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Land of Despair
Now that the “failure” of American culture is being generally recognized, we urgently need to examine why this happened. Just in the space of a single generation America has gone from being a land of promise and an example to the world to one of despair. How and why did this happen? Was it a built in result of the post World War 2 hubris that made the US seem invincible?
Ron Davis
La Paz, Bolivia

We’re Good Looking
The newsletter look is better than ever. The white background gives it a very clean appearance with the color lending just enough notice to the loads of good articles. Cudos to you and the staff and cheers to you all during the the New Year when many of us will join in remembering AC with a good old Bottoms Up!
Carl Finamore
California

Caste and Class
Of course, CounterPunch’s pieces about caste and class will be lost in most dialogues on what happened in India and why the outraged uprising. It seems that low caste women and girls are raped with frightening regularity by upper caste men, even killed afterwards, at least according to what I searched and found out, with nary a whisper coming from anyone. No interest, no mass public outcry. The issue of whose bodies are valued in a neo-colonialist state so deeply impacted by the white supremacy of former european rulers, whose skin shade is considered enough of a passport to safety or at least upset, is of concern here, as well.
T.J. Bryan
Kilkenny, Ireland

Fresh Air
In the States, we are bombarded with misinformation on the consequences of privatizing public services. Reading CounterPunch’s articles on economics is a breath of fresh air. If anyone really wants to see the results of austerity measures and privatization of public services they should talk to someone in Georgia about the average quality of life in their state. It’s a joke. An insidious joke that talking heads and the Koch brother’s PR army are marketing as the road to prosperity.
Derrick Lough
Indiana

Republican Contradictions
I remember in 2005 Harvard Magazine’s cover story featured a giant Social Security card ripped in half (obviously meant to frighten people). You notice when it comes to SS, Republicans and other Wall Street people have no problem looking way out into the future, 40, 50, 60 years. When it comes to environmental problems — well, what do next quarter’s profits look like.
Brian Dorman
Arizona

Bomb Everything
In one of the most explicit calls for genocide, I recall Nixon ordering Kissinger to have “everything that flies (bomb) everything that moves” in Cambodia. If history had any justice, Nixon, Kissinger and practically every President since Roosevelt would be enshrined alongside the Nazi generals as the worst men in history for their destruction of Asia and Latin America.
Michael Dao
Indiana

Southwest Sentiments
RIP, A.C. Carry on, folks, now more than ever! Milagracias,
VGB
New Mexico

No Good Capitalism
Keep talking about CAPITALISM as the fundamental problem. Not “crony capitalism” or “vulture capitalism” or any other adjectival capitalism. It’s a cop-out to talk that way. It implicitly sets up an opposition between “good” and “bad” capitalism. But there is no good capitalism. It is what it always was: a criminal system based on the systematic exploitation and oppression of the majority of humanity by a small minority.
John H.
Montana

The Best of AC
May I say, your collaboration with Alex to get CP to the point it is the most vital internet organ of the english-speaking Indy left is such a tribute. I hope you
and Jeff and the rest of your fine team are coping without him; from afar it certainly looks like it. Magnificent contributions - though the sadness about the big gap in ideas and personality remains. I hope CP continues to reprint the ‘best of’ from his oeuvre, as it was certainly the most formative material I found, when I was growing up in the 1980s.

Patrick Bond
Durban, South Africa

Young Warriors

The day CP goes off-line will be like life on earth without oxygen. Keep it up, young warriors. Alex is watching over us... And grinning. Wish I had more scratch to give you.

Raymond M.
Pennsylvania

From Down Under

Good luck keeping the site going guys ... you have many supporters down this way just like me. Regards,

Des Downey
Melbourne, Australia

Cockburn vs. Hitchens

I never had the chance to meet Alex, although we did correspond a few times. I became aware of his writings only in 1994 when I began graduate school in the US. I still remember the arguments I had with a good friend, both of us Nation readers at the time. She loved Christopher Hitchens while I became an avid fan of Alex. My claim was that Hitchens’ was in love with his style and therefore one could not always trust him with the content, Alex, on the other hand, was driven by social justice and a search for truth, in the tradition of the prophets and the great philosophers. Years later my friend admitted that I had been right.

Back in Israel, during the first years of the second Intifada, I approached Alex a number of times asking for his help and he always did his best in disseminating the information I had passed his way.

He was both a mentor and an ally. He was a mensch.

Neve Gordon
Israel

Changing Minds

Bless you all for your hard work. I have learned and grown so much from reading CP; the articles have really stretched my ideas and even—gasp—changed a few! Thank you so very much!

J. Sager
Washington

On Our Own

I felt considerable surprise and sorrow in learning of the death of Alexander Cockburn. He was instrumental in getting me started as a writer. I owe him a great debt of gratitude for his interest and encouragement, and the platform that he and Jeffrey St. Clair have given me at the CounterPunch website and newsletter.

When I wrote, I sometimes imagined Alexander Cockburn as the reader at my shoulder. I think it made me a better, bolder, and more honest writer.

However, the biting sense of loss has more to it than the disappearance of a sympathetic interlocutor, or the knowledge that, despite having reached his “allotted threescore and ten” and burdened by the physical and emotional miseries of a two-year battle with cancer, Alexander Cockburn had plenty left in the tank when he passed on. Of course, he had more polemics left to write, articles to edit, contributors to nurture.

But I was also brought up short by the thought, if Alexander Cockburn isn’t around to do these things, who will? Who, in these difficult times, has the talent, the knowledge, the experience, and his miraculous combination of engagement, detachment, humor, invective, and generosity to fill the void? Guess we’re on our own now.

Peter Lee
Los Angeles

Heterodox Hero

A late note to say how sorry I was to hear about Alex. It’s a great loss for all of us on the left but, of course, you and the CP team must be feeling it much more personally. I was happy to see personally. I was happy to see how much press his death attracted in the UK, and much of it vaguely sympathetic. Given his heterodox opinions, that was testament in itself to the quality of his writing and his talent for exposing cant. He remains an inspiration.

All best,
Jonathan Cook
Nazareth, West Bank

CounterPunch welcomes letters from our readers. Preference is given to those containing fewer than 150 words. Please include name and city of residence.
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Religion
(Chordeiles Minor)
by Marc Beaudin

Nighthawk throws its single note song across the darkening sky
Then—bell of a nearby church begins to measure out the remaining hours of the day

The bird falls silent – listening ... or not ...
– then returns

These opposites are noted by a slightly aging man on his back porch:
The pure voice of that darting,
wide-mouthed bird catching insects on the wing

and the frail clanging of two thousand years’ worth of dogma and doggerel that only marks the moments leading to our own impending death.
In December, Daisy Cockburn and I traveled to Oakland to accept the PEN Writers' annual censorship award on behalf of her father, Alexander. The trip was an adventure in irony. Oakland was one of Alex's favorite cities. He loved its vibrancy and grittiness. It was the city of Jack London and the Panthers, of jazz and blues, of dockworkers and occupiers, of Sly Stone and Ishmael Reed, who happened to be on-hand to introduce the prize.

But for nearly twenty years, CounterPunch had adhered to an ironclad rule: we violently opposed all writing awards. Such honorifics, Alex reasoned, served as a kind of cultural sedative for unruly writers, a way of entiticing them into the corral of elite opinion. Can one call this censorship? If so, then it assumed several disguises during Alex's life.

There was the censorship of absence, the fact that for most of his career the language's most savage and erudite polemicist was excluded from the editorial pages of the New York Times and Washington Post.

There was the quiet censorship of proscription against journalism awards. It seems my brother Patrick has deserved the accolade. But for Alex Saro-Wiwa was censored for his journalism. Alex and I have both written in dozens of venues and published a journal and website that is read by 100,000s of people around the world (with the exception of Iran and China, where access to the website flickers on and off depending on the temperament of the regimes.) For us to cry censorship would be a yelp of weakness and also demean those writers who were being tortured or assassinated for their opinions.

Even so, there's little question that over the course of his 50 year career as a professional journalist Alex did repeatedly collide with the petty enforcers of elite opinion. Can one call this censorship? If so, then it assumed several disguises during Alex's life.

There was the quiet censorship of absence, the fact that for most of his career the language's most savage and erudite polemicist was excluded from the editorial pages of the New York Times and Washington Post.

There is the censorship of negation. Consider, for example, the New York Times Book Review's vicious assault on our book Whiteout, a history of the CIA's deep ties to dictators, death squads and drug runners. A writer for the Columbia Journalism Review called the hatchet job one of the most hostile book reviews ever written. The review had been commissioned by the Times's editors, whose fraternal relationship with the intelligence agencies had been exposed in our book.

There is the censorship of public ridicule, such as being smeared as a Stalinist by that little twerp George Will or a conspiratorialist by the faux left twerp Todd Gitlin, one of the shrillest false alarmists in American letters.

There is the censorship of manufactured hysteria, as when the Village Voice lost its nerve and suspended Alex for writing honestly about the plight of the Palestinians. When the Voice finally came to its senses and begged Alex to return, he rightly told the editors to screw off.

There is the censorship of orthodoxy, which explains Alex's disgusting treatment at the hands of the Nation magazine, where Victor Navasky and Katrina vanden Heuvel first cut Alex's columns in half, even though he was the magazine's most popular writer, and then when that didn't teach him to toe their narrow liberal line, they slashed his columns from twice a month to once a month. If you want insight into how the bosses of the Nation really felt about Alex, read Navasky's icily written and demeaning obituary.

Then there's old fashioned censorship, as when Nightline host Ted Kopple pulled the plug on Alex's microphone after the megalomaniacal anchor got peeved that Alex was wiping with floor with him during a live debate about the Soviet Union.

Finally, there's the censorship of government spying. A few days after Alex died, I asked our friend David Price, the anthropologist and historian of American intelligence agencies, to file a FOIA request for Alex's FBI and CIA files. After the usual run-around, Price secured a rather thin, but intriguing, sheaf of pages from the National Archives. As detailed in Price's story in this issue of CounterPunch, the FBI had been keeping tabs on Alex since his arrival in the US in 1972. More sobering, the documents (almost certainly incomplete) reveal that an unidentified informer for Britain's MI5 spy shop had tried to get Alex deported in the mid-1970s for his seditious writings. Alex was only saved by the FBI's refusal to disclose the name of the informant to the INS.

At this point it is hard to get the full picture of government harassment and snooping because the documents are so heavily redacted. Yes, even Alexander Cockburn's FBI, has been censored. That's surely something we should all aspire to as writers—it's a true measure that your prose has power and punch.
Grasping at Straws
The Fiscal Sellout
By Mike Whitney

Working people are getting royally shafted by the fiscal cliff deal. In fact, it isn’t really a budget deal at all; it’s just “starve the beast” dressed up as prudent “deficit reduction”.

This is austerity writ large. This isn’t the time to be cutting government spending. The economy is still in the doldrums. Wages are flat, unemployment is too high, and demand is still too weak. Any cutbacks now will show up immediately in terms of less hiring and slower growth. That’s why the settlement is such a disaster. It sacrifices the real economy to a phantom threat that poses no danger at all.

Even the big money guys at the brokerage firms know the whole thing is a hoax. They realize this isn’t about sensible deficit reduction, but choking off the vital flow of funds to the broader economy to effect some nutcase plan to crush labor and dismantle popular social programs. That’s what it’s really all about, restructuring the economy. Just listen to what Akira Takei, head of the international fixed-income department in Tokyo at Mizuho Asset Management Co. said to Bloomberg News: “People in the market are saying? Here’s a sampling taken from the Wall Street Journal:

Lewis Alexander, Nomura Global Economics: “The deal just enacted implies a significant tightening of fiscal policy this year. Payroll taxes are going up and federal spending is being cut by the amount anticipated in the BCA. These measures will be a drag on growth, starting in the current quarter. Taken at face value, the deal appears to entail somewhat more fiscal drag for 2013 than we had assumed in our forecast.”

And here’s a tidbit from G-Sax: “We estimate this package would result in an overall drag on growth from fiscal policy of around 1.5pp. Our forecast assumes 1.6pp of fiscal drag on a Q4/Q4 basis in 2013, due to the expiration of the payroll tax cut, upper income tax cuts, and new taxes under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that take effect today, and slowing federal spending due to the spending caps enacted last year.”

Here’s JP Morgan’s David Kelly: “Because the fight was concentrated on how the ‘rich’ should be taxed, many investors may have the impression that this was a relatively small and narrowly focused tax increase. In fact, this represents a very significant increase in taxation on almost all Americans, with the most pain likely being inflicted by the expiration of the 2% payroll tax cut. From a macro-economic perspective, this is also where the impact is likely to be greatest—consumer spending on basic goods and services like groceries, clothing, restaurant meals and gasoline should all take a hit over the next few months due to lower take-home pay…. the impact of all of this should be to slow the US economy in the first half of 2013 but not put it into recession.”

And, here’s my personal favorite from Dan Greenhaus at BTIG LLC:
Every Child Left Behind
BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

I was complaining the other day to my wife, who gave birth to our second daughter—the first is 17—about what it means to have kids in America. “We hate kids in this country,” I told her. “Why do we keep having them?”

I was thinking about public schools getting defunded; about the bankrupting cost of day care and health care; about the fact that one half of all US children will be hungry enough at some point in their lives to go on food stamps; that GDP is up 168 percent since 1975, while “family economic well-being” is the worst it has been in 35 years.

“We hate mothers too,” said my wife. She was thinking about health insurance companies. “Well, they want mothers to fucking die,” I offered.

Because, you know, these corporations think pregnant women are sick. Why else do “health” insurance companies categorize pregnancy as a “pre-existing condition,” as if it’s an illness?

The disease of carrying the unborn is reason for a health insurer to stipulate that for exactly ten months after a woman is first determined to be pregnant she will be ineligible for insurance if she does not already have it.

Hopefully during those ten months the mother will deal with the problem—how about abort the fetus, soak it in motor oil, set it on fire, and fling it via crossbow at the executives of said insurance companies?

Which brings me to the issue of how, if you’re lucky enough to bring it into the world alive and with the requisite twenty fingers and toes, a child should be raised as an ethical being in a society that expresses so fully its loathing for the family unit—which is to say, for the parents doing the raising.

The issue turns on our understanding of human nature. This fundamental philosophic question in American culture is answered as follows: Man’s nature is to make purchases in the marketplace, and find happiness in the acquisition of material things through the getting and spending of money.

This is a worldview obviously based on contempt of man, the presumption that man for himself is worthless. One does not raise human beings in such a culture; one invests in a unit of exchange, the goal being that the children can one day sell themselves in the market.

And to what end?

Here is my 17-year-old, immersed in an environment that asks her to be a grasping, greedy, ugly, jealous, conniving social idiot; to mistake accumulation for beauty; to engage in ostentatious display of finery and trinkets; to lionize the rich and vilify the poor.

Thorstein Veblen figured out the contours of this spiritual disaster more than a century ago. From Veblen we have the concepts of conspicuous consumption—a form of “derangement,” in Veblen’s words, because it was predicated on rationalized waste—and pecuniary emulation, better known as keeping up with the Joneses.

Veblen’s conclusion was that a society trapped in cycles of pecuniary emulation and conspicuous consumption—display and waste based on envy—was not a society worth living in. It was primitive, “barbaric,” uncivilized.

What’s more, the young—and this was also Veblen’s observation—are taught that to be useful and productively engaged in society is dishonorable, and that to make money doing as close as possible to nothing is the dream. Prestige in our barbaric order is accorded the classes that produce almost no social value commensurate with the money they are paid, the accolades they are wrapped in.

The short list of offenders includes the finance-insurance-real estate sector; the advertising, promotional, and public relations complexes; the human circus animals in football, basketball, baseball etc.; and the related celebrities complexes (whose members are almost always employed in film, sports, entertainment).

Yet why is it that little boys want to operate garbage trucks and locomotives and cranes but show no interest in derivatives trading, betting against oil futures, or hedging on currencies?

It is because the species naturally—this being part of the real nature of man—gravitates to productive work with hands and body and mind, abhorring that which is manifestly worthless. The parent is faced with despair at the prospects for direct confrontation with this monstrous normality. The children are surrounded, besieged, penetrated by the culture.

The mass indoctrination inherent in consumer capitalism has got hold of the great majority of adults, too many of whom help the indoctrination along, either tacitly at home, through ignorant or careless acquiescence, or actively at the office writing the advertising copy, designing the iPhone app, and the like.

The culture is always looking to rot the brains of the next generation, and we who know better have an obligation, at the least within the confines of the family unit, to hold the monster at bay via a kind of monastic withdrawal.

I think of author Jeannette Walls writing in her memoir, The Glass Castle, about the quite effective defense her parents mounted at Christmastime against the pernicious Santa Claus fable. “They told us all about how other kids were deceived by their parents, how the toys the grown-ups claimed were made by little elves wearing bell caps in their workshop at the North Pole actually had labels on them saying MADE IN JAPAN.” Walls’ mother wisely counseled her: “Try not to look down on those other children. It’s not their fault they’ve been brainwashed into believing silly myths.” CP
Inside Cockburn’s FBI File: Snoops, Snitches and Secrets

By David Price

Over the past decade, while writing pieces for *CounterPunch* documenting Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) monitoring of American activist intellectuals, I had several conversations with Alexander Cockburn about FBI surveillance of political radicals. He took it as a matter of course that a nation’s secret police would keep tabs on critics, visionaries, and troublemakers. Yet even the undeterred optimist, when considering the possibility of such surveillance directed at himself, Alexander maintained a nonchalant buoyancy, insisting he did not give this possibility much thought because his continued ability to freely write remained unfettered. If the FBI was monitoring him, it had not limited the freedoms of expression he claimed for himself, so he wasn’t going to waste time worrying about such matters.

It's not that Alexander underestimated the power of the FBI to disrupt political movements. Over the years he wrote critically of the FBI’s infiltration of environmental activists, the Black Panthers, his friend Edward Said, COINTELPRO, and topics such as the dangers of post-9/11 data mining. He just didn't let such possibilities alter the course or force of his attack.

Last July, a few days after Alexander’s death, I filed Freedom of Information Act requests for records pertaining to him with the FBI and CIA. The FBI notified me that their record search revealed one set of documents that had previously been moved to the National Archives for storage. I re-filed my FOIA request with the National Archives and in November I received a small collection of FBI documents, only seventeen pages, spanning the years 1973-75. The FBI now claims these documents comprise Alexander Cockburn's complete FBI file.

It is surprising to find as outspoken a critic of American capital and empire as Cockburn to have such a paltry record of FBI attentions. There are good reasons to wonder if this initial release truly represents all FBI records pertaining to him. The FBI is notoriously sloppy and inefficient, and its responses to FOIA requests show recurrent patterns of inconsistently searching for records. Given the outdated state of the FBI’s older record system, it is likely they hold yet to be identified records on Cockburn. Unfortunately, during the first Bush and Clinton administrations, a broad range of historic FBI records were destroyed rather than moved to safe storage at the National Archives. The extent of this damage to the historical record is not well understood by FOIA scholars.

But even with unresolved questions about the completeness of Cockburn’s FBI record, the released seventeen pages combined with what is known of FBI efforts to limit political discourse during this period provide a disturbing view of how the FBI and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) used McCarthy era legislation to try and limit political discourse in America.

1973 Cockburn in New York

Cockburn’s released FBI file (FBI 100-HQ-478026) was catalogued under the FBI’s Central Records Classification System number “100,” indicating he was the subject of an FBI Domestic Security investigation. This is the same FBI designation used for its numerous investigations of suspected communists, anarchists, socialists and other subversives since the Bureau’s creation. The cumulative total of FBI “Domestic Security” investigations is unknown, but in the early 1990s the FBI disclosed it had to date undertaken over 1,300,000 “Domestic Security” investigations, producing files occupying over 22,000 cubic feet of space. We can only guess at the growth in size of these files in the post 9/11 era.

The FBI opened its initial record of Alexander Cockburn on August 15, 1973, with a brief report describing him and his work carrying a disclaimer that it was to be “made available to the Immigration and Naturalization Service only on the understanding that under no circumstances will it, or the identity of the originating agency, be disclosed to the public, to the subject of the report or to his representatives or employer, in any administrative or judicial proceedings without the written prior consent of the originating agency.”

Alexander had moved to the United States in 1972 to work as a freelance journalist. The FBI described him as a “leading figure of the ‘New Left,’ a group of revolutionary Marxist academics centered round the ‘New Left Review,’ since 1966. Although closely associated with members of Trotskyist and Communist groups, he is not known to have been either a Trotskyist or a Communist himself, and is probably best described as a Revolutionary Marxist.” The FBI’s report included a copy of Cockburn’s INS application requesting Permanent Resident Status in the United States.

The following week, the FBI’s New York Special Agent In Charge (SAC) submitted a report to FBI Director Clarence M. Kelly summarizing the Bureau’s knowledge of Cockburn. This investigation occurred during the midst of significant administrative upheaval within the FBI, coming just fifteen months after J. Edgar Hoover’s death, with Kelly being the FBI’s third post-Hoover director. The memo header listed Cockburn’s name along with the FBI subject heading “SM—SWP;” FBI shorthand meaning: Subversive Matter—Socialist Workers Party, a designation likely revealing more about FBI predilections for inventing political affiliations than Cockburn’s actual party ties.

The FBI reported Cockburn had submitted a request for an “adjustment in immigrant status” and referenced information coming from a “confidential source abroad,” writing that, “a review of files at [FBI] Headquarters indicates that Cockburn edited ‘Student Power,’ a British publication relating to student protests. No other pertinent information is available in Bufiles [Bureau Files] in addition to that furnished by confidential source abroad and enclosed herewith.” The report conceded that Cockburn “has never been known to have been a member of a Trotskyist or Communist Organization as such.”

The New York SAC wrote FBI Director Kelly that his office would review its files, incorporate any relevant in-
formation along with information from their confidential sources and submit this on a LHM (Letterhead Memo) to FBI Headquarters and the INS, stressing that the restrictions protecting the identity of MI-5’s informer be maintained with the INS. This reference to a Letterhead Memo indicated FBI plans to release a memo designed to be distributed with attribution outside the Bureau, in this case, the outside agency receiving the LHM was the INS.

An October 3, 1973 FBI memo referenced eight copies of a LHM, including one copy sent to the INS. This LHM described Cockburn as a “revolutionary Marxist,” biographical information, including information on his father Claud Cockburn and his mother, Patricia Arbuthnot (nee), and stressed his links to the New Left Review and Marxist academics. The FBI included the summary of a 1954 interview, with Claud Cockburn’s former wife, identified by the FBI as Mrs. Robert Gorham Davis, who described Claud’s journalism career.

While the FBI Letterhead Memorandum portrayed Alexander Cockburn as a subversive involved in radical socialist movements, no released records indicate further FBI action or interest in him in 1973. The reasons for the FBI or INS’s lack of further activity immediately after this initial 1973 series of memos is unclear, but given the rise of Watergate investigations, with the impeachment resolution introduced in Congress months earlier, and the beginning of scrutiny into a broad range of FBI activities, rapid shifts in FBI leadership, and accounts in memoirs of a range of FBI insiders, we know that the FBI was adopting a new posture of historically relative caution and was not perusing radical political activities as aggressively as it had just a few years earlier.

The next entries in Cockburn’s FBI would come in 1975, but before discussing these records, some historical information contextualizing the FBI and INS’s roles in monitoring, deporting and denying entry visas to suspect writers is in order.

**FBI Hounding Authors**

The legal foundation of the INS and FBI’s mid-1970s investigation of Alexander Cockburn was the 1952 Immigration and National Act, more commonly known as the McCarran-Walter Act. This McCarthyism era law includes provisions for barring entry to the US to subversives and allowing the deportation of those involved in subversive activities. Though the Act was vetoed by President Truman, his veto was overridden by both House and Senate votes. The Act has been revised several times; 1990 revisions removed some political exclusionary restrictions, but the McCarran-Walter Act remains in place, now with post-9/11 political manifestations.

There is a long history of the FBI monitoring authors the Bureau believes subversive. Hundreds of American authors including John Steinbeck, William Carlos Williams, and Langston Hughes to Alan Ginsberg were tracked by Hoover’s FBI, and the Bureau at times worked with the INS to revoke visas of foreign authors residing in or visiting the United States. The breadth of this surveillance remains unknown, but back in 1991 Tim Weiner documented in a Philadelphia Inquirer investigative series that US immigration authorities then maintained a “blacklist” identifying over 367,000 individuals not to be allowed into the United States. Weiner determined that “ninety-six percent of those names were tacked onto the list for ideological reasons,” among those writers denied entry to the US identified by Weiner were Carlos Fuentes, Farley Mowat, and Doris Lessing. McCarran-Walter has been used to deport Graham Greene from Puerto Rico, and to deny Marxist sociologist Thomas Bottomore an entry visa to the US.

Such uses of McCarran-Walter powers to limit intellectual and political discourse are not an archaic practice from a past age. In 2007 Dr. Riyadh Lafta, the Iraqi scientist who coauthored the 2006 Lancet study estimating the number of Iraqi deaths resulting from the American invasion exceeded over 600,000 people was denied entry to the US when she was invited to present an academic talk at the University of Washington. This past year the US State Department denied a visa to German journalist Gabriele Weber (well known for her anti-Nazi research, having thousands of records on Adolf Eichmann released), seeking to conduct research at the US National Archives.

It is this historical pattern of the INS and FBI working in tandem to monitor progressives or radicals, and at times denying entry or even deporting non-American writers or others that the context of these FBI records takes on significance. The FBI and INS interest in Cockburn was part of an ongoing application of the McCarran-Walter Act to limit American political discourse.

1975 FBI & INS Deportation Prospects

Alexander Cockburn came to the FBI and INS’s attention during a time that his writings were making a significant splash on American journalism. His “Press Clips” column in the Village Voice, co-written with James Ridgeway, was pioneering a new form of media criticism, and his regular contributions to The New York Review of Books, Harpers, Esquire, and other publication were expanding American political discourse.

After fourteen months of inaction, in January 1975 the FBI began administrative proceedings to release information detailing Cockburn’s involvement in subversive activities that could lead to his expulsion from the United States by the INS. A January 20, 1975 memo from Henry E. Wagner, Assistant
Had protracted legal difficulties with the INS during this period, adding that, "Alexander believed that at least one of the deportation efforts was sparked by a request from Rep. Peter Rodino, then chair of the Judiciary Committee, which controlled the INS budget." He recalls that Alexander hired a top immigration lawyer, Stanley Mailman, "who drove them off." While the specifics of the referenced MI5 information remains unknown, Andrew Cockburn speculates that "MI5's interest in Alexander might have come from his work with Ralph Schoenman, former secretary to Bertrand Russell, who controlled a lot of money donated by Russell and put it to use in the antiwar movement in the late 60s. At one point Schoenman, banned from Britain, smuggled himself in and was looked after by Alexander who among other things took Ralph, who was being actively hunted by the authorities, to Number 10 Downing Street and photographed him standing between two smiling coppers at the front door, said picture appearing in The Times the next day."

**Secret Evidence**

These FBI documents suggest that the reason why deportation proceedings against Cockburn were not undertaken was the FBI's refusal to disclose the identity of the MI5 informer. During the mid-1970s, constitutional safeguards, such as that most basic of Sixth Amendment protections allowing those accused of wrongdoing to face accusers, prevented the INS from using secret evidence to deport individuals from the United States. Today, the Obama Administration continues post-9/11 policies allowing the use of secret testimony in INS deportation proceedings.

Jaya Ramji-Nogales writes in a 2008 *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* article that while conditions of secrecy make it impossible to know how widespread governmental use of secret evidence is, the use of secrecy in immigration cases has increased since 2001. Ramji-Nogales observes that, "the government has not presented statistics on the use of secret evidence in immigration court since 2000, and because records of immigration proceedings are not publicly accessible, it is practically impossible to obtain this information independently. ... We do know of consistent efforts in Congress to expand the use of secret evidence in immigration proceedings as part of immigration reform legislation."

The timing of Alexander’s move to America likely played a role in limiting the FBI and INS’s action against him. These records of the FBI and INS weighing deportation options coincided with a period of administrative upheaval within the FBI following J. Edgar Hoover’s death, the rise of congressional investigations of FBI abuses of power, and during an era when basic civil liberties mandating the right to face accusers still prevailed. The FBI’s 1975 renewed interest in exploring the possibility of deporting Cockburn coincided with the rise of the US Senate Church Committee and the House’s Pike Committee’s hearing investigating FBI and CIA’s illegal interference in domestic and international political activities, and it is possible that these larger historical processes limited the FBI’s ability to strike in ways that it had routinely just a few years earlier.

Given the pleasure that Alexander found arguing that
Gerald Ford was America's greatest President (largely because Ford's short term of office transferred "the Hippocratic injunction from the medical to the political realm, he did the least possible harm") I imagine he would have savored the historical point that it was the Ford administration's adherence to standards of fair play and the rule of law that prevented his deportation from the United States.

It is difficult to assess the impact on American letters and political life had the INS undertaken deportation proceedings and expelled Alexander from the United States. Certainly his critique would have flourished elsewhere, though without the American flavor he developed and the unique independence he found in Petrolia; but certainly American political and intellectual life would been much the poorer had the decidedly un-American activities of the FBI and INS prevailed.

Postscript

One final note concerning the diminutive length of Alexander's released FBI file: the brevity of his file raises more questions than it answers.

Either the FBI has more files which they have either not located or have and intentionally won't release, or it is possible that no further FBI files on Alexander exist. It is tempting to speculate whether either outcome is a measure of FBI incompetence: either a recent incompetence in the Bureau's ability to search, identify, and release existing files, or a more ancient incompetence in evaluating the threat that was Alexander Cockburn. Having studied the extent of FBI surveillance during this period, I am betting on the former, though both remain possibilities. While FBI noncompliance with FOIA requests is a measure of the Agency's contempt of the law and a lack of Bureau professionalism, the federal courts do not look at such incompetence lightly. Three months ago, US Federal Judge Edward Chen awarded FOIA researcher Seth Rosenfeld $470,459 in legal fees accrued in decades of Rosenfeld's legal efforts to access documents (from an uncooperative FBI) relating to FBI political oppression at UC Berkeley during the 1950s and 60s.

During the last two decades I have filed several hundred FOIA requests, and recurrently received initial responses claiming there were few or no files, only later to have hundreds of pages released upon appeal. In early December I filed a multi-pronged administrative appeal with the FBI, arguing that there are indications within the released FBI file showing that there are other referenced files relating to Cockburn that were not searched for or released to me. As results of these appeals become available, I will report on these findings here at CounterPunch.

I will be surprised if the currently released files turn out to be the final installment of the FBI's holdings on Alexander Cockburn.

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No Magic Bullets: Deadly Lessons from the Sandy Hook Little Tyke Massacre

by Nancy Scheper-Hughes

"We have met the enemy and it is us"—Pogo

A few years ago just as I was about to deliver a lecture on 'violence in war and peace' in the auditorium of a large public university in the US the event was interrupted by police responding to a bomb threat. Although police dogs did not sniff out a bomb, the lecture was rescheduled and moved to the palatial home of the dean of undergraduate studies who lived in a suburban gated community. Or, rather, who lived in a gated community that had grown, my genial host explained, like a solid wall of invading kudzu around his lovely faux Frank Lloyd Wright home precariously encased in glass. The dean assured me that we would not be stopped or inspected by security guards posted at a kiosk at the gates of his community that evening. On principle he had refused to pay the membership dues that supported the elaborate security system that monitored the movements of all residents and their guests. A godfather clause permitted him to do so.

The whole thing was absurd, he said angrily. The real threat was not, as feared, from the surrounding low income neighborhoods but from inside the gated complex itself. Scattered among the upper middle class professionals living there were some arrivistes who had climbed the economic if not the social ladder by involvement in the local drug trade. One of these was the next door neighbor with whose children my host's seven year old son and five year old daughter had struck up a friendship. One afternoon his children came back with the usual stories of hide and seek, cops and robbers and cowboys and Indians, but on this occasion they boasted using real guns owned by the neighbor children's parents. Complaints were made, apologies delivered, and the guns were moved to a more secure locked cabinet, but the dean and his family remained trapped inside a pistol-packing, gun-loaded located gated community. He was considering selling his lovely home but would he have to inform prospective buyers about the private armory next door?

This was not the first time that a lecture I gave (or attended) was interrupted by violence. The first time was in 1994 at the University of Cape Town, just before the election of Nelson Mandela, when a short but deadly period of political anarchy created a vacuum during which several hundred civilians—black, brown and white—were killed in massacres in pubs, schools, worker hostels, churches and gasoline stations. The Cape Town faculty knew how to duck and hide during academic lockdowns which occurred with alarming frequency. One of these lock downs occurred during a guest lecture by the British literary scholar, Terry Eagleton, who for some reason I was charged with introducing. Although I reassured Eagleton that the calls and response between police and angry protestors were more symbolic than actual skirmish-
es, being 'locked down' by police in the arts block building surrounded by angry, toyi-toying crowds, some of the protesters waving traditional weapons, felt as weirdly crazy as being locked down in an armed suburban gated community. My initial impulse was to flee through the basement of the building and join the protesters, but under the circumstances, we simply waited it out.

Later, in 2001, just prior to a lecture I was to give on organs trafficking at the Social Anthropology Department of Hebrew University a dud of a bomb exploded just outside the entrance to the grand old campus on Mount Scopus. The damage was minor. No one was hurt, and everyone in the audience seemed relaxed, except me. After the talk an Israeli colleague confided that people were so accustomed to a daily dose of violent aggression that they 'missed' them when they didn't happen for a period. "It is as if our bodies are wired or primed for the violence and we become bored during the quiet periods." I replied that some of us in California felt that way when too much time passed without a moderate earthquake or temblor or two.

We continue to resist the fact that our nation is alone in the industrialized democratic world in tolerating subcultures of violence to form in our cities, towns and suburbs.

These three vignettes on the normalization of violence all concern cultures of violence in countries at war, either at home or abroad. Violence begets violence. In Israel one learns to be cool when a teenage soldier's rifle brushes against one in a public bus. In South Africa one learned to drive one's car away from the sides of the road and to speed quickly under pedestrian overpasses to avoid an angry shelling of large stones. In the US we use a different normalization strategy: we go limp and hibernate like obedient little dormice at the tea table. Americans have learned to silence and censor themselves by, for example, collapsing to the powerful gun lobby and to fundamentalist interpretations of our Constitution as if it were all inevitable. If it was our Bible rather than our Constitution we would never allow it, at least not in progressive circles. You really expect us to believe that when 'God separated light from darkness' he meant to tell us that race segregation is God's will? But we politely acquiesce to censorship by gun supporters and the NRA, or worse, we respond with self-censorship.

For example, the New York Times invited its readers to participate in the weekly 'Sunday Dialogue' on December 18th, 2012, on the assigned topic: "Beyond Gun Control" in response to the Sandy Hook Kindergarten Massacre. The editors message was: no fruitless dialogue on gun control. Get over it! The gunslingers already have won the war. Let's move on...

When I mentioned that I was writing an essay on the tiny tot massacre in New England, a distinguished senior colleague advised sternly: "Do not write about guns. You are an anthropologist. Write about what you know. Write about culture, write about cultures of violence". Yes, indeed. But America's culture of violence is steeped in a deadly historical-romance with handguns, pistols, rifles, M-16s, machine guns and military assault weapons. There is no comparable romance with, let us say, swords, spears, longbows, or battering rams, except for tidbits of Nordic mythology in cult film, cult games like dungeons and dragons and hopelessly nerdy Renaissance faires.

As a government recruiter for the Peace Corps during the Vietnam War, I built a successful US-wide campus recruitment campaign around a slogan and a poster I designed with potential Vietnam draftees in mind: "Shovels Don't Jam like M-16s. Join the Peace Corps". [Peace Corps was not an official alternative to military service in those days but it certainly delayed being drafted while a PCV was in service overseas]. However, once Peace Corps Washington learned about the campaign I was ordered to end it immediately. It was not only 'inappropriate' but I was told that I could face prosecution under the appropriately named Hatch Act 2. Once again, I was told not to talk about guns and war and to talk about what I knew best, as a former Peace Corps Volunteer in the slums of Brazil: peace and latrines.

Years later I received a tongue lashing from Prof. Glenn Wilson, the charismatic and outspoken founder of the Department of Social Medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: "You can teach our medical students any damn thing you think they need to know, Nancy, but for Christ sake don't talk about the public health risks and evils of tobacco! Not in this state or we'll be doomed from the start." And so we were then and so we are now: doomed, that is, by self censorship.

No Magic Bullets

Schoolroom and schoolyard massacres. We have been here before, déjà vu all over again. How much more can we take? What are we willing to do, then, to stop the cycles of violence that are destroying our communities? In the weeks and days following the Sandy Hook tiny tot massacre, the pundits and policy wonks have suggested many reasonable strategies to help communities, parents, and professionals to identify and respond to the assumed 'early warning signs' that can precede and even to predict school shootings and other massacres in public spaces such as shopping malls and movie theaters. However, just about all the strategies suggested were already implemented in 1999-2000 following a spate of mass shootings culminating in the Columbine disaster that, like Sandy Hook, was another tipping point when denial and normalization were the rule.
To assist the National Campaign, a Presidential Academic Advisory Board was formed, led by anthropologist John Devine. The Board included some of the nation’s leading scholars of urban America and youth violence—Elijah Anderson, Sissila Bok, Philippe Bourgois, William Damon, Kenneth Dodge, Richard Freeman, James Garbarino, James Gibbons, James Gillian, David Kennedy, Alan J. Lipton, William Pollack, James Short, Joel Wallman, and Frank Zimring, among others. I was also a member of the Board. Over the course of several meetings we collaborated in the preparation of a detailed report that identified key variables overlooked by the national campaign.

We documented the links between isolated public mass shootings in schools and the broader social and political context of excessively high rates of youth homicides and suicides, of alienation and isolation of youth from their parents, schools, and communities. Drawing on the expertise of the advisory panel members we explained the ‘Code of the streets’ (E. Anderson) and the ‘Search for respect’ (P. Bourgois) that contributed to homicides and suicides among minority youth. The hypersensitivity and hyper reactivity to imagined insults were the offspring of a profound sense of shame and low self-esteem resulting from the extreme marginalization of unwanted and despised (even more than disrespected) populations. We described the culture of bullying in elementary schools that was not yet recognized as a trigger in some mass shooting incidents. Finally, we touched upon the lethal association of male honor with physical force and of power and might with deadly weapons. This led us to a critique of gun culture, but this conversation was derailed by those members of the board who labeled gun control a toxic subject, one that had to be carefully finessed.

We established connections between structural violence—the violence of poverty, exclusion and extreme marginality—and everyday violence in the homes, streets and schools of America. We described an epidemic of youth violence (J. Gillin) that we linked to the punitive and carceral state and to the militarization of American society following the Vietnam and the first Iraqi wars. We debated the problems of homelessness, drug addicted, and traumatized veterans and their impact on children and adolescents. We introduced the category of dangerous and endangered youth (N. Scheper-Hughes), young people who were both victims and perpetrators of violence.

Few of these concepts were familiar to Americans outside the field of social science and the academy. They did not travel easily or well. Neither did our advocacy on behalf of the unmet needs of America’s youth for decent housing,
safe streets, medical, dental, and mental health services. It was difficult to discuss parental, educational, and even nutritional child abuse and neglect. The idea that Americans were not as child-centered as we imagine ourselves to be was not a popular message. Under the guidance of John Devine, whose book Maximum Security, drew analogies between American public schools and US maximum security prisons, the Academic Advisory Panel rejected political proposals to increase technological security systems in schools, video cameras, metal detectors, and the hiring of private security agents to police school corridors and bathrooms.

Many of our conclusions went against the grain and not surprisingly, the report was controversial and contested. It was subjected to many agonizing edits, and passages dealing with the dangers of readily available weapons in American homes and proposals to buy back weapons from gang leaders were watered down or deleted altogether. It was a noble struggle but in the end censorship and self-censorship ruled the day. Those board members of a more critical persuasion deferred to the those dedicated to real politic. In the end, the report, delivered to President Clinton and his staff, was shelved. Today, one can barely find it online hidden in digitized US government archives. On one search I could find it but parts of the report were redacted and even marked withdrawn. When I searched for it more recently I could only find the executive summary and some references to members of the advisory board.

It would be safe to say that the campaign, including the innovative public relations ads, the anti-violence training programs, the just say no to violence programs had no permanent or lasting effects. Advisory Board member Michael Klonsky’s passionate advocacy for smaller schools with lower teacher-student ratios that have a proven record of decreasing incidents of school violence, made no inroads to a US Congress that was all about charter schools and downsizing and closing failed public schools. The call for building new and creative school environments on a human scale seems, in hindsight, almost utopian.

Thus, after a brief respite the mass shootings in American schools and other public venues resumed at an almost predictable rate. American citizens failed to go far enough and deep enough inside our collective national unconscious. We continue to resist the fact that our nation is alone in the industrialized democratic world in tolerating subcultures of violence to form in our cities, towns and suburbs. No other democratic nation allows its private citizens to assemble military arsenals in their homes, practices that endanger the lives of all in our suffering and disintegrating cities, in our increasingly armed and dangerous culturally isolated suburbs, and even in picturesque New England towns.

**The House Gun**

In her award winning post-apartheid novel, The House Gun, Nadine Gordimer describes a traumatized society of white, middle class people who seemed to be sleepwalkers during the democratic transition that replaced a violent racist police state with an imperfect ANC government led by Nelson Mandela. Like the dean (above) confined to his dangerous gated community, the protagonists cannot imagine that their son Duncan was capable of killing his girlfriend’s casual lover with the kind of gun kept safely in his middle class flat to defend the household against attack by skollies and gangsters from the de facto segregated African townships.

The house gun, suggests, as one reviewer noted, a warm fuzzy object, similar to a house cat, both indispensable to a sense of wellbeing. How could things have gone so very wrong? In post-apartheid South Africa the political tables have turned but the economic tables did not. Peoples’ expectations were dashed and consequently violence seemed to be in the air, everywhere. The situation Gordimer describes is not too dissimilar from life in America today. Both countries are coming out from under violent histories and violent struggles, and both are extremely violent and militant societies, suffering from the legacies of colonial and postcolonial domination, slaveries, and racisms. Gordimer’s protagonist, Duncan’s violent act was, however, a domestic crime of passion without political motivation. It should have nothing at all to do with South Africa’s violent history but that is not how the South African author wants us to see it.

Violence breeds violence. Gordimer wrote her novel amidst political debates in South Africa about ending the death penalty and about gun control amidst an alarming increase in violence against middle class white South Africans who were once protected by the apartheid terrorist machine. Whites today are forced back to their own private resources—hired guards, razor wire, electronic security systems. And, when all else fails (at it inevitably does) they rely on the house gun, failing to realize that more guns in private homes do not mean less crime, a lesson for American as well as for South African readers.

**The Two Specters—Sacrificial Violence and the Scapegoat**

"It takes a village to stop a rampage"—Paul Steinberg

After the Columbine disaster the national focus was on Black youth, the inner city, the ghetto, and Black resentment against an unnamed oppressor. Black youth were readily turned into sacrificial scapegoats, the arbitrary objects of white middle class fears and perceptions. The fact that the Columbine killers were, like most other school shooters, white and middle class had no bearing on the public discourse on youth violence which was black coded. White children are not youth, they are adolescents, or young people. Youth refers to minority children, the children of the Other. As Michael Greenberg and David Schneider aptly named the problem in their 1994 article in Social Science & Medicine, “Violence in American Cities: Young Black Males is the Answer, but What Was the Question?” They contest the then prevailing view that the answer to the cause of violence in American cities is young black men. Their comparative study of urban violence in three relatively poor middle-sized cities of New Jersey—Camden, Trenton, and Newark—that violence is distributed
among young and old, male and female, Black, white and Latino. They identify the real causes of urban violence as deindustrialization, unemployment, urban deserts, undesirable land uses and the political and social abandonment of unwanted people: poor and working class whites as well as Blacks. Violence and premature violent deaths (homicides, suicides, accidents) were caused by extreme marginalization, ghettos, and segregation.

Similarly, following the Sandy Hook massacre in which more than 20 youngsters and six teachers and the assailant’s mother were killed in a rampage that ended in the killer’s suicide, the blame was attributed to another sacrificial scapegoat, the mentally deranged mass murderer. Today the pundits and policy wonks, many of them psychiatrists, decry the failure of the mental health system to identify, treat and contain the dangerous mentally ill. Today’s policy prescriptions are just that—earlier intervention and treatment with prescriptions of powerful and dangerous psychotropic drugs. The second line of defense is longer confinement of the mentally ill (especially schizophrenics) in mental hospital wards, wards that are already over-crowded and in psychiatric hospitals that no longer exist.

However, the Sandy Hook killer and suicide victim, Adam Lanzar, died without a medical diagnosis although one report described him as having Asperger’s Syndrome, a condition that is not associated with violence except self mutilation in profound cases. Another news report said that Adam was already being treated with antipsychotic medication. Obviously, here is not the place to argue the case for mental patients rights or to provide robust statistics showing that the mentally ill are less dangerous than those who are not under the suspicion of harboring a lethal mental condition, that is ordinary people like ourselves and like Adam’s mother. Hopefully it is not necessary to remind bio-psychiatric scientists and practitioners that the over-prediction of the dangerousness of the mentally ill resulted in the criminalization of the mentally different for most of the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, a gross social injustice we should never seek to repeat.

More pertinent is the fact that powerful anti-psychotic and anti-depressive medications are already over-prescribed due to the stranglehold of the pharmaceutical industry over the psychiatrists who depend on them. The so-called second generation psychotropic drugs are, despite the pseudoscience produced by pharmaceutical industry, still powerful tranquilizers and they are toxic. They have paradoxical effects, especially on young adults, among these irritability, aggression, and suicide. David Healy, an internationally recognized professor of Psychiatry in Wales and an expert in modern psychopharmacology, published a cohort study of mortality among schizophrenics hospitalized one hundred years ago and a contemporary sample. While both groups died prematurely, the causes of death were different. In the early cohort the patients died from communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis, as a consequence of institutionalization in giant asylums. The contemporary cohort of schizophrenics died young from coronary events and suicides, both of which, according to the researchers, could be the side effects of psychotropic drug regimes over a long period of time.

In an otherwise disturbing essay linking the poor medical treatment of schizophrenia to urban violence, psychiatrist Paul Steinberg made a simple, clichéd but important statement to the effect that “it takes a village to stop a rampage”. One such village is the city of Trieste that has developed over the past 40 years an approach founded by the late Italian radical psychiatrist, Franco Basaglia, to integrate even the profoundly mentally different into community life free of involuntary confinement and of forced medication. Another of those therapeutic villages where people managed to live side by side with those known as mad, crazy or mentally different, is Geel, a small Belgian city where the ‘mentally ill’ have been visible members of the community for over 700 years. Ordinary townspeople in Geel have traditionally taken in mentally ill individuals as boarders and then assimilated them into their families. These boarders were not exploited for cheap labor and their special needs and limitations were accepted. An Irish psychiatrist and former hospital director in Cork described an incident that occurred during a professional visit to Geel some years ago. Late one afternoon a ‘boarder’ became visibly agitated and increasingly hostile and aggressive on a city street. As if on cue townspeople assembled to the location and surrounded the disturbed man. “They were creating a secure circle around him”, David told me recently during a trip to Ireland. "It seemed as if they were performing a ballet, dancing around the person who, in short order, became quiet and allowed his caretaker family to lead him home for a cup of cocoa and a good nap.”

Like the residents of Martha’s Vineyard who adjusted to the high degree of congenital deafness among the island population by becoming a bilingual community of English speakers and signers the villagers of Geel learned the art of living with the mentally different, including how to deflect an episode of escalating violence using practical skills passed down among families who had taken in the mentally ill as boarders and extended family members.

A Way Forward

What, then, is the solution to our current impasse? Americans once thought that parents had the right to slap down their children as righteous punishment. We once thought that smoking in public spaces (even in hospitals) was a civil right. We once thought that carefree motorcycle rides without protective headgear was a right. Today most of us think differently about these practices which were less about individual rights than risks to our freedom.

Ultimately we have to accept that our national commitments to seemingly interminable wars abroad, to dysfunctional wars on drugs and drug cartels along our borderlands with Mexico have consequences at home. These wars create a culture of hyper-arousal and hyper reactivity that circulates and spills over into our private lives, and into our homes, schools, shopping malls and other public institutions. If there is to be another national discourse on violence in America, another national campaign or another Presidential academic advisory panel, they will have to do a better job of identifying
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The new presidential mandate that would require a range of
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In many times and places people under siege have armed
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From the Ghost Dance of the Plains Indians to Kony's child
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Cars are not weapons, but since they pose a threat to
public security they are registered and car owners are held

The deep structural and cultural causes of our growing isola-
tion from the mores that guide other democratic nations. We
have to face up to the increasing militarization of everyday
life in America and to resist the forces of censorship and
self censorship that discourage a real and open debate on
the meaning of the right to bear arms in the context of late
modern society.

We also need to address the magical power Americans
attribute to privately owned weapons, including the belief
that the house gun can protect a family from a rampage.

While President Obama's newly unveiled campaign to fight
gun violence is a decisive move, it leaves three large stones
unturned: the responsibility of parents who have obtained
legal gun permits, who are themselves mentally stable, but
who may have an adolescent child with severe emotional,
behavioral, or adjustment problems. The proposals to expand
background checks will not detect parents who, like many
of the parents of children who attended Sandy Hook elementa-
ary school, are themselves gun owners. Tom Britton, a Sandy
Hook parent of three and spokesperson for Newtown victims
said: "We hunt, we target shoot. We protect our homes. We're
collectors. We teach our sons and daughters how to use guns
a casual friend of Nancy Lanzer, Adam's mother taught her
son how to shoot a rifle from the age of 9. He told the New
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Endnotes
1. 2. According to Wikipedia “The Hatch Act of 1939, officially An
Act to Prevent Pernicious Political Activities, is a United States
federal law whose main provision is to prohibit employees (civil
servants) in the executive branch of the federal government, except
the president, vice-president, and certain designated high-level of-
ficials of the executive branch, from engaging in partisan political
activity. The law was named for Senator Carl Hatch of New Mexico.
psychoses: data from two cohorts, 1875—1924 and 1994—2010”. BMJ
2012
4. Paul Steinberg, "Our Failed Treatment of Schizophrenia", The
Inside Out: Selected Writings of Franco Basaglia. Columbia
University Press (a new edition of this book is underway).
6. Anthropologist Nora Ellen Gross, who lived in Martha’s Vineyard
in the 1970s, published her findings in the book, Everyone Here
Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha’s Vineyard
(1985, Harvard University Press),

An Interview with
Magdulien Abaida, a Libyan
Women’s Rights Activist
by Vijay Prashad

Magdulien Abaida, age 25, has already lived several life-
times. Born in Libya, Abaida grew up in Tripoli in a middle
class household (her father is a lawyer). The February 2011
revolution swept Abaida, and many other young people, into
places they could not anticipate. She became a courier for
the movement, helped build up logistical lines from Cairo
and helped organize solidarity movements in Egypt and else-
where.

When the 42-year old Qaddafi regime collapsed in August
2011, Abaida returned to Tripoli. Her agenda was simple: to
help reconstruct Libya on a progressive foundation, with
women’s rights at the core of her vision and project. The new
regime, putatively liberal in terms of its social program and
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her and her friends not long afterwards.
In early 2012 Abaida and her network created the 7 February Movement. They planned to take to the streets on that date in Tripoli and Benghazi to push for women's rights—reservation of seats in the national constituent assembly being the prime issue. In early January, the draft law for the elections had promised a ten percent quota of seats, but on January 28 this was rescinded. Abaida and those who would form the February 7 movement were furious. "In our society, people will not vote for women," she said at that time. “That is why we need the quota.” The other demands of February 7 included laws against sexual harassment and wife beating.

Abaida called upon the new government to fully adopt the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Charter of Women's Rights. Libya had signed this in 1989, but ignored Article 2, the core of the Charter (in its report to the UN, Libya's letters in 1991, 1998, 2008, noted, “Article 2 of the Convention shall be implemented with due regard for the peremptory norms of the Islamic Shariah”). The February 7 movement pushed the parties to add women to their electoral lists.

Things, however, got much harder for the movement and for Abaida personally. In August 2012, she was at a women's conference in Benghazi. Abaida was abducted from her hotel room by one of the militias in the city. She was released, and then captured again the next day and held in a militia base. These are the militias with an Islamist bent. “Someone came in and started kicking me,” she said at the time. “Then he started hitting me with his gun. He was telling me, 'I will kill you and bury you here and nobody will know.' He was calling me an Israeli spy, and a whore and a bitch.” Eventually released, a physically and emotionally exhausted Abaida fled for Britain, where she is now in exile.

Before the Revolution, I was working at a Tripoli construction company in accounts payable. I was studying law at the Open University in Tripoli. I used to blog online about the situation in Libya. In 2008, I received a phone call asking me to delete my blog, or I would be the only one to blame if anything happened to me. My blog was not about politics. It was critical of society and the NGO that Qaddafi's daughter was running at that time [this NGO is Wa Atassimou run by Ayesha Gaddafi]. When the Revolution started, I support it because I was waiting for this moment. I was waiting for Qaddafi to fall. I never thought it would happen in my lifetime!

VP: What was it like to be a part of the rebellion? I am told that you were in Cairo and Paris, helping to organize logistical support for the rebellion. What was the experience of women in the rebellion? Were there any women as fighters? Was there a women's detachment of fighters? Or were the fighters all men?

MA: Well, during the revolution we did not feel the difference between women and men. We felt that we were all Libyans working together for our country. We did not do any discrimination. It was the first time you saw women and men all united hand-in-hand for their country. No difference. In Cairo, we organized many demonstrations, with men and women standing together. And you could see men holding microphones for women to speak and vice versa. When Qaddafi supporters entered the demonstrations, men would protect women. Some women fought in the frontlines with the rebels. Others were at the frontlines as doctors. We never felt the difference.

VP: Certainly there has long been an Islamist current inside Libya, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group for instance. In that case, why was it a surprise to see that current rise to the surface, even as early as October 2011, when Mustafa Abdul Jalil made his statements about polygamy?

MA: There is a rise of Islamism in Libya, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Those living outside the country in exile came back. And they want to apply their views to the system. However, most Libyans do not welcome them. Even in the election they couldn't win. Of course we have other Islamists, like the Salafis. However, they have little mass support. But they are powerful because they have weapons and would like to use these to apply their rules to society and make chaos in our country. Mustafa Abdul Jalil disappointed us with his speech. It was a big shock for women.

This rise is surprising to us. When we started our revolution, we wanted democracy and life without discrimination, with justice and dignity. We did not want Islamism.

VP: In your opinion, what has happened to the liberal current defined by Fathi Terbil, Terbil Salwa and Idris al-Mesmari, all of whom played a central role as the spark of the February rebellion? What about Dr. Najat al-Kikhia, whose election was heralded as the emergence of the new Libyan woman? Some point to the thirty-three women in the Congress, and suggest that this is real progress. What is your opinion on this?

MA: Fathi Terbil was a lawyer on behalf of the Libyans killed in
Qaddafi’s jails. It was brave of him to support this cause under a dictatorship. However, he was not very progressive when he was the Youth Minister after the revolution. He did nothing for the youth. He was a useless minister.

Najat al-Kikhia won the election to Benghazi Council. It was a great step for women. Her family history played a big role. Her father Mansour el-Kikhia was the Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs [1972-73] and Libyan Representative to the UN [1975-1980]. He turned against the Qaddafi regime and went into exile. They kidnapped him in Egypt in 1993 where he went to attend a conference of the opposition Arab Organisation for Human Rights. In November 2012, his body was finally uncovered in one of the Qaddafi government villas. Najat is his daughter. It is sad that she had to resign from her position. She was not able to solve the problems confronting Benghazi, because of endemic corruption.

VP: Could you tell us a little about Amina Mahmoud Takhtakh, the only candidate who ran for Congress as an independent? You say that if the various parties did not feel obliged to put women on their lists (perhaps to please the West in some abstract way), that Amina Mahmoud “would be the only woman in the parliament by now.” And yet, you say that she is in hiding because she represents the town of Bani Walid. Tell us a little about her, and why she is in hiding.

MA: The political parties put women on their lists not to please the West. It was the law. After a long fight by Libyan women, this law was established. The first draft of the election law had a ten percent quota for women. The second draft removed the quota. Libyan women formed the February 7 Movement of which I am a founder member. We had a Day of Anger for Libyan women on 7 February 2012. Other organizations, such as Women for Peace, joined us. We fought until we got this new law established to assure that women would be part of the General National Congress.

Amina won the election as an individual candidate. People voted for her not because she was on a party list (which she was not), and despite the fact that she was in hiding. She stood against the attack by the militias against her city, Bani Walid. She spoke openly against this attack, and told the truth about what was happening in Bani Walid with the Misrata militias. They were making up stories about Bani Walid to take revenge on the city. None of the propaganda they released was correct: they said there were criminals in Bani Walid, and even that Qaddafi’s son, Khamis, was there. They used rumors to justify their attack. Amina fought against this. She had to go into hiding.

Amina was not alone. Another woman, Dr. Mariam Talyeb, was on the frontlines of Bani Walid, fighting with the rebels. But after the revolution, she went into hiding. [In September 2011, the New York Times’ Sarah Elliott and Anne Barnard celebrated her as “a woman on Libya’s Front Lines,” with the story of this 32 year old who was seven months pregnant with her first child, armed and brave. Today, there is no story about how she lives in fear of her life.]

VP: Could you let our readers know a little about the Hakki Organization? When did you found it, and what has been the kind of tasks that it has set for itself?

MA: Hakki (My Right) organization was officially founded in May 2012. However we were working before that, as most of the founders of Hakki were from February 7 Movement, which organized the demonstration (the Day of Anger for Libyan Women). We felt that we must keep working on women’s rights in Libya especially with the rise of extremism and the talk of cancellation of laws that favor women. We started working on a project called “Stand for Her.” It is about creating a youth group to advocate for women’s rights. However we were not able to finish this project after the attack on Hakki, and the accusation that we are violating Islamic rules. We want to lay out the real picture of women’s rights in Libya: our hopes, our demands. Islamist voices give a false picture of the reality of women’s lives. We want to raise awareness about domestic violence, street harassment, forced marriage, divorce, and marital rape. We have a long way to go to reach the minimum rights for women in Libya.

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Nato in the Arctic: Cowboys and Indians Redux?

By Ritt Goldstein

Dalarna, Sweden. The catastrophe of global warming is rapidly bringing accessibility to the Far North, an often discussed ‘rush’ to claim land and resources ongoing as I write this. Historically, there have been numerous other ‘rushes’ for land and resources, America’s 19th century West being one of these, the conduct shown Native Americans by those ‘rushing’ being today increasingly appreciated as ‘far less than kind’. Of course, if human nature doesn’t change much, then one might expect history could repeat.

It was March 2011 when The Economist headlined, ‘Now it’s their turn’, subheading ‘The Inuit prepare to defend their rights’—it was an article addressing perceived sources of potential Arctic conflict. As for state conflict, the article noted, “countries surrounding the Arctic do not have much to argue over. The resources on land lie within clearly delineated borders and those under the sea…are largely in shallow waters within the uncontested jurisdiction of coastal states.” However, while observing that a big-power threat of frozen confrontations seems to be minimal, the piece did indeed seem to emphasize that “potential for conflict with native groups is in rich supply.”

In this day and age, is it really possible that governments might try to run roughshod over Indigenous Peoples’ rights? Is it conceivable that the use of military force could be contemplated in securing national visions of ‘Arctic Development’?

By itself, the Economist headline means little, but curiously, almost exactly a year later, came an exercise called ‘Cold
Response 2012’. Its preparation phase began March 5th, its operational and withdrawal phases running from March 12–23, according to the Norwegian Military’s (NM) website. The NM website further described the exercise as one “to rehearse high intensity operations in winter conditions within NATO with a UN mandate”, adding that “everything from high intensity warfare to terror threats and mass demonstrations” would be “handled” by participants. And, according to a NM press release, “approximately 16000 participants from 15 nations (both Nato and PfP [Partnership for Peace])” were involved, with the “main international forces” (those other than Norwegian) coming from “Canada, France, The Netherlands, Sweden, UK and USA”.

Okay, on the surface of this it just seems one more Nato/PfP war game was played, but, perhaps it’s worthwhile to probe just a little bit deeper. And, my gosh, articles relating to the exercise did appear in Swedish and Finnish media (Finland was reported as having a 215 man contingent participating).

On the 18th of March, days before ‘Cold Response 2012’ ended—but after a Norwegian C-130J Hercules aircraft had crashed in the mountains of Northern Sweden—Sweden’s major conservative paper, Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) ran a story titled “Crash puts focus on NATO’s presence”. But the crash itself pales in interest to the war game scenario the article describes.

My own translation of a key excerpt seems to show the SvD article reported that: “On the Armed Forces’ website you can find the scenario. An undesirable population has settled in northernmost Sweden and established ‘Gardaland’. This country has now invaded an area in Norway. Under a UN mandate, Nato implements a ‘peace enforcement’ operation to drive out the invaders.”

Cold Response
Now, this does seem like an interesting scenario, particularly if one considers just what kind of a group would be able to establish a state within a state. Could it be Russians, could it be an invasion from the Middle East, or would such a scenario suggest the idea of a group with local roots that had declared its independence? Of course, if it was such a local group, that also might explain the need for training to handle ‘mass demonstrations’. But, since we’re not talking US States seceding because of Mr. Obama’s reelection, what kind of a ‘local group’ might this be?

One potential model could be that of the Inuit in the Canadian province of Nunavut, where, according to Wikipedia: “The members of the unicameral Legislative Assembly of Nunavut are elected individually; there are no parties and the legislature is consensus-based. The head of government, the premier of Nunavut, is elected by, and from the members of the legislative assembly.” And, the Danish Inuit received even further independence in Greenland, Wikipedia observes: “Greenland (Kalaallisut: Kalaallit Nunaat) is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark, located between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, east of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.” However, the Inuit are not the only Arctic People, and Scandinaivia’s Sami do not seem to enjoy the full range of freedom which some of the other Indigenous People have found (ie, the Greenlanders), something which arguably seems particularly true for the Sami of Sweden.

Could ‘Cold Response 2012’ have been an exercise aimed at a fictional Indigenous Peoples adversary?

Needless to say, this journalist wasn’t present when the military planned Cold Response. Fortuitously, Finland’s largest paper, the Helsingin Sanomat, publishes an English-language edition, and they did cover Cold Response 2012. According to the Sanomat’s article: “It would be silly to rehearse a situation if it were not realistic”, says the Norwegian Lt. Commander Per Rosta, the chief of media and communications at the command centre in Bardufoss.” While this seems straightforward, I contacted Swedish Armed Forces headquarters for more details.

After some technical difficulties, my phone call was forwarded to a media officer who was said to be knowledgeable of the 2012 event. At first, I understood him as noting that the war game was “a good way for us to have an exercise that’s really, or much like, a real operation.” Interestingly, though I repeatedly asked about the Cold Response scenario, no mention of the mythical ‘Gardaland’ entered the conversation until I introduced it. At that point, my impression is that the officer in question began stressing the war game as completely fictional, just imaginary scenarios developed to fit the desired training. When queried regarding ‘crowd control’, he could not recall if Cold Response 2012 included it; he advised me to contact the Norwegian military for more explicit details.

Norway was the lead country in Cold Response. Its military websites says it involved “everything from high intensity warfare to terror threats and mass demonstrations”. That seemed to fit with what the military might practice for an operation targeting an Indigenous People. However, nothing occurs in a vacuum, and as such it appeared vital to examine the broader context of events—since Cold Response 2012 targeted the Swedish Arctic, maybe we should examine what’s occurring there.
A Corporate Invasion

According to Annika E Nilsson, PhD, Arctic researcher at the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI): "I think what you see in the Arctic right now is very much increasing interest from actors who are not necessarily from the region. Transnational mining companies, international energy companies, etc, wishing to exploit the resources that are there, in the Arctic. But it's of interest to some of those people living in the Arctic as well, who have rights to those resources. It's a complex picture, what's going on right now, and connected very much to a global resource scarcity, high-price situation." In other words, there seems to be a rush by corporate interests from outside the Arctic region to secure access to resources, but, what such access entails can conflict with the lives and livelihoods of those already there.

"Competition for space actually becomes an issue in the Arctic. It might not have been such a big issue previously because it's sparsely populated, but the more industrial activity you get, the more risk there is that there are many actors competing for the same space. Could be a mining company, could be a reindeer herder, needing the same valley for different purposes", Nilsson explained, adding such competition would "then be especially acute if you need more space to be able to adapt to climate change", stressing that in the Arctic such adaptation will indeed be needed.

As once occurred in the American West, Indigenous Peoples are facing pressures from outsiders desiring access to their traditional lands and the resources they hold. As to the severity of the issues, prior to my interview with Dr. Nilsson I contacted key members of Sweden's Sami community. The picture they painted is not a pleasant one. But it helps to footnote their concerns, concerns primarily regarding mining interests. Such mining operations were a topic addressed by Radio Canada International (RCI) just this August.

"Investment keeps mines booming in Northern Sweden", read the headline from RCI's 'Eye On The Arctic', the report noting that Sweden's SvD had reported the country's mining industry "has seen investments of over US$ 6 billion in the past four years". More telling, the report added that: "Most investments in industry in Sweden are happening in the northern mining industry," says Magnus Ericsson, a professor at Luleå University and founder of the mining analyst company Raw Material Group.

Sweden's Indigenous Sami

Given this report, it would seem that Northern mining is what Sweden has currently pinned much of its hopes for foreign investment to, but, the North is the very area the Sami have traditionally pursued reindeer herding and fishing, their way of life. It would appear that corporate industrial pursuits are competing with those of the Sami...and so, I interviewed the President of the Sami Parliament of Sweden, Per Mikael Utsi, discussing the issues mining was posing.

"I think we have special problems in the Sami area because we have a rather good infrastructure for mining compared with other regions of the world where indigenous peoples live", Utsi immediately observed. More pointedly, he prefaced this comment by noting, "I think the Swedish legislation is in favor of the mining industry..."

Sweden's Sami Parliament was established in 1993, but sadly has much less power than one might imagine. According to Wikipedia, in the section termed 'responsibilities', the Parliament exists "to recognise the Sami minority as an indigenous people to distinguish it from other minorities; to raise the Sami minority influence which comes into conflict with the European majority democracy system, i.e., the group with the most votes wins." Given this, I wasn't surprised when Utsi further described his vision of events.

"I'm working with some initiatives from the Sami Parliament in Sweden, and (with what) the Sami Parliament in Norway and Finland has done, and what we're doing in cooperation with other indigenous peoples Utsi told me. But, we have until now no possibilities to have any impact on the Swedish legislation. It's said from the Swedish government they are trying to find ways to take into account the needs from indigenous peoples, the needs from environment protectionists, and so on, but nothing really is happening."

In 1989, the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) spawned a human rights document known as the 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989'. The Convention has been described as "the most important operative international law guaranteeing the rights of indigenous peoples", and while Norway ratified it in 1990, and Finland is slated to do so in 2015 (according to Swedish Radio), Sweden has so far refused ratification.

When I asked SEI's Nilsson to comment upon Sweden's failure to ratify the Convention, she starkly observed, "I think it's appalling...but it really comes down to many having claims for the same areas and conflicting interests." Of course, I imagine 19th century Native Americans faced circumstances that might bear some similarity to these.

I contacted the executive branch of Sweden's national government, sought the 'official view' of what's ongoing, initially speaking with Foreign Minister Carl Bildt's press secretary, Erik Zsiga. I contacted Minister Bildt's office first as he has been very active in addressing Arctic Development, Sweden currently holding the Presidency of the multination 'Arctic Council', a body representing the eight Arctic nations and indigenous tribal groups. Following my contact with Zsiga, I was referred to the Arctic Council's President, Swedish Ambassador Gustaf Lind. As much has been said by the Swedish Government about the need for 'sustainable' exploration and development in the Arctic, upon reaching the Ambassador I asked what this meant.

"I think in the Arctic it's quite evident that you need development—the people in the Arctic need jobs, and you need tax incomes, and you need to develop the communities of the North in a way which you can only do with economic activity. But, in the same time, the sustainable part of it is extremely important", Ambassador Lind observed, further noting that "in the case of where we have the much needed economic activity, we have to do so with the greatest respect for the environment and for the people living in the region, their traditions, in order to move forward".
I then asked Lind how he might reply to those who charge these terms are “nothing more than negotiated definitions based upon the relative strength of the involved actors, business interests effectively dominating the process”. The Ambassador responded noting: “I would say that we have good government regulation in place, and of course, business, if they want to act, they have to respect this regulation. So, you can see that in Northern Sweden, and what we are sort of working in the Arctic Council, is to get better circumpolar, multilateral frameworks for these issues.” However, with all due respect to the Ambassador, though Northern Sweden is held up as an example, a recent news report from the North did detail a current mining issue.

On 9 December, Sweden’s state television, SVT, did a report on a gold-mining problem where “large emissions of heavy metals, such as zinc and cadmium, have been recorded, affecting the surrounding waterways.” I used Google translate on the SVT report’s summary highlights: “Investigation complete bill for cleaning up mines at Ersmarksberget and swear Swamp can at worst be well over 200 million. The two companies conducted mining operations have only allocated three million for the cleanup. This means that taxpayers will have to pay most of the bill.”

“I feel that the mining regulations read as if they’ve been written by the unions together with the mining companies. That is, other interest, which is the environment; or, for that matter, the reindeer herders, the Sami culture, has not been taken into consideration, and the result is that these interests are at risk,” Charles Berkow, political advisor of the Swedish Green Party’s parliament group, told me.

Addressing this issue the SEI’s Nilsson raised regarding ‘increasing interest from actors who are not necessarily from the region,’ I asked Berkow: “In other words, a foreign company interested in quick profits can basically, effectively, come here and do whatever they will, and get away with it?” Berkow replied: “The risks of that is all too high.”

Returning to the Sami, I asked the Foreign Ministry’s Zsiga to respond to criticism of Sweden’s failure to ratify ‘Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989’: “The Government considers ratification still to be complicated, and is working on the matter. The reason for not ratifying essentially relates to Article 14, land rights, which poses a major obstacle for Sweden. The Government wishes to maintain the present balance between the two competing interests in the area concerned.”

In terms of how the Sami see the issues, the Sami Parliament had directed me to both its President, Mr. Utsi, and another individual—Matti Bergblind, a well-known Sami spokesman. Bergblind first spoke of how he had grown up in Kiruna, Sweden’s furthest city in the North, and how Swedish mines have been there for a hundred years. “But, what happens now is that the prices of minerals go sky high, and that means that there are a lot of foreign companies that come into the area and want to make quick money. That money they earn on my and my people’s coats, so to speak. We are the losers in the long-run when they come out and take out all the minerals that are possible—they want to make just short-term profit. That’s why we are worried about the future,” Bergblind emphasized, the concern in his voice evident, adding that “the problem is, for us, that the new coming companies, they go in, and they destroy a big part of the land, grazing land for the reindeer, and also they cut the reindeer herd in parts.”

As Bergblind tells it, mine operations, roads, infrastructure—these block routes to and from seasonal reindeer pastures, with it being evident in the Kiruna region that the reindeer “avoid the area up to ten kilometers around the mining”. Elaborating further upon his vision of the issues he said: “Our worry about the future is the fact that, if these mining plans come through, they are going to destroy the whole balance in nature”.

In an interpretation of events this journalist personally found both particularly disturbing and insightful (I had not mentioned this work’s title), Bergblind compared what’s happening now in Sweden to the 19th century US/Native American experience, noting that—following the onslaught of business interests and the military—it was the destruction of the buffalo that “destroyed the traditional way of living for the Native Americans—that’s the way they defeated them. And, the same thing happens now in Scandinavia”.

Cowboys and Indians Redux?

To return to the title of this work, ‘Nato in the Arctic: Cowboys and Indians Redux?’, there yet remain questions, including those of recent precedents. As regards precedents for military action against the North’s Indigenous People, the SEI’s Nilsson recalled, “if you look at the location of the Thule Airbase in Greenland…it was certainly military interests forcing the relocation of a whole indigenous community. The Arctic has always been heavily militarized, it has been a high politics, security zone during the whole Cold War…it’s more coercion than military force.” And, Wikipedia describes a Norwegian example, that of the Alta Dam.

“In the fall of 1979, as construction was ready to start, protesters performed two acts of civil disobedience: at the construction site itself at Stilla, activists sat down on the ground and blocked the machines, and at the same time, Sami activists began a hunger strike outside the Norwegian parliament. Documents that have since been declassified, show that the government planned to use military forces as logistical support for police authorities in their efforts to stop the protests.”

To put all of this in a geo-political context I contacted historian Michael Parenti. “As they’re doing in Central America and other places, that (Cold Response 2012) might be a scenario to do the same thing up there in the Northern region,” Parenti told me, “which is to wipe out the Indigenous Peoples, remove them as was done here in the lower 48 states”. He said that the NATO regime views indigenous people as “just a nuisance … who can be brushed aside like gnats.” The war games, Parenti observed, are a rehearsal for a certain kind of reality. CP

RITT GOLDSTEIN is a journalist living in Sweden.
Machine Politics (the remix)
by Lee Ballinger

Rage Against the Machine's first gig, a 1991 outdoor college show, is included on DVD in Rage Against the Machine XX 20th Anniversary Edition Deluxe Boxed Set (Epic/Legacy). Only a few people are watching so it feels like a rehearsal. The working parts are interesting but they only add up to possibilities, to potential.

By the time Rage's first album, Rage Against the Machine, was released a year later that potential was fully realized. It contains ten tracks, now road tested for two decades. Like many country songs, the titles reveal a lot about each tune, in thought or feeling or both. “Bombtrack,” “Killing in the Name,” “Take the Power Back,” “Settle For Nothing,” “Bullet in the Head,” “Know Your Enemy,” “Wake Up,” “Fistful of Steel,” “Township Rebellion,” “Freedom.” Several lines from these songs have become catchphrases worldwide, such as “Anger is a gift,” “Fuck you, I won’t do what you tell me,” “They say jump, you say how high.”

But Rage is more than a political poster with sound effects. The songs are concise, well-written, and brilliantly arranged. The rhythm section of Brad Wilk and Tim Commerford is rock solid while Tom Morello brings hip-hop style into his guitar playing without sacrificing the power of major riffage. Zach de la Rocha commands the mic with a unique combination of rap, spoken word, and speechifying.

Besides that first show, the boxed set includes the first album on vinyl, a remastered version of the CD with live bonus tracks, and twenty live video clips. Plus twelve music videos which highlight the band's playful side as they skewer Wall Street and America's one party political system.

The most compelling extra is the “Battle of Britain” concert DVD. That show was the result of a 2009 Facebook campaign in England started by Jon and Tracy Morter to have Rage's “Killing in the Name” be the most downloaded song and thus the number one Christmas single in the UK. They were up against the winner from Simon Cowell's rapid pop music TV show The X Factor. The band promised that if they won they would do a free show. They did win and on June 6, 2010 they played in London’s Finsbury Park for eighty thousand fans.

Midway through a concert featuring Rage at its incandescent best, the Morters came onstage as part of a victory celebration. A check representing fan donations and royalties from the song was presented to the homeless charity SHELTER. The crowd was in full throat, exulting in support of the homeless and in their own collective power in making the concert happen. Zach de la Rocha spoke about the inspiration drawn from British bands, just before Rage plunged into a cover of the Clash's “White Riot,” whose lyrics confirm Rage's roots:

Are you taking over
Or are you taking orders?
Are you going backwards

Or are you going forwards?

The show held its intensity to the end, the inevitable closer being "Killing in the Name." The band took a bow as the crowd roared “Fuck Simon Cowell! Fuck Simon Cowell!”

Why would a band like Rage waste its time with Cowell, a man who literally smirks for a living and whose non-televison claim to fame is that he signed the Teletubbies to a record deal? On the concert DVD, Public Enemy's Chuck D asks if the whole affair might be “small and inconsequential.” Chuck's answer is that all those people coming together to stick it to the mainstream was indeed meaningful.

Now wait a minute. Rage Against the Machine, a band which has sold millions of CDs and sold out stadiums, is part of the mainstream. Indeed, there's been sniping by some journalists and musicians throughout the band's career that with their radical politics, Rage's proper place is as part of some vaguely defined underground. Mike Muir of Suicidal Tendencies wrote a song attacking them and went on to say that they were hypocrites for “talking about how evil corporations are, and they're signed with one of the biggest corporations in the world.”

That's a false issue. Most of us work (or seek to work) for corporations or for institutions controlled by corporations. The choices are, to say the least, limited, even more so for musicians who want to be paid for their work. What matters is what you do from where you're at. A rock star can do things beyond the reach of cult favorites, however worthy. For instance, during the 2003 supermarket strike in Los Angeles, I was standing next to Tom Morello at the Roxy in Hollywood before a benefit show he'd arranged with many top names. His phone kept ringing—some of the calls were from other bands who have millions of fans saying they were on the road but wanted to be involved. On May 1, 2012 at Occupy Wall Street, Morello led a Guitarmy of several hundred guitarists.
in street demonstrations, an expansive new form of mobilization made possible by his rock star status.

That doesn’t mean riding a mainstream wave doesn’t have its contradictions. The boxed set is retailing for up to $110 which means the majority of the band’s fans may never see or hear it. But that’s just further proof that the current social arrangement doesn’t work. Getting out your music with the help of a large corporation is a tactical decision, not a moral one.

In any event, the mainstream music industry won’t exist much longer. It’s being destroyed by technology and its own greed. I’d be willing to bet my last “Home Taping is Killing Music” T-shirt that whatever comes next, Rage Against the Machine will be in the middle of it, drawing lines and taking sides as they’ve always done. CP

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Is Kathryn Bigelow Our Leni Riefenstahl?

BY LOUIS PROYECT

As a member of New York Film Critics Online (NYFCO) for over a decade I was not surprised to see Kathryn Bigelow’s “Zero Dark Thirty” named best movie of 2012 since the group had picked “Hurt Locker” as the best for 2009. Among the 36 members there were only two who had problems with this choice—Prairie Miller, a WBAI Arts Magazine host and (CounterPunch contributor), and me.

Perhaps feeling a bit of peer pressure, I emailed my colleagues: “I actually had no problem voting for this movie in one category or another. Katherine Bigelow is our Leni Riefenstahl, after all.” (I did not bother to explain that my vote might have been for cinematography or film score, but certainly not for screenplay, direction, or best picture.) After Prairie told me that she was surprised by my comment, I began to grapple with the question of reactionary filmmaking, all the more so after reading a passage in Glenn Greenwald’s savage take-down of the film:

Do defenders of Zero Dark Thirty view Riefenstahl critics as overly ideological heathens who demand that art adhere to their ideology? If the KKK next year produces a superbly executed film devoted to touting the virtues of white supremacy, would it be wrong to object if it wins the Best Picture Oscar on the ground that it promotes repellent ideas?

Before addressing comparisons between Bigelow and Riefenstahl, it would be useful to consider the KKK question. I am willing to bet that Greenwald has D.W. Griffith’s “Birth of a Nation” in mind since that pretty much describes how it is viewed nowadays: an apologia for the night riders. In my last CounterPunch article devoted to the Oliver Stone/Peter Kuznick “Untold History” series on Showtime, I mentioned that “Birth of a Nation” was shown in the White House in much the same way as the Obama-friendly films like “Lincoln” or “Zero Dark Thirty” might be shown today:

Wilson even screened D.W. Griffith’s pioneering though notoriously racist film Birth of a Nation at the White House in 1915 for cabinet members and their families. In the film, a heroic Ku Klux Klan gallops in just in time to save white southerners, especially helpless women, from the clutches of brutish, lascivious freedmen and their corrupt white allies—a perverse view of history that was then being promulgated in less extreme terms by William Dunning and his students at Columbia University. Upon viewing the film, Wilson commented, “It is like writing history with Lightning and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.”

In grappling with the problem of reactionary but breakthrough filmmaking, I checked the Wikipedia entry on D.W. Griffith and to my surprise discovered that Charlie Chaplin described him as “The Teacher of Us All”. Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein, two of the greats of Soviet cinema, also revered him. Orson Welles said “I have never really hated Hollywood except for its treatment of D. W. Griffith. No town, no industry, no profession, no art form owes so much to a single man.”

But the biggest surprise of all was James Agee’s take on the man who arguably made the most racist film in American history. Agee was the Nation magazine’s film critic in the 40s and 50s and a powerful voice for the downtrodden. His name is also honored by a group of leftwing film critics that was launched by Prairie Miller, the James Agee Film Society (I suggested Agee’s name as the title of our group.) In a review for the September 4, 1948 edition of the Nation Magazine, Agee wrote:

He achieved what no other known man has ever achieved. To watch his work is like being witness to the beginning of melody, or the first conscious use of the lever or the wheel; the emergence, coordination, and first eloquence of language; the birth of an art: and to realize that this is all the work of one man. We will never realize how good he really was until we have the chance to see his work as often as it deserves to be seen, to examine and enjoy it in detail as exact as his achievement. But even relying, as we mainly have to, on years-old memories, a good deal becomes clear. One crude but unquestionable indication of his greatness was his power to create permanent images. All through his work there are images which are as impossible to forget, once you have seen them, as some of the grandest and simplest passages in music or poetry…

“The Birth of a Nation” is equal with Brady’s photographs, Lincoln’s speeches, Whitman’s war poems; for all its imperfections and absurdities it is equal, in fact, to the best work that has been done in this country. And among moving pictures it is alone,
not necessarily as "the greatest"—whatever that means—but as the one great epic, tragic film. (Today, "The Birth of a Nation" is boycotted or shown piecemeal; too many more or less well-meaning people still accuse Griffith of having made it an anti-Negro movie. At best, this is nonsense, and at worst, it is vicious nonsense. Even if it were an anti-Negro movie, a work of such quality should be shown, and shown whole. But the accusation is unjust. Griffith went to almost preposterous lengths to be fair to the Negroes as he understood them, and he understood them as a good type of Southerner does.

There are two things that struck me when I read these shocking words. The first was James Agee's focus on the image. If film is primarily about moving pictures, it should not come as any big surprise that someone like Agee would be fixated on the visual aspects of the film.

But defending the film against NAACP protests is obviously a lot more questionable. What it suggests to me is that racism was so deeply embedded in American society that even a nominally progressive journal like the Nation would be insensitive to the film's racism. Of course, there is a precedent for this in the magazine's history as I pointed out to Ricky Kreitner, an intern there, who had written a very good article on Spielberg's latest movie and the historical background. It turns out that despite its abolitionist reputation, the magazine had little use for Thaddeus Stevens. Consulting the magazine's archives, Kreitner discovered an obituary on Stevens that described his demand for slave plantations to be confiscated and the land given to ex-slaves as a sign of a "mental defect".

I wrote Kreitner that this was not the half of it. In an article I wrote for Swans in 2008 on "The Early Days of the Nation Magazine", I pointed out that he advised The Nation's readers that he found the average intelligence of blacks "so low that they are slightly above the level of animals." He longed for the return of southern conservatives to power in 1877 eagerly, writing Harvard professor Charles Eliot Norton and fellow adversary of democratic rule that "I do not see . . . . the negro is ever to be worked into a system of government for which you and I would have much respect."

Given the self-righteousness of American liberalism, it might be expected that a film that glorified the KKK would pass muster at one of its citadels. However, the critical consensus on Leni Riefenstahl would tend more to the negative since the Nazis were an Official Enemy Number One unlike the Klan, a group that Harry Truman once considered joining (again we are grateful to Stone and Kuznick for pointing this out.)

Suffice it to say that Riefenstahl is usually celebrated in much the same way as Agee celebrated D.W. Griffith, for her mastery of the image rather than for her odious politics. But then again, there was a time and place when those politics seemed not particularly offensive. This is a review of her documentary on the 1936 Olympics from the March 30, 1940 New York Times. Apparently the paper had not yet figured out that the film that opened just 5 blocks from my apartment in the Yorkville neighborhood in Manhattan (a bastion of German-American support for the Nazis at the time) was inimical to all the values we hold dear.

At 86th St. Garden Theatre
After a run of three weeks the first part of "Olympia, Festival of the Nations," the German celluloid record, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, has made way for the latter half at the Eighty-sixth Street Garden Theatre. While it gets off to a rather slow start, Part II speeds up when the exciting military riding competition hits the screen and continues at a lively pace through the field hockey, polo, soccer and cycling events and the Marathon race to the thrilling finale of the decathlon, where Glen Morris, the American, won the title of the greatest all-around athlete in the world. The photography is always effective and sometimes brilliant. There is an adequate account of the doings spoken in English.

H.T.S.

The Wikipedia article on "Olympia,
Festival of the Nations” takes note of the technical breakthroughs that wowed the reviewers: “She was one of the first filmmakers to use tracking shots in a documentary, placing a camera on rails to follow the athletes’ movement, and she is noted for the slow motion shots included in the film. Riefenstahl’s work on Olympia has been cited as a major influence in modern sports photography.”

But it added that its pro–Hitler agenda was crystal-clear. This mattered not a whit to Avery Brundage who called the film the greatest ever made about the Olympics or to Walt Disney who gave Riefenstahl the red carpet treatment when she visited Hollywood on a tour. (Then again, few would ever associate Brundage or Disney with liberal causes.)

While I have no doubt that her work was marked by major innovations, I tend to agree with Robert Sklar’s assessment in an April 1994 Cineaste article titled—appropriately enough—“The Devil’s Director”:

Will Kathryn Bigelow ever be held in such esteem as D.W. Griffith or Leni Riefenstahl, leaving aside political considerations? Does “Zero Dark Thirty” deserve to be described as a breakthrough at least in narrative, technical, or visual terms? In other words, the sort of criteria that matter at places like the NYU or UCLA film schools?

I have my doubts.

While I may be the only person who has made the connection, I find “Zero Dark Thirty” to be highly derivative of another terrorist-manhunt-of-the-century-movie. To paraphrase Christopher Marlowe, that was in another century and besides the terrorist is dead. I am speaking here of Carlos the Jackal who was the Osama bin Laden of his day.

One of the minor characters in “Zero Dark Thirty” is a spook named Larry whose technical expertise and detective work helps the CIA track the cell phone signals that lead to Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad. Venezuelan actor Edgar Ramirez, who just happened to play Carlos the Jackal (a Venezuelan by birth) in the 2010 television series “Carlos” that was released in a theatrical version a year later, is cast as Larry. When I recognized Edgar Ramirez, a light bulb went on over my head. Of course, this is the same kind of “get the terrorist fiend” movie but from a different POV. Carlos appears in every scene in the 2010 television movie while bin Laden appears in none in Bigelow’s (assuming that his corpse does not count.)

Carlos the Jackal is a man on a mission. As directed by Olivier Assayas, who counts Guy DeBord as his major intellectual influence, “Carlos” is a film that makes absolutely no effort to probe the psychological depths of an urban guerrilla. He is motivated strictly by his ideology and a willingness to use force in the interests of pursuing his political goals. Both in life and as a character in a movie, he is a compelling figure even if he remains unknowable.

Essentially Boal and Bigelow have replaced the terrorist bogeyman with his pursuers who now occupy center-stage but remain as unknowable as Carlos in the final analysis. The first half hour of the film is devoted to CIA agent Dan (Jason Clarke) physically and verbally abusing his captives, while Maya, the lead character played by Jessica Chastain, looks on impassively. That, my friends, is exactly what you see in “Carlos” for most of its 330 minutes except that the abuse is meant to alienate a movie audience that has been hard-wired to loathe and fear “terrorists.” When the same kind of abuse is applied to our enemies who are tied up and gagged like Carlos’ captives, then it becomes high-class entertainment—the equivalent of an Eli Roth movie geared to the liberal carriage trade, the kind of people who take a rave review in the New Yorker magazine at face value. If there is one thing Hollywood has learned over the years, it is that torturing people sells popcorn even if it is frequently useless in garnering critical intelligence. CP

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By Martha Rosenberg

THE REAL PROBLEM IS MENTAL ILLNESS!

YEAH OF THE PARANOID BULLIES WHO LEGALIZED ARSENALS AND RAPID FIRE WEAPONS
Cruel Harvest: US Intervention in the Afghan Drug Trade

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— Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of CounterPunch, co-author of Whiteout: the CIA, Drugs and the Press