyghur sore point, resource exploitation, by touting 2400 kilometers of pipeline delivering natural gas from the oil fields to four million people in southern Xinjiang.

The CCP is most happy when the Uyghur community is atomized, and engages with the state and state controlled institutions as individuals on the PRC terms. This appears to be what the "spirit of ethnic harmony" really means in Xinjiang.

Therefore, it is perhaps not too surprising that Ilham Tohti, the economist and advocate for rights of Uyghurs received his draconian sentence. By offering to serve as a voice of the

Uyghur people and an interlocutor with the CCP—and by reaching out to like-minded Han and Tibetan activists, and by seeking to nurture a group of Uyghur students with a similar outlook—Ilham was trying to occupy a space the Party wishes to keep void. And the service he was offering—the prospect of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence—was perhaps an objective that the PRC felt was no longer attainable or was unimportant to China and its vision of defying Uyghur anger and spasmodic violence to dominate Xinjiang through Han immigration backed by military force, party control, and economic supremacy.

A prospect for change—and not change in a good way, perhaps—lies more in the PRC's external relations.

External interference in Xinjiang affairs—particularly aid and comfort to the Uyghurs—has always been a matter of great concern to the PRC.

There is a diaspora of perhaps half a million Uyghurs in Turkey, Germany, the United States, and other countries, historically a hodgepodge of competing organizations, now nominally united as the World Uyghur Congress under Rebiya Kadeer.

The PRC has labored mightily to hamstring the overseas Uyghurs and has largely succeeded for the time being. No country as yet, wishes to endure China's wrath by hosting an explicitly subversive Uyghur presence, and as a result the Uyghur diaspora has renounced the historically evocative (and ethnically inclusive) agitation for an independent East Turkestan and has limited itself to rather toothless and unconvincing advocacy of "Uyghur autonomy". The United States, for its part, seems to limit itself for the time being to yanking the PRC's chain on the Uyghur issue, by welcoming Uyghur activists to Washington and broadcasting Uyghur language news and views into Xinjiang via Radio Free Asia, reportedly an extremely popular service.

Much closer to home, during the years of PRC-USSR hostility, and especially when China was lurching from one political and economic catastrophe to another during the late 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union lured tens of thousands of Uyghurs over the border with the promise of a better life, and kept the sword of Soviet-supported Uyghur insurrection over Beijing's head.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the PRC hastened to fix its borders with Kazakhstan, the biggest stan, and also the one with the biggest border with China and some of the thorniest demographics (over 1.7 million Kazakhs inside Xinjiang; about one quarter million Uyghurs inside Kazakhstan). The PRC also invested heavily to become Kazakhstan's primary energy partner. In 1996, the PRC and Kazakhstan cofounded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a China + Russia + Stans confab whose interests tilt towards security and discouraging adventurism in the region.

A potential fly in the ointment is the possibility of conflict between Kazakhstan's large Russian-speaking minority—

about one quarter of the population, primarily in the north of the country, a relic of the Soviet era—and the Turkic speaking majority.

In other words, Kazakhstan is another potential Ukraine, at least in the dreams of the neo cold warriors of the United States and Western Europe. There it is avowed that Putin intends to exploit the purported perils of the Russian-speaking population as a pretext to intervene, reconstitute the Soviet Union, seize Kazakhstan's oil, and fly the Russian flag over the Kazakhstan cosmodrome. It is also quite possible that the West and its army of NGOs will seek to cultivate distrust and division between the Kazakhs and the ethnic Russians in order to exploit an anticipated succession crisis when the current strongman, the seventy four year old Nursultan Nazarbayev (who has run the country since 1989) packs it in, and catapult into power a new regime hostile to Russia.

In such a case, the PRC would be faced with the rather undesirable prospect of a pro-Western regime, one with a sizable population of Uyghurs, bordering on Xinjiang.

An even more undesirable prospect might be the emergence of anti-China jihadism in South Asia.

With good reason, the PRC stands accused of ill treatment of its Uyghur minority. However, jihadi wrath has not been unleashed on China for a number of reasons that go beyond the PRC's draconian and effective security regime in Xinjiang.

First, the PRC's relationship with the mujahedeen of Afghanistan and their Pakistani and Saudi patrons runs long and deep. Supplying the anti-Soviet fighters of Afghanistan with the mountain of materiel available thanks to Saudi largesse was beyond the logistical capabilities of the CIA. The United States turned to the PRC, which was happy to put the boot in on the Soviets, and do a quartermaster business that supplied the fighters with four hundred million dollars of everything they needed from bullets to mules.

The PRC also benefits from close economic relations with Saudi Arabia (China is now the biggest customer for Saudi hydrocarbon products) and Turkey, two countries with the inclination and means to meddle in Xinjiang, as well as a strategic alliance with Pakistan, which views Afghan militants as its geostrategic asset for force projection. None see profit or advantage in supporting Muslim aspirations inside China, although solicitude for the Uyghurs (Turkic tribes originated in what's now the northwestern PRC before finding their way to Istanbul) is a staple of Turkish nationalist politics.

The Afghan Taliban under the command of Mullah Omar and most other militant actors in the area have for the most part not inflicted murder, kidnapping, and mayhem on the Chinese and their interests in Afghanistan, presumably out of deference to the preferences of Pakistan's intelligence service and in response to Chinese blandishments.

The wild card, however, is the Pakistan Taliban, a.k.a. the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP, which owes its existence

and a strong sense of grievance to the massacre at Islamabad's Lal Masjid mosque in 2007, an event inextricably linked to the PRC. Under a radical cleric, Maulana Abdul Aziz, the mosque had become a radical fiefdom that apparently had no qualms about affronting the PRC. Mosque students, some of them purportedly Uyghurs, attacked a local massage parlor run by Chinese, and there were rumors that plans were afoot for an outrage that would spoil the 2008 Beijing Olympics. After a prolonged crisis, a reluctant President Musharraf yielded to Chinese insistence and ordered the storming of the mosque by 15,000 troops at a cost of perhaps 1000 lives.

Maulana Abdul Aziz not only survived the siege, which claimed the life of his brother; he recently emerged from prison, apparently freed so he could serve as interlocutor between the government and the PTT which, perhaps as a function of its grudge against the PRC for its role in the Lal Masjid atrocity, is reported to be harboring some Uyghur militants.

In recent weeks, Maulana Abdul Aziz as an individual; a number of PTT district commanders; and the Uzbek Islamic Movement have all declared their support for the Islamic State caliphate, apparently defying the suzerainty of Mullah Omar, a mere emir. And, in his July 4, 2014 coming out speech declaring the caliphate, Abu Bakar al Baghdadi listed China as a place where "Muslim rights have been forcibly seized" albeit in a laundry list of nations including virtually every country with a significant Muslim population.

The PRC alleges that a trickle of Uyghur fighters have already made it to the Middle East to fight for the caliphate.

If "AfPak" becomes an IS stomping ground and the PTT is encouraged to act on its resentment against the PRC, Uyghur fighters may find haven, training, and encouragement closer to home, and Uyghur militants may start to operate inside Xinjiang to chastise the godless infidel persecutors of Muslims (to recapitulate the framing used against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan).

Faced with this possibility, the PRC may decide to elevate its Xinjiang and regional security measures to an unprecedented level, perhaps even involving a military intervention in the PRC's "near beyond", coupled with further assaults on Uyghurs dreams of freedom and dignity within the XUAR.

In the end, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang may end up with the worst of both worlds—at war and without a nation. **CP**

PETER LEE edits China Matters and covers Asia for CounterPunch.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Monumental The Bloody History of Cotton

BY LEE BALLINGER

In August, bluesman B.B. King became the honorary head of an effort to build a national monument in the Mississippi Delta to honor those who picked cotton and made the world rich. King, who was born in a cabin on a cotton plantation outside Berclair, Mississippi in 1925, replaces the late Maya Angelou as the Honorary Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Cotton Pickers of America and the Sharecroppers Interpretive Center. The plan is for a twenty-five foot high monument to be erected on twenty acres of cotton land along Highway 61 in the Mississippi Delta.

At first glance, this project might appear to be simply an overdue gesture to hardworking people who have long been ignored. While it is certainly that, it would also serve as a rebuke to the Confederate monuments that litter the South, monuments that make quite a different statement about the people who picked the cotton.

But it is so much more. As Karl Marx wrote: "Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there is no modern industry." It was the combination of free labor and cheap cotton that made the British textile industry possible and paved the way for the worldwide expansion of the capitalist system. The commercial trade in human flesh (cotton pickers/slaves) generated the capital that made the financial empires of the nineteenth century possible.

The world we live in now is a direct result of the bloody history of cotton. Without the foundation laid by cotton, today there would be no cell phones,

television, or Internet, no suburbs, universities, or worldwide transportation networks. All of this was made possible by the people B.B. King seeks to help honor: millions of slaves and, after the Civil War, millions of sharecroppers (half of whom were white).

Yet the contribution of cotton pickers goes even further. Right after World War Two, human cotton pickers were replaced by machines that were fifty times more productive. The repressive apparatus that had kept blacks working on the land against their will suddenly threw them off it. Where once a man with a gun insisted "You must stay!" now a man with a gun insisted "You must get out!"

Pushed off the land, people flooded into the cities of the South and the North. Isolated individuals living in rural cabins had been easy to control. Their resistance was often heroic, yet scattered. Masses of people clustered in cities were quite another matter. They were able to create their own organizations and institutions and move to impose their will. This allowed the civil rights and black power movements to break out and spread. The politics of the country were changed forever.

The massive migration out of the rural South also caused a cultural revolution, as the mainly rural music that had developed under the hammer of violence and segregation became urban music, music that anyone might hear or be influenced by.

As a recent email from *Rock & Rap Confidential's* Dave Marsh put it: "When the Woody Guthrie show was at some part of the Smithsonian, maybe ten years ago, a friend and I were walking towards it when I grabbed her arm and forced a detour onto another floor. 'I just want to show you the machine that invented rock and roll.' She looked at me like I was an even

bigger nut than she already thought. But there before us stood the first mechanical cotton picker."

Nicholas Lemann writes in *The Promised Land* about former cotton pickers who "recently had been barred by law from being out of the house at night and had no money to spend on entertainment anyway, [now] patronizing clubs in Chicago that had big bands playing inside."

Those bands, which took the music of the Delta and amplified it and helped it to go in new directions, were indispensable to the creation of rock & roll and many other styles of music. The musicians themselves were often former cotton pickers as was much of their initial audience. Together they set a sound wave in motion that reverberates still. The spread of this new music began to poke holes in the cotton curtain that walled off the South, not to mention holes in other forms of apartheid across the country, holes that the best efforts of the worst people have been unable to plug up.

It comes as no surprise that there has been little official support for the Cotton Pickers Monument, despite the impact of cotton on the world and despite the fact that so many Americans have family roots in those fields. In 1952, just as countless sharecroppers were being shown the door, the Democrats wanted to mend fences with Southerners who had bolted the party and run as Dixiecrats in 1948. Adlai Stevenson, the quintessential 1950s liberal, agreed to have segregationist Alabama Senator John Sparkman with him on his Presidential ticket.

As the political twig is bent, so grows the tree. The Kennedys traded favors with close personal friends such as Mississippi Senator James Eastland. It was liberal darlings LBJ and Hubert Humphrey who ensured that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, with a core of former sharecroppers, was not allowed to take its rightful place at the 1964 Democratic convention.

Current liberal darling and presumptive 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton has offered no support for the Cotton Pickers Memorial despite her roots in the cotton state of Arkansas. That's because Clinton always takes the side of the employer, the master. From 1986 to 1992, she served on Walmart's board and never said a word as the company

them to a White House." Wynette went on to challenge Clinton to "stand toe to toe with me" and debate in "any forum," adding "I can assure you, in spite of your education, you will find me to be just as bright as yourself."

Nashville writer Holly Gleason recently told me that Tammy Wynette had her own cotton pickers monument. "She kept a bit of cotton clinging to the

Daniel Patrick] Moynihan set up a White House task force on 'Internal Migration.' At Moynihan's urging, Nixon said in his 1970 State of the Union address, "We must create a new rural environment which will not only stem the migration to urban centers but reverse it."

But instead the "rural environment" has remained desperately poor and



Cotton pickers in Lake Dick, Arkansas. Photograph: Russell Lee, Farm Services Administration.

waged a vicious anti-union campaign aimed at keeping the wages of its employees, many of them the children or grandchildren of sharecroppers, as low as possible.

On January 26, 1992 Hillary Clinton appeared on *60 Minutes* to attempt to explain away her support of husband/Presidential candidate Bill Clinton, who was under fire for marital infidelity. "I'm not sitting here like some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette," Hillary said.

Wynette, a former cotton picker who went on to become a country singing star, responded: "You have offended every person who has no one to take

stem in a little baggie in her dressing room to always remember working in that terrible heat as a young woman."

Politicians may have ignored the plight of former sharecroppers but they were very worried about the mass migration from the South. According to Nicholas Lemann: "For several years it had occurred to government officials that the crisis in the ghettos might be solved by finding a way to keep rural Southern blacks from moving to the cities. Toward the end of his presidency, Johnson set up a secret Interagency Task Force on Rural-Urban Migration to look into this question, and in 1969 [Nixon advisor, Democrat

the United States has been part of the massive worldwide migration from country to city. This has only served to create bigger, poorer cities. A recent Harvard/University of Michigan study found that 1.65 million U.S. households with 3.5 million children are trying to subsist on less than two dollars per person per day (the official poverty line is at \$17 per person per day). This extreme poverty echoes the extreme poverty of those who once picked cotton. In both cases, people were pushed outside the economy when they were replaced by new technology.

Just as half of all sharecroppers were white, so too are half of the heads of

the poor households now living on two dollars a person per day. This creates an environment where the music the sharecroppers invented can, in its current evolutions, become a unifying force. That potential was indicated by Jay-Z in a recent interview when he said: "This generation right now, they... are a bit removed from those racist feelings because...it's integrated and the music we listen to is the same." He added: "All our feelings and anxieties and all that thing are more similar now."

A monument to cotton pickers would be more than recognition of their blood, sweat, and tears. It would be more than an expression of gratitude for all they have given us. It would serve as a reminder that in times of epochal change, great things can be accomplished by those who are cast aside by the onrush of technology. **CP**

Lee Ballinger is an associate editor at Rock & Rap Confidential. Free email subscriptions are available by writing rockrap@aol.com.

Laura Poitras's Surveillance Trilogy

Under Western Eyes

BY KIM NICOLINI

Documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras just released the third film in her Surveillance Trilogy the Post 9-11 and post-Patriot Act world climate. *Citizenfour* (2014) covers Edward Snowden's disclosure of Top Secret NSA documents revealing that the United States government has been spying on its own citizens and people around the globe via telecommunications, computers, search engines, mobile phones, and social media. In all three films, Poitras started filming one thing, but ended

up filming another by becoming intimately connected to accidental protagonists who were never scripted to be in the films. She is a woman roving with a camera letting narratives unfold. Through this method, she shows the growing power of the U.S. government to control privacy, movement, and so-called liberty.

Poitras practices *cinéma-vérité*, where the camera and filmmaker become invisible. There are no talking heads to explain or proselytize. Poitras does not know the outcome of her films in advance. She starts with a general idea, but chance becomes the key player and makes the documentaries much more real, immediate and open-ended.

In an interview in *The New Yorker*, Poitras explains: "Plot is so relentless. It's totally unforgiving, and it also can be simplifying. It can provide resolution where there should be none. It can provide false catharsis." Poitras does not give simplistic explanations. Rather she lets the camera show us an environment and the people in it. In this way, her films have more political impact than Talking Heads documentaries with their clear agendas and barrage of "experts" telling us what to think. Poitras allows the audience to think on its own terms. Her films provide questions, rather than answers, and questions lead to thought which leads to action.

My Country, My Country (2006) focuses on the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the Iraqi elections. While filming in Iraq, Poitras met Dr. Riyadh who was running for office. Poitras moved in with Riyadh's family, and through her camera, we are given intimate access to their response to the election and the overall Iraqi environment. U.S. airstrikes, car bombs and other war zone explosions provide the soundtrack.

Poitras follows Riyadh to Abu Ghraib where he interviews prisoners behind the fence. Poitras also films other government sites, such as U.S. checkpoints, military training rooms,

and UN operations in Iraq. Her camera follows the family, the military, and general Iraqi citizens and gives a view of the religious sect- and war-torn occupied landscape and a family trying to get by in it. Poitras focuses on the doctor and his family, but she also delivers objective documentation of the "election process." Televisions provide news feeds of the dangerous politically charged environment (e.g. bombings in Fallujah) while the family responds, goes about its life, and votes. At times, the camera pulls back to stunning vistas of the Iraq landscape. U.S. military tanks cruise the streets, but Poitras never talks about the occupation. She just shows its continuous presence.

The Oath follows Osama bin Laden's former bodyguard Abu Jandal, who is now a taxi driver in Yemen. Initially Poitras planned to focus on Jandal's brother-in-law Salim Ahmed Hamdan who had been in solitary confinement at Guantanamo for being a driver for Al Qaeda. It turns out that Jandal turned Salim into authorities. He went free while Salim was imprisoned. So Poitras's focus changed to Jandal with Salim maintaining an invisible but powerful presence. Poitras installed a movie camera in Jandal's taxi. Abu drives through busy streets, picking up passengers who inquire about his political and religious views. Abu talks about Jihad, Islam, and the U.S. occupation. We learn of his religious and political views as well as the overall climate. At one point, a passenger asks Abu about the camera, and he lies, stating the camera is broken. Interestingly, Poitras's taxi camera is a surveillance device within her film on surveillance.

Poitras's camera takes up residence in Abu's home, and we watch Jandal indoctrinate his son as well as other young men about Islam and Jihad. Through his actions, we understand he is still an extremist. True to Poitras's style, the documentary fluctuates between intimate claustrophobic footage in Abu's apartment and scenes of the landscape, military trials and interviews, and stunning

sequences of the Guantanamo complex. Poitras's process allows for a democratic view of humans. While Abu wakes his son to pray at dawn and talks about how the afterlife matters, not the material world, I couldn't help but think of America's Religious Right which pretty much holds the same views as Islam extremists.

The film includes a 1998 interview with Osama bin Laden, in which Abu stands at bin Laden's side, and a *60 Minute* interview with Jandal where Abu talks about why he left Al Qaeda. This material poses more questions. Why is Jandal free and Salim imprisoned? And why is Jandal still alive? These questions come to mind without Poitras directly putting them there.

Citizenfour further addresses being an informant. Edward Snowden contacted Poitras as the point person to whom he would divulge his knowledge of NSA's domestic surveillance practices. Poitras was already shooting her third film when Snowden contacted her. She had shot hours of footage, including NSA whistleblower William Binney and WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange. In the middle of her project, Snowden contacted Poitras under the fictitious name *Citizenfour*.

At this point, Potrias's initial project became derailed and redirected. Her previous random encounters in filmmaking were taken to a new level as her personal implication in the Snowden case threw a wrench in her cinémarité practice. How could she be invisible when she was such an integral part of the story? What was she going to do with the hours of previously filmed footage?

The result is a little awkward. Some old footage is tacked onto the beginning of the documentary. Binney makes appearances, but Assange did not want to be part of the film. Poitras remains at a distance by reading Snowden's emails in voiceover, showing the initial encrypted correspondence, and including typed conversations between the two.

The crux of the film resides in the hour of footage from inside Snowden's Hong Kong hotel room as he divulges his NSA secrets. The room is full of tension. Snowden talks, rubs his chin, answers phones, and shows images on a laptop screen, but he remains an enigma. While the information Snowden provides is obviously true, his motivations seem vague. He states one thing, but perhaps feels another. This ambiguity is implied in the negative space of the film. A hotel fire alarm keeps going off instilling a sense

“Poitras herself became the object of surveillance: she has been detained over forty times by the U.S. government.”

of paranoia. The phone rings, and Snowden unplugs it realizing it could be a surveillance device. Even the walls seem to be listening.

Scenes in the hotel cut to news releases of the Snowden leaks. THE US GOVERNMENT IS SPYING ON EVERYDAY CITIZENS AND THE WORLD! And let's not forget that OBAMA IS PRESIDENT while this is happening. Hope, my ass.

The most chilling scenes are stunning landscape shots. Images of the State Apparatus are ominous and eerily beautiful. Shots of a data mining site being built in Utah, giant radar dishes on the UK coast, and another data mining site in Germany require no words to deliver the implications they represent.

The film instills the audience with paranoia. Perhaps the most effective

part of the documentary is the empty space after the credits roll. We leave the theater and understand that the United States continues to violate human rights to privacy. In one sequence, computer hacker Jacob Applebaum notes the Post 9-11 conflation of privacy and freedom. Freedom is now seen in terms of privacy, so when we are denied privacy, we are denied freedom. In those terms, the United States is no longer a “free” country (if it ever was).

Poitras herself became the object of surveillance after making her first two films. She has been detained over forty times by the U.S. government. She now lives in exile, working in Berlin in an attempt to protect her material, her privacy, and her freedom. Snowden continues to live in exile in Russia.

After watching the trilogy, I couldn't help but think of Poitras as a tool of surveillance. In one scene in *The Oath*, Abu implores the camera (a.k.a. Poitras) to delete material from the previous day when he talks about 9-11. Since we witness the material on screen, clearly Poitras did not honor his plea. Evidence of his words is stored in the mind of everyone who watches the documentary and in Potrias's own data archive.

Documentaries carry the illusion of truth by way of genre. They are constructions assembled with the very specific intentions of the filmmaker. At the end of *Citizenfour*, Greenwald and Snowden exchange written messages about Obama's role in drone bombings. The scene feels awkward and staged. Perhaps it was Potrias's way of putting distance between herself and her film, or maybe it is a way of saying documentaries are also not to be entirely trusted. They are constructions, and no construction is pure truth. **CP**

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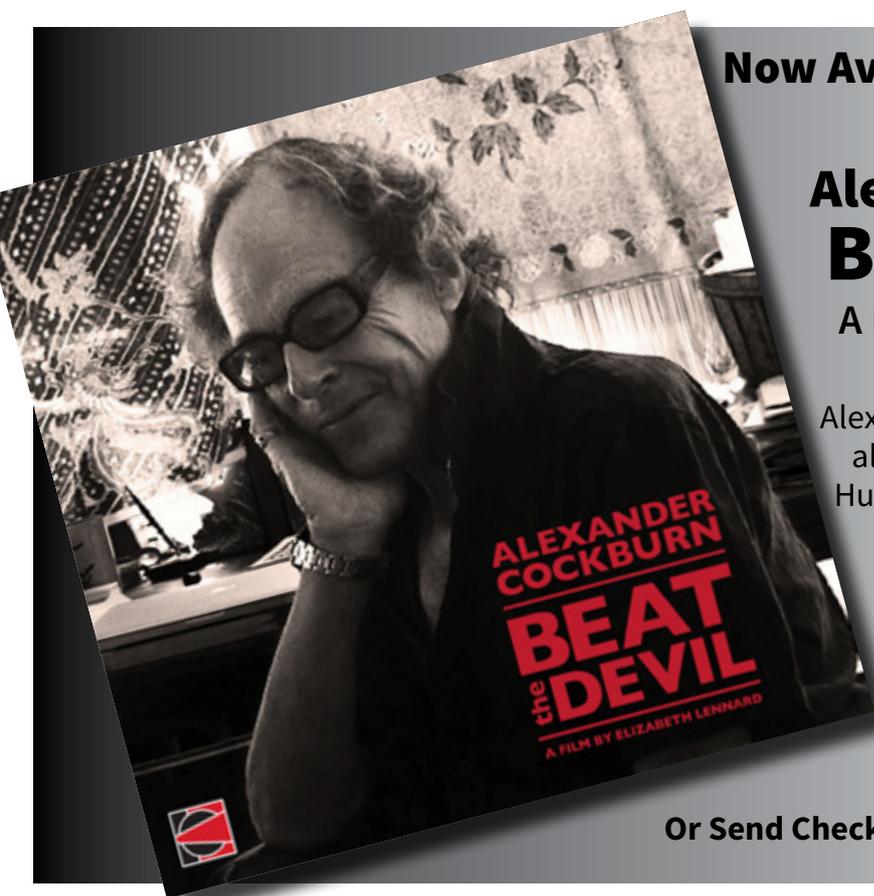
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