

Silencing Donahue and Anti-War Voices

Amid the war fever over Iraq in 2002, legendary talk show host Phil Donahue returned to television with an MSNBC program that allowed antiwar voices to speak but his corporate chieftains soon pulled the plug, a shameful moment in U.S. journalism explored in this interview with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

From the early 1970s to 1985, *The Phil Donahue Show* was broadcast nationally from Chicago. Donahue also co-hosted a compelling political talk show – with Vladimir Pozner of the former Soviet Union – called *This Week with Pozner and Donahue* from 1991-1994.

In July 2002, MSNBC hired him to host a free-wheeling TV talk show, which hyped the return of *Donahue*. However, eight months later during the run-up to war with Iraq, behind-the-scenes pressure from the Bush White House – and a groundswell of conservative outrage – led MSNBC to give the anti-war TV talk-show host the boot.

It mattered little that Donahue had won nine Daytime Emmys and a Lifetime Achievement Emmy in 1996. MSNBC claimed Donahue's ratings were too low to justify keeping the show on the air, even though *Donahue* was the highest rated show on MSNBC at the time it was canceled and beat out Chris Matthews's *Hardball*, which was then on CNBC.

After *Donahue* was cancelled, AllYourTV.com reported it had obtained a copy of an internal NBC memo that stated Donahue should be fired because he would be a “difficult public face for NBC in a time of war.”

We caught up with Donahue at the campaign headquarters of Norman Solomon for Congress, in San Rafael, California, about 20 miles north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. He had come into town to show his moving film “Body of War” and to campaign for Solomon

DB: Phil Donahue has come into town to show a very compelling film that he produced called “Body of War” in 2007. It's a very thoughtful film about a young vet, named Thomas Young, who was paralyzed in Iraq, and went through a transformation. It wasn't meant to be a dogmatic attack at policy but it turned into something that made you really think about war and peace, and why we send young people off to war.

So, in that context, we've been at many wars for a long time here. We're thinking that there's some end to the U.S. involvement in the war in Iraq. But

now, everything looks like, and it's getting worse that there might be some kind of tangle, and a very terrible tangle, with Iran. Your response to current policy, war policy, and your thoughts on that.

PD: Well, Rick Santorum is scaring me. He's got both guns out. The Straits of Hormuz, if they [the Iranians] block that, you can see how we get into war. That's one of the reasons why I admire Norman so much, he is making the point that it's much too easy for a president to go to war.

And I discovered Thomas Young at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Here was this kid, 24-years old, pale as the sheet, whacked out on morphine. And as I stood and looked down at him and his mother told me how paralyzed he was; he's a T4 which anatomists knows is paralyzed from the nipples down. Thomas can't cough. Thomas has bowel and bladder every morning, nausea.

He is a warrior turned anti-warrior. He came home from the war absolutely stunned at its horror, that it wasn't necessary. He went to Fort Hood and immediately said, "Why am I going to Iraq, I thought I was going to Afghanistan?" Too late now, he goes there, he goes to Iraq and he's there five days, no top on the truck, main street in Sadr City, and he takes a bullet through the collar bone and exited T4 in his spine. He will never walk again.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. And then it occurred to me how sanitized this war was. I mean you couldn't. ... The president [George W. Bush] said, "don't take pictures" [of the carnage] and the whole mainstream press said "Okay." There was never any push back.

The American public did not see the pain that was inflicted on thousands and thousands of families. These were especially heinous injuries; I mean women had their faces blown off, I mean IEDs, blind kids, twenty something blind. And we don't know anything about that.

Bush successfully threw a blanket over the painful coverage, and media cooperated. I just couldn't believe that the land of the free would allow this to happen. And so I said I'm gonna, I nominated myself to show as many people as I could the pain of this one family, and tried to make the point that this is just one. There are thousands of other homes out there; the lives of the entire family are turned upside down. We've never been this close to a catastrophic injury.

This young man, it's awful. And he recently had pulmonary embolism, so now his speech is affected and he has to be fed. He cannot hold the silverware. You know, what's the sacrifice? Twenty something male, impotent? I mean, we'll never be the same, the people who worked on this film. We saw some PTSD, we saw him

struggling, with you know, he can't, he's a smoker, he can't walk, he can't get out of bed and get his cigarettes.

I picked him up once on an airplane, I had to go and help him off the airplane. That's when you. ... this is a spiritual experience. That's when you realize how powerless, helpless he is, from the chest down he is a rag doll, and unless somebody comes up with a genome answer to this, which by the way, the man he fought for, George Bush, would not approve stem-cell research.

So all these things came colliding down on us and we went ahead with no script and we, I said "Thomas, I want to show the pain here. I don't want to sanitize this at all. But I can't do it unless you agree." He said, "I want to do that too." So I had his agreement, and off we went. And here I am.

DB: And it was indeed hard to look at, it was transformational in nature. And it was only one example of millions of young people and that's why I bring this in the context of perhaps of one more, still, one more war. Imagine, can we take another ten or fifteen years, another war, with Iran? What does that mean? How do you respond to that kind of policy? What does that say about where we're going?

PD: It says that we live in a nation of law, unless we're scared. George Bush with great fanfare talked about democracy, went around the world "Democracy! Democracy!" and turned his back on the Bill of Rights. We have people in cages, around the world, no Red Cross. What is American to us? And while the bedrock of this nation, no habeas.

You know, you can't be a proud American and water board somebody. You can't be a proud American and deny access to a prisoner. And that's what they were doing, because they had to protect us. And the framers, you know, the Bill of Rights is kind of a quaint, good, interesting idea but it's not practical at [this] time. Especially now when you never know when somebody is going to drop a bomb on us.

This is how they are arguing. And I think it's how we bombed Grenada, Grenada! Panama. We bomb people. We drop bombs on crowded cities at night where old people and children are sleeping. And the American population watches this on CNN and remain, largely, mute. That's how we got here, I think.

DB: And of course, it was a New York Times' reporter, named Judith Miller, that helped lie us into that war with Iraq, so that was the paper of record. And I guess I want to focus with you a little bit on the problems with media. Norm Solomon, of course, is no stranger. He cut his teeth becoming a very biting, moving, media critic, holding the corporate media accountable.

Now, you've had your own encounters with the corporate media. And it's a problem because if people don't, if we don't have that Fourth Estate free and, if you will, questioning the centers of power, then we're in trouble. Would you remind people, just very briefly, what happened to you. We were all very excited, you were starting a new show on MSNBC, I think it was 2003, a wonderful...

PD: 2002.

DB: 2002. A wonderful producer named Jeff Cohen, who was a founder of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, was your producer. What happened there? It didn't last long. It was a wonderful show, but it didn't last long.

PD: Well, I think we signed on in August [2002] and I was gone in February of the following year which is a month before the invasion. MSNBC and its corporate parent, General Electric, were not at all pleased with my anti-war position. And I was outspoken about it.

And a memo was released, and printed by the New York Times from a consultant hired by NBC News. "Donahue appears to take delight in his anti-war stance." See how we're marginalized there, "delight." So I not only opposed the war, I was, I delighted in. I mean what kind of crass person am I?

They're so clever. The propaganda campaign that's been leveled against the so-called liberal voice. By the way, we're not liberal anymore, we're progressive. We're actually ashamed of our own name, liberal. The political idea that dare not speak its name.

So, I just, I noticed that the more I got into this the more I realized what I had learned from Norman. How easy it is to go to war, especially if you have corporate media on your side. And you can bet, that if there is another war, corporate media will be on the side of the establishment. It's not good for business to oppose a war.

People who oppose wars are scolds, nobody likes a scold. They are crabby, they don't love America. And how can you oppose a war when a president is ramping up for one? You embarrass the president in front of the world, and the people that we're trying to overcome here, and you're disrespectful to the troops.

So we've sent how many thousands and thousands of Americans to fight for our freedom, including free speech, and when we need it the most, at a time when a president [is starting a war], we have millions of people in this country who believe it's unpatriotic to not support the president. That's why, that's how war is made easy. It's amazing.

And then if you, if you scare the people you can move an entire population.

George Bush took this nation by the ear and led it into the sword, and we let it happen. It's amazing what you can do if you scare the people. And corporate media will always be on the side of whatever the White House wants to do. They don't want anybody mad.

I mean imagine the money that General Electric makes out of just these defense contracts. And Donahue is on the air making fun of [Defense Secretary] Donald Rumsfeld. It's counterintuitive for them to want to have me on their television program. When the board of directors went to their country clubs I am sure their golf buddies said "What the hell are you doing with Donahue on the...?"

And this is, this is 2002. The Iraq War resolution was October 2002, this was less than a year from the [9/11] towers. And Bush called for the Iraq resolution two weeks before an election. Only 23 senators voted "No." Twenty-three. [One-hundred-and-thirty-three] House members voted "No." This resolution passed overwhelmingly on lies. It wasn't true. Saddam had nothing to do with 9/11, and there are, I'm betting you, I can't prove this, there are millions and millions of Americans who today, believe he did.

DB: I'm sure to this day, and of course, we're concerned because the same kind of media machine is cranking us up for another war. It is interesting to me what happened in journalism, and I do want to get your feedback on this.

The great Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, who actually reports for an Israeli newspaper in the West Bank, talks, when you ask her "What's the job of a journalist?" She says, "To monitor the centers of power, whether they be in the government, in the corporation, in the local politicians. It's our job as the Fourth Estate, to monitor the centers of power." But now it seems that the media has become its own center of power. How would you define what happened here?

PD: With the war?

DB: And the role that the journalists seem to play in fanning the flames as opposed to reporting about what exactly is the situation.

PD: Well, there's almost a worship of people in power. You never see a peace worker or leader on *Meet the Press*. The established journalists cover established power. You know, I thought journalists could take all kinds of criticism because they dish so much of it out and I was wrong. They bleat and they pout. And they never forget you if you say something, so I don't mean to be swinging round-house bar room generalities here. But how else can we explain the surrender of the reporters [at a] Rumsfeld briefing.

So did the so-called expert generals, defense people on CNN and the other channels... I mean this was so managed and the press made it happen. One of the

few journalists that I admire who doesn't care if the White House calls them back is Sy Hersh. And I'm sure you've interviewed and you know you won't see him on *Meet the Press*. ...

DB: And it's not because he wouldn't accept the invitation. He's not going to get the invitation.

PD: That's what I mean. That's exactly true. And we gotta somehow fix this. mainstream media, like the American public, as I say, if you criticize a president ramping up for war you're unpatriotic, you don't believe in God. They have got it, and you don't. That's the coup de grace.

And as long as that kind of drum beat against this "tax and spend, tax and spend!" I mean they have blistered us. We've changed our name, we're no longer liberal. That's how brilliant it has been this strategy of marginalization. You don't understand it, you liberals! You never saw a problem you don't want to spend my money to fix. You don't understand the geopolitical rah, rah, rah. They've got all kinds of things they're going to nail you with.

You go to war [and] if you criticize it, they're mad. If you criticize it after we go to war, you don't respect the troops. If you criticize it after we lose troops, you're defiling the memory of these troops and you are spitting in the face of their loved ones and their parents. I mean from everywhere, and by the way, you can't say "Why did they crash into the towers?" Because then you're blaming the victim.

At every turn they are ready for you, and you better shut up and sing or they're going to make life miserable for you and if you're thirty something, with two and a half kids and a mortgage, and reporting to a Republican boss, you know, how much of an outspoken dissenter are you going to be? Everything conspires to open the door wide for a president to march through it with his cruise missiles, his aircraft carriers. ...

I think the greatest thing that Obama could do now is call a press conference and say "We are here, now and hereafter not going to use drones for military assault. We may want to reserve the right to keep them for surveillance but we are promising the world now that we won't..."

Where is the valor? A guy sits in a cage or a control room somewhere in Maryland or maybe Nevada and he sees in the nose cone camera of the unmanned aerial vehicle, there's the insurgents, how they know, I'm not sure, and they fire an incendiary device, and we kill children, children! And this is on Obama's watch.

You know, I don't see how anybody who engages in this kind of killing can claim to be brave. You know, Grenada. We bombed a mental hospital. We don't have

ground troops to go in and take care of Morris Bishop, the communist? And the endangered lives of those medical students? We don't have to bomb people. It's just easier. I'm convinced of this. And I also have this totally unassailable position that bombing should be a war crime.

You know, if a Marine goes into a Fallujah home and blows away the family with an AK47 that's a war crime. If we drop a bomb on that house and incinerate the family, it's collateral damage. We are in denial. And we are creating language to help us continue to be in denial. This is awful.

We are endangering the lives of our young adult children or the future military. My grandchildren, what kind of a world are they going to live in? Are they going to keep looking over their shoulder in downtown New York City or Fargo, North Dakota? Are they going to be saying, "Did I just get on the wrong bus?" Do we really expect that we can drop bombs like this and not have to pay a price for this?

We have executed an American citizen in a foreign land and we assassinated him with a drone. We are endangering our political, and military and mostly our political leadership. You can't keep doing this. For them to stand there and let this happen forever is counterintuitive.

DB: Before we get to Norman, I, in this context of war and peace and courage, about telling the truth, I have to ask you about a private by the name of Bradley Manning. Who the government, the military wants to put in jail forever, who spent a great deal of time in jail. Just had his first hearing and some people think he should be executed for revealing some of the things that you were talking about including a film that showed a U.S. helicopter crew gunning down civilians, including children. Your thoughts on Bradley Manning? Is he a hero or a traitor?

PD: In a time in the history of this nation, when there is so much happening under the table, when administrations feel they have to protect us, and in order to do that efficiently they have to keep it secret, I celebrate the courage of Bradley Manning. I've yet to see anybody prove to anybody else that somebody was killed because of whatever it is that Bradley Manning has made public.

You know, the information is the life blood of a democracy. I believe there are more victims caused by secrecy than there are by sunshine. So let's have the disinfectant there. Let's have Julian Assange [WikiLeaks founder]. What has been revealed is helpful. It's gonna help. ... It raises the possibility that it won't happen again. And that's a good thing.

And we can argue all night, you know, the next thing they're going to bring in

the family of the CIA agent who was killed, and how can you do. ... They are ready for any kind of dissent, they will slap you down. They will hit you hard. You can't even get your sentence out. One of the, the writers, a female writer, shortly after 9/11 wrote a column that said "The chickens have come home to roost." And Charles Krauthammer took her head off. She was blaming the victim.

So you can't even inquire "Why did they do this?" Another attempt to sort of say "Hold it. Hold it." is shut off. And they have succeeded. They have succeeded. They have scared us enough where they have made us believe, not everybody to be sure, but they've made enough people believe that they need this secrecy otherwise they can't protect us and that is a very difficult thing for an American citizen to oppose.

DB: I know that you're in town to support the candidacy of Norman Solomon. He's running for Congress on the Democratic Party which in a district that was reprogrammed, if you will. That covers the Golden Gate Bridge all the way to the border, up north with Oregon. And it's a very important district. Some significant people have come out for him, Dan Ellsberg, Delores Huerta, and Elliott Gould was just in town. You are here now. Tell us why you've come here, why you would support somebody like Norman Solomon. What do you know about him? You know enough about him to believe in him?

PD: Well, I think so. First of all, we both made documentaries, with the same point of view. And when we each saw, when we saw each others documentaries, it was like a brotherhood, you know? And I admired also what he had to say in his book. His analysis of how we go to war and what collectively pushes [us] into these horrible "Don't mess with Texas" foreign policy decisions. It's much more detailed.

Norman does something that I haven't seen anybody else do, and that is get behind this. We have a national press corps that wants to know who's winning and who's losing, and where we have the bases and how much equipment without ever asking "Why the hell are we doing this in the first place?" Norman does that. And he does it in a very professional way.

His scholarship is impeccable. He's the son my mother wanted to have. And I admire him so much because, you know, I'm out there high wire, you know, trying to make my contribution to the peace movement and when I am out there, I think of Norman and I steal from him, I do. But I always quote his book. Norman, he makes the point, a president of the United States can have a war if he wants one. That is terrifying. That is so frightening.

You know look at Ron Paul, now here's a guy I'm not able to vote for. There is a history that is very distracting for me, but he's going around the campaign

saying "Why are we always doing these wars? Why are we invading other people?" No other candidate on either side of the aisle can speak those words.

DB: And he's getting support for it.

PD: Yes, he is. He's getting a lot of young people. Can you imagine Mitt Romney saying "What are we doing in all these wars?" Can't be done, because if they turn out to be wrong or unpopular, whatever it is, it's politically fatal. They're finished in the public service business. They will not be re-elected to Congress.

Imagine the most important issue right in front of us, some would argue it's the economy, and it may be. But right now when you think of all this military action going on and all the bombs we've dropped and all the countries we've invaded, what is more important to you as an issue in a presidential race? And it's off the table. That's how we go to war. There is no robust debate about this.

Rick Santorum can't wait to invade Iran. He's ready to send another 4,000 Americans to die. And he's doing it because he knows that the way you get elected is you gotta be tough. And a president, if you give a president a cruise missile, he'll fire. You know, it just, it blows me away when I see how easily we are seduced into a war and all of a sudden, we have widows getting the folded flag, people are crying around the coffin, young men and women are coming home. They'll never see a child graduate, they'll never go to a bar mitzvah, or first communion. They are irreplaceable human beings, and they are dead forever, because George Bush wanted to "Bring it on!" And now we've got Rick Santorum.

Boy, you can see a president doesn't get a statue for fixing health care. The only way you get a statue in a park is winning a war. That's why we've got horses and swords; we have military airplanes in parks that kids play on. We've cannons in parks, in parks! We celebrate war. There's no other way to say this.

And how the American people can stand there and allow this to happen, there is a connection. If we create a culture surrounded by things that go "Boom" we can't be surprised if we build our foreign policy on that kind of activity.

DB: In conclusion, and Norman and I have gone back and forth one this, I asked him for an article that I did about him for the Progressive, "Why would you give up this role, this very important role as a biting media critic to go into a swamp land called Congress, where nobody, very few people, say what they mean, there are a few of them. But won't we lose this important media critic if he ends up in the swamp of Congress?"

PD: Here's what I think about that. We're very close to cynicism with that observation. What good does it do? By the way, everybody hates Congress. And it

doesn't take a lot of courage to hate Congress. It's easy to hate 535 people. And I've never found that criticism to have much weight. You know, what do you mean? What is it you don't like about Congress? They won't answer you. Congress is politicians, we hate politicians.

I think Norman's decision is exemplary. I'd like to see more people like Norman. It's an act of courage today to jump into this thing, I agree with you. I don't know how you have any fun with all the whacko business that's going on in Washington. Don't you miss Donald Trump? I mean seriously this is, this was the greatest reality show.

What we want is sunshine, as long as it's out there. As long as your listeners have an opportunity to hear them, don't let anybody be so protective and paternalistic where they get themselves in a position where "Well, we know what's good for you." Now we've become the thing we hate. Which by the way, has what's happened in foreign policy. We are killing innocent people.

When I was on MSNBC I had people on from Peaceful Tomorrows. These were citizens who lost family, loved ones in the towers. And they call us and their message was, "don't go and kill other innocent people to avenge the death of my innocent father, or grandfather," whatever it was. I could see the pain in their faces across, and this was another example of moral courage. Imagine these people got up in the middle of the war fever, and made this point.

Of course, they were ignored. But what's most interesting to me is that these people are not alone. You know, right now most people agree with us. You know, we're going to have to get used to this. We're popular. But I guess we weren't popular enough in 2003 when we invaded, but even then there were millions of Americans who opposed the war but they were never heard, they were never heard. Mainstream media, went along, to go along.

DB: Well, finally so to be clear here Phil Donahue, in your heart of hearts, you really believe that somebody like Norman Solomon can make a difference? Is that what you believe?

PD: You know if I don't believe that, then I'm a cynic, and my voice has ended, I no longer, if I think, how many times have you heard, "Oh, what does it matter, they're going to go to war anyway." I mean I've heard that so many times, you know, wars just happen. ... I mean that's a surrender. ...

I mean we've got to start somewhere, Dennis. I mean, if Norman doesn't, whose going to do it? ... I think he'd be a great example for other progressives to follow him into the public arena of Washington, D.C. and be a break on this rootin' tootin' shootin' foreign policy that presidents and others in power seem

to believe will make them heroes. [Vice President Dick] Cheney looked at Bush at a cabinet meeting [and asked] "You gonna take him out, or not?" Imagine that. This is cowboy talk.

And it may involve your son, or daughter, who will come home in a pine box, when the two officers walk up the front walk and the mother looks out the window, they often faint, before these men get to the front door. This is the pain that the American people are not seeing, and I made this one little attempt with the movie titled "Body of War" to at least expose the sacrifice of one family.

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Muscling What's Left of Democracy

The Standard & Poor's rating agency has downgraded European countries in a move that may force the governments to crack down more on their populations and divert more money to wealthy investors, thus helping the super-rich short-circuit what's left of democracy, Danny Schechter reports.

By Danny Schechter

We Americans live in an increasingly degraded country. Our politics are degraded and have become a laughingstock to the world. Our military is demoralized and degraded with soldiers urinating on dead civilians and awaiting deployment orders for the next illegal intervention.

Our education system has been degraded with standards falling and pervasive defunding. Our transportation system, ditto. I could go on, but I don't have to. We are all living the decline with downward mobility, jobless and foreclosures, to cite a few trends that make life so miserable for so many.

Now, our godlike financial ratings agencies have decided to degrade nine countries struggling to fix their financial crisis. The decision by Standard and Poor's (Best renamed, "It is now Standard to Be Poor") to downgrade credit ratings for France, Italy, Austria and six other European countries signals those nations that Wall Street has them by the cojones. Their costs for borrowing will go up.

These countries are being warned: We are in charge. Do as we say!

Unreported in all of this, is that many of the companies that loaned them the money are part of a U.S.- led financial oligarchy. The credit agencies the same ones that legitimated fraudulent sub-prime lenders with no accountability are part of the enforcement gang of today's loan sharks who are squeezing Europe to pay up or else.

It's been reported that when Greece finally gets a huge new loan from the European Central Bank and the IMF, most of the money will only touch down in Athens before being wired directly to London-based hedge funds that pushed the debt out in the first place. They now demand to be repaid first. The hell with Greece's needs.

As The Financial Times reported, "The eurozone debt crisis returned with a vengeance on Friday as Standard & Poor's downgraded France and Austria, two of the currency's six triple A creditors, as well as other nations not in the top tier."

S&P's goal was not just about economics. It was political, to press Europe's political leaders to move faster to please them, i.e., suspend democratic checks and balances if needs be, and do what Wall Street wants ASAP! It was an act of bullying. It was also punitive because, according to Bloomberg, Europe was actually making progress in getting its house in order:

"S&P acted at the end of a week in which signs grew that Europe's woes may be cresting as borrowing costs fell, evidence of economic resilience emerged and the European Central Bank said it had quelled a credit crunch at banks.

"The result is that refinancing costs for certain countries may remain 'elevated' and credit availability and economic growth may fade, it said. 'It's not a catastrophe,' French Finance Minister Francois Baroin told France 2 television, noting his country now has the same rating as the U.S."

How reassuring. The U.S. is getting the same treatment. The problem is that the more the .001 percent financiers push, the more their borrowers may be forced to push back,

Bloomberg's report ends with a quote about "dangers" that the article glosses over: "This decision could upset the positive developments we've seen in Europe in the last few weeks," ECB Governing Council member Ewald Nowotny said. "That's the most dangerous thing in my view."

In short, we are all in the same crunch, being pushed around by the same avaricious interests. Call it what it is: a system of financial terrorism.

Europe is not simply a passive victim here its elites have been collusive and complicit with the lenders, taking massive loans and often squandering the money. Satyajit Das, a brilliant author and derivatives expert, writes on NakedCapitalism.com, “ Europe is on a road to fiscal bondage.”

Satyajit Das said, “Financially futile, economically erroneous, politically puzzling and socially irresponsible, the December 2011 European summit was a failure. Only the attending leaders and their acolytes believe otherwise. German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s post-summit homilies about the ‘long run’, ‘running a marathon’ and ‘more Europe’ rang hollow.

“The proposed plan is fundamentally flawed. It made no attempt to tackle the real issues the level of debt, how to reduce it, how to meet funding requirements or how to restore growth. Most importantly there were no new funds committed to the exercise.

“The centerpiece of the new plan was a commitment to a new legally enforceable ‘fiscal compact’ requiring government budgets to be balanced or in surplus, with the annual structural deficit not to exceed 0.5% of nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The language was Orwellian and incomprehensible in equal measure.”

While some get the stick, others enjoy the carrots. Matt Taibbi reports:

“Newspapers in Colorado today are reporting that the elegant Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado, will be closed to the public from today through Monday at noon. Why? Because a local squire has apparently decided to rent out all 94 rooms of the hotel for three-plus days for his daughter’s Bat Mitzvah.

The hotel’s general manager, Tony DiLucia, would say only that the party was being thrown by a ‘nice family,’ but newspapers are now reporting that the Daddy of the lucky little gal is one Jeffrey Verschleiser, currently an executive with Goldman, Sachs.”

He was also an executive at the now departed Bear Stearns, This particular “nice” padre was part of a double-dipping scheme exposed in The Atlantic:

“The traders were essentially double-dipping – getting paid twice on the deal. How was this possible? Once the security was sold, they didn’t have a legal claim to get cash back from the bad loans – that claim belonged to bond investors – but they did so anyway and kept the money.

“Thus, Bear was cheating the investors they promised to have sold a safe product out of their cash. According to former Bear Stearns and EMC traders and analysts who spoke with The Atlantic, Nierenberg and Verschleiser were the decision-

makers for the double dipping scheme.”

Scratch beneath the surface and all the old players and financial gangsters come into view in an internationally interconnected and manipulated system. Unless something is done by those outside the system a more powerful global Occupy Movement for starters we will all be on what Satyajit Das calls “The Road To Nowhere.”

News Dissector Danny Schechter covers financial crime in his News Dissector blog His new book is “OCCUPY:” Dissecting Occupy Wall Street. His most recent film is Plunder that looks at the financial crisis as a crime story. Comments to dissector@mediachanel.org
