

# Plutocracy Now!

The United States today qualifies as a plutocracy – on a number of grounds, and it is having a profound impact on the media, education and think tanks—indeed on the whole of society, says Michael Brenner.

**By Michael Brenner**



Plutocracy literally means rule by the rich. “Rule” can have various shades of meaning: those who exercise the authority of public office are wealthy; their wealth explains why they hold that office; they exercise that authority in the interests of the rich; they have the primary influence over who holds those offices and the actions they take.

These aspects of “plutocracy” are not exclusive. Moreover, government of the rich and for the rich need not be run directly by the rich. Also, in some exceptional circumstances rich individuals who hold powerful positions may govern in the interests of the many, for example Franklin Roosevelt.

The United States today qualifies as a plutocracy – on a number of grounds. Let’s look at some striking bits of evidence. Gross income redistribution upwards in the hierarchy has been a feature of American society for the past decades. The familiar statistics tell us that nearly 80 percent of the national wealth generated since 1973 has gone to the upper 2 percent and 65 percent to the upper 1 per cent. Estimates for the rise in real income for salaried workers over the past 40 years range from 20 percent to 28 percent. In that period, real GDP has risen by 110 percent – it has more than doubled.

To put it somewhat differently, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the top earning 1 percent of households gained about 8 times more than those in the 60 percentile after federal taxes and income transfers between 1979 and 2007 and 10 times those in lower percentiles.

In short, the overwhelming fraction of all the wealth created over two

generations has gone to those at the very top of the income pyramid.

That pattern has been markedly accelerated since the financial crisis hit in 2008. Between 2000 and 2012, the real net worth of 90 percent of Americans has declined by 25 percent. Meanwhile, Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates et al, i.e. the wealthiest 1 percent of the world's population, now own more than half of the world's wealth (according to a Credit Suisse report in Nov. 2017). Croesus is green with envy.

### **Not By Accident**

Theoretically, there is the possibility that this change is due to structural economic features operating nationally and internationally. That argument won't wash, though, for three reasons.

First, there is every reason to think that such a process has accelerated over the past nine years during which disparities have widened at a faster rate. Second, other countries (many even more enmeshed in the world economy) have seen nothing like the drastic phenomenon occurring in the United States. Third, the readiness of the country's political class to ignore what has been happening, and the absence of remedial action that could have been taken, in themselves are clear indicators of who shapes thinking and determines public policy.

In addition, several significant governmental actions have been taken that directly favor the moneyed interests. This includes the dismantling of the apparatus to regulate financial activities specifically and big business generally.

Runaway exploitation of the system by predatory banks was made possible by the Clinton "reforms" of the 1990s and the lax application of those rules that still prevailed. Former Attorney General Eric Holder, let's recall, went so far as to admit that the Department of Justice's decisions on when to bring criminal charges against the biggest financial institutions will depend not on the question of legal violations alone but would include the hypothetical effects on economic stability of their prosecution. (Those adverse effects are

greatly exaggerated).

Earlier, Holder had extended blanket immunity to Bank of America and other mortgage lenders for their apparent criminality in forging through robo-signing of foreclosure documents on millions of home owners. In brief, equal protection and application of the law has been suspended. That is plutocracy.

Moreover, the extremes of a regulatory culture that, in effect, turns public officials into tame accessories to financial abuse emerged in stark relief at the 2013 Levin Committee hearings on J P Morgan Chase's 'London Whale' scandal. Morgan officials stated baldly that they chose not to inform the Controller of the Currency about discrepancies in trading accounts, without the slightest regard that they might be breaking the law, in the conviction that it was Morgan's privilege not to do so.

Senior regulators explained that they did not see it as their job to monitor compliance or to check whether claims made by their Morgan counterparts were correct. They also accepted abusive treatment, e.g. being called "stupid" to their face by senior Morgan executives. That's plutocracy at work. The Senate Finance Committee hearing drew only 3 senators – yet another sign of plutocracy at work. When mega-banks make illicit profits by money laundering for drug cartels and get off with a slap on the wrist, as has HSBC and others, that too is plutocracy. FDR, it rightly is said, saved American capitalism. Barack OBAMA saved predatory financial capitalism.

When the system of law that is meant to order the workings of society without reference to ascriptive persons is made malleable in the hands of officials to serve the preferred interests of some, it ceases to be a neutral instrument for the common good. In today's society, it is becoming the instrument of a plutocracy.

The financial behemoths and big business in general can count on sympathetic justices to bail them out when cornered by prosecutors. The United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Preet Bharara, was making an earnest attempt to call to account several predators when the New York Supreme Court pulled the rug out

from under him. Their generous interpretation of the dubious Supreme Court decision on wrongful trading cases upheld the overturning of the conviction of Michael S. Steinberg, the highest-ranking officer of notorious hedge fund SAC Capital Advisors. Bharara was obliged to drop seven outstanding cases against the Wall Street biggies.

### **Corporate Tax Dodging**

There are myriad other examples of complicity between legislators or regulators, on the one hand, and special business interests on the other. Environmental Protection Agency judgments that are reversed under the combined pressure of the commercial interests of affected and beholden politicians is one. The government's decision not to seek the power to bargain with pharmaceutical companies over the price of drugs paid for with public funds is another. Tolerance for the concealment of offshore profits in the tens of billions is a third. This last is the most egregious.

Some of the most profitable companies pay little or no federal taxes. Apple is outstanding among them – it has paid zero. Facebook and Microsoft follow closely behind. General Electric received a tax refund in 2015 – after revenues of \$8 billion. Its global tax rate in all jurisdictions was 3.2 percent.

In California, several corporate giants (including Apple and Genentech) have launched an aggressive campaign in an unprecedented effort to be reimbursed for real estate taxes on the grounds that their assets have been over-assessed – and their profits unfairly cut. The Silicon Valley town of Cupertino hosts the world headquarters of Apple, which built its vast campus there in 2014. It has 13,000 employees. How much does it pay the city of Cupertino for the services provided? \$6,000.

Apple has rejected polite suggestions that it might raise that amount on grounds that doing so would be in contradiction of its business model. The threat of packing up and moving the whole shebang to Sheboygan is hardly credible given the multi-billion investment in concrete and glass. Apple's power to get its way is political and cultural. Cupertino, by the way, was a prosperous town before Apple

set up shop there.

Even in Seattle, bastion of progressive politics, Amazon has shown how easily it can intimidate and muscle politicians to do its bidding. A path-breaking corporate tax was enacted in May that would raise \$50 million annually to help cover the cost of desperately needed affordable housing programs. It was passed unanimously by the City Council to nation-wide acclaim.

In June it was scuttled by a 7-2 vote. What had happened to produce this 'epiphany?' Simple – Amazon announced that it was suspending all expansion plans for Seattle, and were joined by Microsoft, Starbucks and others in a declaration of war against the city. Mayor Jenny Durkin caved in: "We heard you," she said while waving the white flag and bowing to her masters.

In short, a city besieged by barbarians saved itself by enslaving itself. Thereby, Seattle is little different from an old style corporate run mill town like Bethlehem or Scranton, Pennsylvania. That's our bright high-tech future under plutocracy.

Please note: Seattle and Silicon Valley are where Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and other Democratic leaders go to plead for money from hedge fund vultures and IT billionaires to fund their 'Republican-lite' 'reform' campaigns.

## **Über Alles**

The ethic of corporate entitlement is carried to its extreme by Uber. The company flouts laws and regulations as a matter of course. It exploits its disposable gig workers to build a clientele and then tells local authorities that if they enforce the rules, Uber will leave – and leave angry voters behind. Currently, they are hotly contesting a ruling of the California Supreme Court that its throw-away workers are not "independent contractors." In its typical aggressive fashion, Uber leaders are buying politicians and stirring its promoters to get a legislative exception. Board member Ariana Huffington, former progressive activist, is in full support. So it goes in a plutocracy.

Relaxed interpretations of the tax laws by the IRS to the advantage of high income persons can be added to the list. So, too, can the give-away to sole source contractors of the tens of billions squandered in Iraq and Afghanistan. The number of such direct assists to big business and the wealthy is endless.

The point is that government, at all levels, serves particular selfish interests no matter who holds high positions. While there is some difference between Republicans and Democrats on this score, it has narrowed on most major items to the point that the fundamental properties of the biased system are so entrenched as to be impervious to electoral outcomes. The most revealing experience that we have of that harsh reality is the Obama administration's strategic decision to allow Wall Street to determine how and by whom the 2008 financial crisis would be handled.

Systemic biases are the most crucial factor in creating and maintaining plutocratic orientations of government. They are confirmed, and reinforced, by the identities and identifications of the persons who actually hold high elected office.

Our leaders are nearly all rich by any reasonable standard. Most are very rich. Trump's cabinet is dominated by billionaires. Those who weren't already rich have aspired to become so and have succeeded. The Clintons are the striking case in point. That aspiration is evinced in how they conduct themselves in office.

Congress, for its part, is composed of two rich men/women's clubs. In many cases, personal wealth helped win them their offices. In many others, they knit ties with lobbies that provided the necessary funds. Former Senator Max Baucus should have worn a Big Pharma jersey, like soccer players, if truth in advertising rules pertained. Whether they are "bought off" in some sense or other, they surely are often coopted. The most insidious aspect of cooptation is to see the world from the vantage point of the advantaged and special economic interests.

## **Democrats' Devolution**

The devolution of the Democratic Party from being the representative of ordinary people to being just “another bunch of guys” is a telling commentary on how American politics has degenerated into a plutocracy. The party’s rolling over to accommodate the interests of the wealthy has been a theme of the past decade or longer.

From the Obama White House to the halls of Congress, party leaders (and most followers) have conceded the dominance of conservative ideas about macro-economic strategy (the austerity dogma), about retaining largely untouched the for-profit health care “non-system,” about bailing out the big financial players at the expense of everyone else and the economy’s stability, and about degrading Social Security and Medicare. The last item is the most egregious – and revealing – of our plutocratic ways and means. For it entails a combination of intellectual deceit, blatant massaging of the numbers, and disregard for the human consequences in a time of growing distress for tens of millions. In other words, there is no way to conceal or spin the trade-offs made, who is being hurt and who would continue to enjoy the advantages of skewed fiscal policies.

The most compelling evidence of how the money interests shape American politics is the systematic disregard for the most overt manifestations of predatory capitalism. Consider the tax exemption corporate leaders have granted themselves by devising ingenious ways of incorporating themselves in tax havens (or even no-tax cyber space) where all profits are registered via the manipulation of transfer pricing – as noted above. Yet, there is not a single bit of proposed legislation to remedy this gross misappropriation of wealth being considered by either branch of the United States Congress. It was raised, albeit tangentially and briefly, by only one candidate in the 2016 election – Bernie Sanders.

No one is raising it in this year’s mid-terms. As for the hedge fund/private equity vultures, they were singled out for denunciation by Newt Gingrich – of all people – back in the 2012 Republican primaries against Mitt Romney. It was the main reason for his surprise victory in South Carolina. Then came the much publicized debate in Florida. To everyone’s surprise, Gingrich was completely silent about

hedge funds and never mentioned Romney's career as a hedge fund predator. What happened? The Party heavies made him a proposition he could not refuse: either shut up or you'll never eat lunch again in Washington. Fold up your lucrative consultancy, turn in your celebrity card, and start getting your new wife accustomed to dinners at Eat & Park.

### **The Media's Job**

There is another, absolutely crucial dimension to the consolidation of America's plutocracy. It is controlling the means to shape how the populace understands public matters and, thereby, to channel thought and behavior in the desired direction. Our plutocratic guides, prophets and trainers have been enormously successful in accomplishing this. One object of their efforts has been to render the media into either conscious allies or to denature them as critics or skeptics. Their success is readily visible.

Who in the media has challenged the plutocracy serving falsehood that Social Security and Medicare are the main cause of our deficits whose imminent bankruptcy puts in jeopardy the American economy? Who even bothers to inform the public that those two programs' trust funds draw on a separate revenue source from the rest of the budget? Answer: no one in or near the mainstream media.

Who has performed the most elementary service in pointing out that of all the jobs created since 2009, small as the number has been, 60 percent at least have been either part-time or temporary? Answer: again, no one. Who has bothered to highlight the logical flaws in the market fundamentalist view of the world that has so deformed perceptions of what works and doesn't work in macro-economic management? Yes, Paul Krugman, Joseph Stiglitz and a handful of others – although even Krugman's colleagues writing on business and economics at *The New York Times* seem not to have the time to read him or else lack the wit to comprehend what he is saying.

### **Think Tank Takeovers**

A second objective in a similar vein has been to dominate the think



tank/foundation world. Today, nearly every major Washington think tank depends on corporate money. Businessmen sit on the boards and shape research programs. Peter G. Peterson, the hedge fund billionaire, took the more direct route of acquiring the International Institute of Economics, renaming it after himself. He then set about using it as an instrument to carry on the campaign against Social Security which has become his life's work.

Then there is Robert Rubin. Rubin is the distilled essence of financial malpractice, and the embodiment of the government-Wall Street nexus that brought the country to wrack and ruin. Author of Clinton's deregulation program while Secretary of the Treasury: later super lobbyist and Chairman of the conglomerated super bank CITI (only made possible by his deregulation) in the years before it was pulled from the brink of bankruptcy by Ben Bernanke, Hank Paulson and Tim Geithner; and adviser to Barack Obama who stocked the new administration with Rubin protégés. He since has ensconced himself as Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations and Director of the highly prestigious, lavishly funded Hamilton Project at Brookings. By happenstance, both organizations late last year featured presentations by Jaime Dimon, chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase, America's biggest bank. The presentation was billed as a forum for a leading global CEO to share priorities and insights before a high-level audience of CFR members. This is plutocracy in action.

### **Education Undermined**

The third objective has been to weaken public education. We have witnessed the assault on our public elementary school system in the name of effectiveness, efficiency and innovation. Charter schools are the watchword. Teachers are blamed as the heart of the problem. So privatization, highly profitable privatization, is sold as the solution to save America's youth in the face of ample evidence to the contrary. Cast aside is the historical truth that our public school system is the one institution, above all others, that made American democracy. It also is a bastion of enlightened social thinking. It thereby qualifies as a target.

The same goes for the country's proud network of public universities. From state to state, they are starved for funding and made sacrificial lambs on the altar of the austerity cult. They, too, are stigmatized as "behind the times," as no longer doing the job of supplying the business world with the obedient, practical skilled workers it wants. Business schools, long a dependency of the corporate world, are held up as the model for private-public partnership in higher education. Distance learning, often managed by for-profit "expert" consultants or "entrepreneurs", is advertised as the wave of a bright future – a future with fewer liberal-leaning professors with fuzzy ideas about the good society. Distance learning is the higher education companion to the charter school fad. Lots of promises, little delivery, but well conceived to advance a plutocracy friendly agenda.

Here, too, boards of regents are led by business men or women. The abortive coup at the University of Virginia was instigated by the rector who is a real estate developer in Virginia Beach. The chairman of the Board of Regents at the University of Texas system where tensions are at a combustible level is a real estate developer. The chairman at the University of California is CEO of two private equity firms – and the husband of Senator Diane Feinstein. His pet project was to have the moneys of the California teacher's pension fund (CALPERS) placed in the custody of private financial houses. Two former directors of the fund currently are under criminal investigation for taking very large kick-backs from other private equity firms to whom they directed monies – and which later employed them as 'placers.' That's plutocracy at work.

### **Money as the Measure of All Things**

The ultimate achievement of a plutocracy is to legitimize itself by fixing in the minds of society the idea that money is the measure of all things. It represents achievement, it is the sine qua non for giving people the things they most want. It is the gauge of an individual's worth. It is the mark of status in a status anxious culture. That way of seeing the world describes the outlook of Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. It is Obama who, at the

height of the financial meltdown, lauded Jaime Dimon and Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs CEO, as “savvy and successful businessmen.” It is Obama who eagerly became Dimon’s golfing buddy – an Obama who twice in his career took jobs with corporate law firms. It was Bill Clinton who has been flying the world in corporate jets for the past twelve years. It is the two of them who promoted Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles to press for the crippling of Social Security. That’s plutocracy pervading the leadership ranks in both parties of what used to be the American republic.

Perhaps the most extraordinary achievement of the plutocracy’s financial wing has been to convince the political class that its largely speculative activities are normal. Indeed, they are feted as being the economy’s principal reason for growth. Their ruse follows that their own well-being is essential to the well-being of the national economy and, therefore, they deserve privileged treatment.

Subtlety, discretion and restraint are foreign to their buccaneering style with deep roots in the country’s culture and history. Their behavior is often impulsive and grasping: greedy to display what they can get away with and that they are top dogs. They are playing with the nation’s wealth to enrich themselves rather than manage an economy.

There is little interest in building anything that might endure – no ‘new order,’ no new party, no new institutions. Not even physical monuments to themselves. Why bother when the existing set-up works so well now to your advantage and your like-minded and like-interested associates who can turn ideas, money and policies in their direction with ease.

Meanwhile the public is blind to how they are being deluded and abused, thanks in large part to a supine news media. Little changes in a country whose civic ideology imbues the populace with the firm belief that its principles and institutions embody unique virtue. Challenging that is a threat to plutocrats and the media and the educational system they run or influence.

## **A Wall Street Police State**

One of the most stunning examples of direct plutocratic involvement in the state was Wall Street's audacity in coopting a part of the NYC Police Department in setting up a semi-autonomous unit to monitor the financial district.

Funded by Goldman Sachs et al, managed in part by private bank employees in key administrative positions, and with an explicit mandate to prevent and deal with any activity that threatens them, it operates with the latest high tech equipment out of a dedicated facility provided by its sponsors. The facility for years was kept "under the counter" so as not to tempt inquisitive parties to expose it. This is the unit that coordinated squelching of the Occupy Movement's Manhattan demonstrations. It represents the appropriation of a public agency to serve and to serve under private interests.

The post-9/11 hyper-anxiety provided political and ideological cover for a deal devised by Mayor Mike Bloomberg (himself a Wall Street billionaire who went down the line to defend Wall Street against all charges of financial abuse) in collusion with his former associates. Is this simply Bloomberg exposing NYC's fiscal dependency on financial sector jobs?

This is the same Bloomberg who killed a widely supported initiative to set a minimum decent wage of \$10 an hour with health insurance (\$11.50 without) on development projects that receive more than \$1 million in taxpayer subsidies. He stigmatized the measure as "a throwback to the era when government viewed the private sector as a cash cow to be milked... The last time we really had a big managed economy was the USSR and that didn't work out so well." That's as plutocratic as it gets – and in liberal New York.

### **No Conspiracy Necessary**

Furthermore, the moving parts of plutocracy are not well organized. There is no conspiracy as such. It is the convergence of outlook and self-interests among disparate persons in different parts of the system that has accomplished a revolution in American public life, public discourse, and public philosophy.



Nobody had to indoctrinate Barack Obama in 2008-2009 or intimidate him or bribe him. He came to the plutocrats on his own volition with his mind-set and values already in conformity with the plutocracy's view of itself and of America. This is

the man who, for the first two years of his presidency, repeatedly misstated the coverage of the Social Security Act of 1935 – ignorant and not bothering to find out, or willfully ignorant so as to create a convenient comparison with his fatally flawed health care pseudo-plan. This was the man, after all, who cited Ronald Reagan as a model for what sort of presidency America needed. He has been living proof of how effectively Americans had been brought into line with the plutocratic vision.

This is not to say that the plutocrats' success was inevitable – or that they were diabolically clever in manipulating everything and everyone to their advantage. There has been a strong element of good fortune in their victory. Their most notable piece of luck has been the ineptitude and shortsightedness of their potential opposition – liberal Democrats, intellectuals, professional associations and their like. The plutocrats pursued their goals in a disorganized, diffuse way. However, the absence of an opponent on the contested terrain ensured success.

### **Not Smart**

As for cleverness, the American plutocracy is actually a stupid plutocracy. First, it overreaches. Far better to leave a few goodies on the table for the 99 percent and even a few crumbs for the 47

percent than to risk generating resentment and retaliation.

Since the financial meltdown, financial and business interests have been unable to resist picking the pockets of the weak. Fishing out the small change in the wake of grand larceny is rubbing salt into wounds. Why fight a small rise in the minimum wage? Why ruthlessly exploit all those temps and part-timers who have so little in the way of economic or political power anyway? Why squeeze every last buck from the small depositors and credit card holders whom you already systematically fleece? In the broad perspective, that sort of behavior is stupid.

To explain it, we must look to the obsession with status of America's audacious corporate freebooters. These peculiar traits grow more intense the higher one goes in the hierarchy of riches. One is the impulse to show to everybody your superiority by displaying what you can get away with. "Sharp dealing" always has been prized by segments of American society. It's the striving, insecure man who has to prove to the world – and to himself – that he can act with impunity. He is little different from the hoodlum showing off to his pals and to his moll.

These people at heart are hustlers – they crave the thrill of pulling off a scam, not constructing something. Hence, Lloyd Blankfein not showing up for White House meetings yet having Obama thank him for letting the president know, albeit after the meeting already had begun, that Blankfein can't make it. Hence, Jaime Dimon indignantly protesting his verbal mistreatment by the press, by the White House, by whomever.

Then there is Jack Welch, the titan of American industry who struts sitting down, holding the Guinness record for the most manufacturing jobs outsourced by one company – and yet impudently calling Obama "anti-business" after the president appoints his hand-picked successor, Jeffrey Immelt, to head the White House's Job Council. Or Bank of America's faking compliance with the sweetheart deal it got from Obama on the felonious foreclosure scam.

The ultimate episode of egregious lawlessness is the MF Holdings

affair – whereby under its chief, former Senator and Governor Jon Corzine, this hedge fund took the illegal action of looting a few billion from custodial accounts to cover losses incurred in its proprietary trading. JP Morgan, which held MF Global funds in several accounts and also processed the firm's securities trades, resisted transferring the funds to MF's customers until forced to by legal action. Punitive action: none. Why? The Justice Department and regulatory bodies came up with the lame excuse that the MF group's decision-making was so opaque that they could not determine whose finger clicked the mouse. Shades of SNL. To pull capers like these and get off scot free without chastisement is the ultimate ego trip.

### **Where the Money Is**

Willie Sutton, the notorious bank robber of the 1940s, explained his targeting banks this way: "That's where the money is." Today's financial swindlers go after high risk gambles because that's where the biggest kicks are. That is more important than the biggest bucks – although they add to the thrill. The constant status striver and insecure financial baron is a compulsive gambler. He needs his fixes: of winning, of celebrity, of respect, or deference as transitory as all may be.

American culture provides few insignia of rank. No 'Sirs,' no seats in the House of Lords, no rites of passage that separate the heralded elite from all the rest of us. Since oblivion shadows the most famous and acclaimed, they often grasp for whatever is within reach – however ludicrous that might be. When [IR Magazine awarded JPMorgan the prize for "best crisis management" of 2012 for its handling of the London Whale trading debacle, at a black-tie awards ceremony in Manhattan,](#) Morgan executives were there to express their appreciation, rather than hide in shame. The only Wall Street personage who has played the celebrity game without being marginalized in the public mind is Robert Rubin. Through nimbleness and political connection he has semi-institutionalized his celebrity status. Yes, there is former Fed chairman Paul Volcker. But his stature is built on an unmatched record of service to the commonweal and unchallenged integrity. The Blankfeins and Dimons and Welchs and Rubins not only lack the critical

attributes – they also appear to scorn the public, rather than serve it, which even private financial institutions should do, while still making a decent profit.

The plutocrats' compulsive denigration of the poor and the dispossessed is perhaps the most telling evidence of status obsession linked to insecurity borne of their often ill-gotten gains. That is at the core of their social personality. They seem to find it necessary to stigmatize the everyone not in their class as losers. Those at the lower end are condemned as as moral degenerates – drug addicts, lazy parasites – rather than victims of their financial system. This attitude is in part to highlight their superiority and in part to blur the human consequences of their rapacity. Behavior of this kind is the antithesis of a cultivated image of the statesman of commerce – even though they are paying a price in public esteem despite the media's attempts to maintain their elevated status.

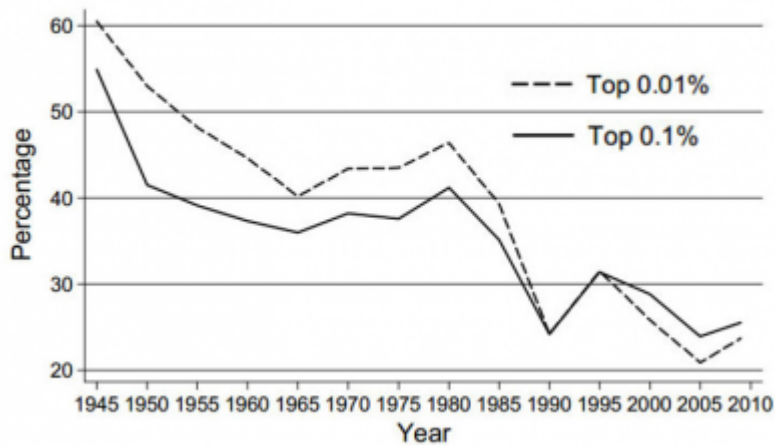
American plutocrats have a deep craving to believe in their own virtue – and to have others recognize it, despite the facts. Their perverse pride in beating the system does not tarnish how they regard their behavior. Blankfein said: "I have been doing the Lord's work."

Dimon swaggers through the Council on Foreign Relations or Brookings with the huddled masses in his audience beaming their adulation as they bask in his fame and thirst for his wisdom on the great affairs of the world. Would he give his views on whether the BRICS can rig the LIBOR rate with the connivance of the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve – or ignore regulatory reporting rules when they threaten to reveal a madcap scheme that loses \$6 billion?

### **The Widespread Effect**



**Average Tax Rates for the Highest-Income Taxpayers, 1945-2009**



Source: CRS calculations using Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Statistics of Income (SOI) information.

Plutocracy in the current American style is having pernicious effects that go beyond the dominant influence of the rich on the nation's economy and government. It is setting precedents and modeling the unaccountability and irresponsibility that is pervading executive power throughout the society.

Three successive presidential administrations and two decades of rogue behavior by corporate elites have set norms now evident in institutions as diverse as universities and think tanks, the military and professional associations – even private clubs. The cumulative result is a widespread degrading of standards in the uses and abuses of power.

Plutocracy raises social tensions. Logically, the main line of tension should be between the plutocrats and the rest of us – or, at least, between the plutocrats and all those with modest means. But that is not the case in the United States. While it is true that there were bitter words about Wall Street moguls and their bailouts during the first year or so after the financial collapse, it never became a main line of political division.

Today, outrage has abated and politics is all about austerity and debts rather than the distribution of wealth, and the power that goes with it. The deep-seated sense of anxiety and grievance that pervades the populace manifests itself in outbreaks of hostile competition among groups who are in fact all victims themselves of the plutocrats' grabbing most of the country's wealth – leaving the rest of us to fight over scraps. So it's private sector employees pitted against government employees because the latter have (some) health insurance, some pension and some security relative to the former who have been shorn of all three. It's parents worried about their kids' education

against teachers. Both against cash-strapped local authorities. Municipalities vs states. It's the small businessman against unions and health insurance requirements. It's doctors against patients against administrators. It's university administrators against faculty and against students, and faculty against students competing for much-reduced appropriations. It's all of those against boards of regents and state governors.

Nearly everyone is frustrated by the ever-sharpening contrast between hopes and aspirations and darkening realities of what they might expect for themselves and their children. Meanwhile, the folks at the top wait confidently and expectantly above the fray that they have engineered – ever ready to swoop down to strip what remains by way of privatized public assets, no-bid contracts, tax and regulatory havens, commercially owned toll roads, student loan monopolies, rapacious buying of foreclosed properties with federal incentives, and myriad tax breaks.

President Obama used his State of the Union Address of 2017 to send the message loud and clear. "Let me put colleges and universities on notice" he warned, "If you can't stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down." He thereby set forth a line of reasoning that put him on the same wavelength as Rick Perry because the reality is the exact opposite. It is because public funding has gone down by 2/3 over the past few decades that colleges and universities are obliged to raise tuition – despite flat-lining faculty and staff salaries. This is the essence of intellectual conditioning to the plutocracy's self-serving dogma and the suborning of public authorities by the plutocracy. Beyond capture, it is assimilation.

Does this sort of perverse pride go before the fall? No sign of that happening yet. Plutocracy in America is more likely to be our destiny. The growing dynastic factor operating within the financial plutocracy militates in that direction. Wealth itself has always been transferred from one generation to another, of course; reduced inheritance taxes along with lower rates at upper income brackets generally accentuate that tendency. With socio-economic mobility in American society

slipping, it gains further momentum.

Something approaching a caste identity is forming among the financial elites – as personified by Dimon who is the third generation of Wall Street stockbrokers and financial managers in his family. His father was an executive director at American Express where the young Dimon joined forces with Sandy Weill. As a revealing coda to this generational tale, Dimon, last year, hired his 81-year old father to work for JP Morgan Chase. His father's first-year salary was \$447,000; slated to rise to \$1.6 million – now that the apprentice has some work experience under his belt, presumably. A sense of limits is not part of the financial plutocracy's persona.

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## The Choice of Guns Over Butter

The American political system continues to ignore President Eisenhower's dour warning about the Military-Industrial Complex and embrace President Reagan's happy "We're No. 1" illusions. The long-term consequences of this choice have been devastating to most U.S. citizens and to the world, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Years ago I read a newspaper story about an elderly man who lived in an impoverished area of Cleveland, Ohio. The man was a friendless loner who seemed to have no caring family members. Neighbors had noticed his mail piling up on his porch, and, with no responses to knocks on the door, they called the police who broke into the man's house.

What they found is an allegory for our time, especially after another, peculiarly American school shooting, the latest one involving non-hunting weapons and the gunning down of 26 defenseless little children and staff members at an elementary school.

The withered old man was found dead in his bed, surrounded by rifles, pistols and guns of every description. Boxes of bullets and cartridges were stacked on the floor. He had a knife in his cold, dead hand and an actual harpoon was

leaning against his refrigerator, *which was empty*. In a nation of plenty and with grocery stores in the man's neighborhood, the well-armed man had starved to death.

He had fiercely exercised his precious Second Amendment rights but had ignored his neighbors, family and his health. He had apparently heard the National Rifle Association's sermons about defending one's property against intruders by lethal means if necessary but he had chosen to remove himself from civil society and starved to death, all alone in his well-defended room.

The man had wasted away, in a paranoid state, while "defending" himself against imaginary "others" who never did come to rob him. He had spent all of his money, including his Social Security and pension checks, on guns and ammunition, but he had spent nothing on food or life-sustaining activities. He was obsessed by the fear of burglars and thieves, and it had cost him his life.

And, what was perhaps a more tragic reality, he had been suspicious of his neighbors, all of whom were potential friends, although many were probably keeping their distance from the crazy old man with the guns.

### **Painful Lessons**

Our paranoid, militarized and heavily armed nation will probably ignore the lessons that should be obvious from that story. The arms race that financially bankrupted the Soviet Union and morally (and nearly financially) bankrupted the United States during the Cold War, was run at the expense of the sick, hungry, under-employed, homeless and desperate people everywhere, including many who were living, unnoticed, in our own neighborhoods and in our local ghettos on the other side of the tracks.

Mutual fear of the "other" caused the two Superpowers and their allies to spend obscene amounts of money on inedible and unnecessary weapons systems. The training of tens of millions of "kill or be killed" warriors who were both spiritually and emotionally deprived and deformed (often for the rest of their lives) inevitably weakened the moral integrity of the nation as well, all in the name of "national security."

Contrary to what patriots who believe in American exceptionalism (and expect the rest of us to believe as well), America hasn't been able to afford both guns and butter without borrowing money in order to keep that delusion going.

The Pentagon's wars ever since the Reagan years have been mostly paid for with massive amounts of borrowing and huge indebtedness rather than with increased taxes, and the return on that "investment" has been lousy. The investor classes and lending institutions were happy however for they are the ones who receive

the guaranteed interest payments on the T-bills and Treasury bonds.

But the increasing number of under-water private citizens are finding themselves forced to use credit cards to even pay for basic human necessities like food, water, clothing, health care, shelter and education. The increasing amount of joblessness, homelessness, home foreclosures and bread lines shouldn't surprise anybody.

### **Emaciation of Militarized Nations**

During the Cold War, the two saber-rattling superpowers each spent/wasted an irretrievable \$12 trillion. America spent trillions of dollars recruiting, training and retaining troops; researching, developing and producing expensive weapons systems; maintaining hundreds of budget-busting military bases in countries ruled by brutal dictators and friendly fascist states as well as quasi-democracies, all the while virtually ignoring the growing numbers of impoverished and under-privileged people of color who helplessly watched their health, savings, civil rights, jobs and food security wither and disappear.

America has been ruled by a powerful insider group of over-privileged, body-guarded, chauffeured and essentially conscienceless Wall Street elites who live in gated communities. They are also among the One Percenters who have been fingered by the Occupy Wall Street movement as the criminal culprits who created the financial mess America is in.

The so far unindicted and not yet behind bars One Percenters were responsible for the Great Recession, which may still become the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's version of the Great Depression. The nefarious corporations that are responsible for the economic crash of 2008 have, with their ill-gotten gains, bought and paid for most of the major media and also many of the bribed politicians and judges, all of whom are faithfully serving their paymasters by helping to implement their agendas in statehouses around the nation.

Most of these pro-corporate political leaders (both un-elected and elected, including five of the nine U.S. Supreme Court justices) are dutifully promoting their greedy agendas. These traitors to real democracy only preach fiscal responsibility when the bottom lines of their paymasters are at risk, but they never seem to act when people in the lower 99 percent are in a financial crisis including those needing jobs, healthcare, relief from Hurricane Sandy or protection from illegal foreclosures.

The moneyed ruling class, with large fortunes and investments to hide and protect, has conveniently forgotten that its Reaganomics-inspired predatory lending and the massive borrowing and spending tactics (the propaganda trick

called “trickle-down” economics) sky-rocketed America’s national debt to its current unsustainable level.

The debt crises that follow are only being met with more borrowing and cutting spending for programs of social uplift, while never questioning the obscene, nearly \$1 trillion annual budgets that continue to bloat the Pentagon. National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) budget requests are, year after year, approved by nearly unanimous majorities of our chicken-hearted legislators of both political parties in the dark of night, when the daily news cycle is at hibernation status.

### **Chickens Home to Roost**

And now, predictably, the chickens (in more than one sense of the word) have come home to roost. Strongly deluded that there is “glory” in war and with blank-check borrowing and spending on weaponry America has spawned tens of millions of sick, hungry, homeless, under-employed, under-educated, addicted, psychologically-traumatized and impoverished people, many of whom are conveniently hidden in inner cities that the out-of-touch policymakers never see.

Universal health care, which large majorities of the population desire, is habitually rejected by the powers that be in the medical, pharmaceutical and insurance industries. After all, the politicians who have been financed by such industries have great health insurance and health care themselves. So why would greedy One Percenters want to have their taxes go up to help those whom they have made sick, poor and hungry? (For that matter why should the One Percenters want to pay taxes that support public libraries and parks when they themselves have personal libraries and private playgrounds?)

“Let ‘em eat grass” was the fateful comment made to starving Indians by the thoughtless Minnesota territory Indian Agent who was later found dead with his mouth stuffed full of grass.

But America’s rapidly deteriorating infrastructure can’t and won’t be fixed while bloated and wasteful military budgets go unopposed in Congress. You can’t afford both guns and butter!

If you are seeing cuts to the programs that make life worth living, understand that much of the blame should be placed on the massive Pentagon borrowing and spending that has gone on every year since the massive increases in spending on nuclear weaponry during the administrations of old 666 Himself, Ronald Wilson Reagan.

### **Who’s in Charge?**

What is the eventual outcome of putting a society's basic human needs last? Poor mental and physical health, poor educational opportunities, a poorly trained workforce, underemployment, drug use (both illicit and prescription), hopelessness, suicidality, homicidality, addictive behaviors (including gambling), domestic abuse, street gangs, prostitution, ignorance, malnutrition, desperation, poverty and, inevitably, anger at and a desire to retaliate against a system of government and corporate control that neglects its people and then shows no signs of remorse for having done so.

It shouldn't surprise us that the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring movements have emerged and then were put down by the powers-that-be.

Are average Americans going to continue to be perpetually sickened and impoverished while blindly cheering our unaffordable #1 Military Superpower status? Are we going to continue to waste scarce resources on bankrupting wars and military occupations worldwide while refusing to make investments at home that would ensure a sustainable economy, a healthy planet and citizens whose physical and mental-health needs are met?

Are the weapons-makers, the gun-runners, the Pentagon, the FBI and the CIA (and the dozens of other intelligence agencies) really just expensive make-work jobs programs that protect the global investments of the obscenely-wealthy war-profiteering, multinational corporations that further impoverish the rest of society? Knowing that the "black box" budgets of the dozens of American intelligence agencies now approximate \$1 trillion a year makes one wonder if our nation has a military or if our military has a nation.

Are we going to continue ignoring the fact that wasteful war-industry jobs cost twice as much to generate and fund as jobs in health care, education, infrastructure repair or green technology? Are we going to continue to allow excessive military spending at the expense of the disappearing middle-class and an expanding lower class?

Are we going to continue fearing the wrath of the 800-pound gorillas of the One Percent that intimidate and threaten us into silence and inaction? Or are we going to courageously organize and band together to refuse to cooperate with the One Percenters?

### **Is It Too Late?**

The military/industrial/congressional (MIC) complex that President Dwight Eisenhower warned us about in his farewell address has increasingly parasitized the U.S. economy since World War II, and it has proven to be disastrous for average Americans.

The MIC has caused the extinction of many family farms, family businesses and trade unions starting with Reagan, and it has created the heartless union-busting multinational corporations that yearn to pay slave wages to its workers.

The Complex has been behind the “fouling of the nest” (the poisoned environment) with tens of thousands of lethal, immune system destroying and cancer-causing industrial pollutants, radioactive waste disposal sites and toxic military dumpsites that will continue to foul the food, water, soil and air for generations unless effective programs are instituted.

Unsustainable levels of personal credit-card debt, college loan debt, healthcare debt and home mortgage debt among the lower 99 Percent, who were tempted, by predatory lenders, to imitate what seems to be the norm for the One Percenters, have resulted in an epidemic of home mortgage foreclosures, personal bankruptcies and homelessness.

Although it might already be too late, the lower 99 may finally be waking up and trying to reverse the nation’s descent toward total economic collapse, at which time the One Percenters, with their fortunes intact, will snap up everything they covet at fire sale prices. However, for the nation as a whole, being armed to the teeth and universally feared and hated (because America’s exploitative bullying behavior around the world) is not a sustainable path to global security.

Because of America’s bullying behavior and its misbegotten generations-long over-spending on its weapons systems (that continues to victimize billions of people, including its own citizens), we will soon have nobody interested in rescuing us from our massive indebtedness and our self-imposed, suicidal path towards collapse.

Without a change, America is destined to become a despised pariah state a national version of that heavily armed dead man in Cleveland as the U.S. sinks further and further into moral and spiritual depravity.

We Americans have to stop deluding ourselves into thinking that we can spend borrowed money on both guns and butter. America cannot continue to go the route of empty refrigerators and lethal weapons everywhere.

**Gary G. Kohls is a peace-and-justice activist and retired mental health physician.**

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# At Year's End, the 'News' Fails

The end of the year brings reflection on what happened in the past 12 months and what lies ahead. But these retrospectives usually offer no more context and often less than the thin gruel of news as the events played out, News Dissector Danny Schechter notes.

By Danny Schechter

The TV networks are hard at work in this last week of the year recapping their best footage to remind us where we've been. Researchers are combing the archives to find the best images for their annual greatest hits "package" which usually ends with a photo-montage driven by music of the politicians, entertainers and personalities who died in 2012.

As we watch, we ooh and aah and remember calamities that struck us like that well-named "Franken Storm" Sandy identified with that man-made monster Frankenstein and the shooting of the children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. The networks will replay the 2012 elections that haven't resolved the current stalemate, the "fiscal cliff."

Oh, you know what else the networks will show the year of I-Phone 5 and I-Pad 3, the Olympics, and Gingham Style. We will hear about Kate Middleton's rise and Whitney Houston's demise and the ups and downs of the Chinese-American basketball player Jeremy Lin.

When it comes to the world, there will be a reference to the war on Iran that wasn't, and the war that is ripping Syria apart. We may hear about China's new leader, the mess in Mexico, and Hugo Chavez's electoral victory and battle with cancer. The deaths in Gaza will be omitted.

There is unlikely to be any mention of the stories chosen by the Miami Herald's Andreas Oppenheimer, who reminds us of a July 16 news report from Kuala Lumpur that negotiations for the completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, which could become the world's biggest and most ambitious deal of its kind, could be concluded by October 2013. What are its implications? Who stands to benefit? Who will lose? That's not even in the news yet.

Or, "The Nov. 25 vote in Catalonia, Spain, in which about 70 percent of the people voted for parties that support a referendum for independence of the rich northern Spain region, triggering a chain reaction of secessionist moves in the 27-country European Union. Many fear that if Catalonia secedes from Spain, Corsica and the Basque region may seek independence from France, Scotland may

split from Britain and Flanders and Wallonia from Belgium, among others. Economic turmoil could be followed by political chaos in Europe.”

Many of these past and impending events have been so awful that many of us were almost looking forward to those Mayan prophecies of the world ending.

Those of us who hoped that President Obama’s election and reelection might usher in a little more justice and equality remain disappointed. Those of us who longed for a change we could believe in took to the streets to try to create it, only to confront the power of the police state the NYPD, FBI, et. al. Only now, with the disclosure of new documents, do we have a hint of how we were spied upon and lied to.

All of the “news” we get deals with specific stories and events, not trends and less visible forces that drive our economy and political system. We hear about issues, not interests. The newscasts lack context, background, analysis and interpretation. They are there to dumb us down, not smarten us up.

What the big banks do and don’t do is treated in terms only of discrete deals, not their role as channels of the influence for the one percent. It’s not news when regulators don’t regulate or when industries “capture” the officials meant to restrain them.

Guns in America are in the news, but not our vast armament industry that sells weapons including new drone systems, worldwide. The United States is always pictured domestically as “the homeland,” a phrase most famously used in Germany in the 1930s and in white-supremacist South Africa decades later. Americans see ourselves a nation while much of the world sees us as an empire.

As for the economy, all the talk of tax and trade policies soar over most people’s heads as the business publication Wealth Daily reports in warning that pay cuts are coming for many Americans:

“Now that the very basic taxation and revenue proposals are converging in the fiscal cliff talks, politicians are fielding some entitlement program revisions. The changes are seemingly minute. On paper, we’re just going to have an even exchange between obscure equations that are basically similar.

“But that’s the whole point: If the general public can’t understand it, they don’t pay attention to it. If they don’t pay attention to it, they won’t punish politicians for it.”

The odds are that that the Libor conspiracy that manipulated trillions will be overlooked. Too hard to explain in ten seconds!

Increasingly, the most important underlying issues are found in the movies, in fiction, not “faction,” and certainly not on TV News.

In theaters now, we have a choice between two views of the impact of slavery in America: Spielberg’s “Lincoln” and Tarrantino’s “Django Unchained.” One focuses on corrupting the Congress to outlaw slavery and the other on the brutality of slavery on the slaves. The former traces a top-down reform as a matter of Constitutional theory, the latter, shows a bottom-up armed revolt against ugly racism.

The movie version of the musical, “Les Miserables,” tells the story of a failed French revolution in song, its barricades, not its values. “Argo,” meanwhile, briefly cites the reasons for the Iranian revolution but then celebrates the role of the CIA in rescuing Americans from it while reinforcing American hostility.

The film “Zero Dark Thirty” shows how the CIA tortures far more graphically than TV News ever did, but, then, it turns a pretty CIA analyst obsessed, not with capturing bin Laden but killing him, into a hero.

The movie doesn’t have the guts to condemn state-supported death squads and torture explicitly and may even have gotten the story wrong because what is called “enhanced interrogation” was not the critical element in finding bin Laden, according to the CIA itself as well as U.S. senators and many experts. One interesting casting choice was to have the actor who played mafia boss Tony Soprano on TV portray then-CIA Director Leon Panetta.

This holiday season is not a very cheery time in America what with a political stalemate in Washington, parents mourning the deaths of young children slaughtered in their classrooms, storms savaging the Mid-West and East, and the certainty of a less than rosy future awaiting us in the next year when the only option seems to be more austerity at home, more foreign intervention in wars abroad, and talk of a new global recession.

If there is a Zeitgeist, it’s not one of optimism. This is an angry and deeply polarized country in a world that seems to be imploding.

*Happy News Year.*

**News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at [News Dissector.net](http://NewsDissector.net). His latest books are *Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street* and *Blogothon*. (Cosimo Books) He hosts a show on [ProgressiveRadioNetwork.com](http://ProgressiveRadioNetwork.com) (PRN.fm) Comments to [dissector@meciachannel.org](mailto:dissector@meciachannel.org)**

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# Deranged Angels of Self-Preservation

The new Batman movie, "The Dark Knight Rises," envisions a social order overturned by a violent and vengeful rabble, a parody of Occupy Wall Street activists transformed into the villains of this pro-One Percent propaganda film, writes Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

In the contest between Stupid and Evil, Stupid reaps far more destruction. Why? Stupid prevails by the sheer force of numbers in its ranks. But the argument is moot: Because all too often Stupid is working for Evil believing it is serving as a force for good and, I might add, for degrading wages as well.

German-born filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003) insisted to her dying breath that her 1936 masterwork of visual bravura, "Olympia," documenting the 1936 Summer Olympics, held in Berlin, Germany, and funded and promoted by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi state, was not a political film nor was intended as propaganda for the Third Reich as writer/director Christopher Nolan is claiming his "The Dark Knight Rises" is not a political movie.

Yet, for some reason, the villains of the movie just happen to resemble the febrile stuff of right-wing delusion regarding Occupy Wall Street activists, and the beleaguered victims of the movie's vengeance-seeking, blood-drunk rabble's reign of mindless terror happen to resemble the denizens of the One Percent.

But we are told to relax ruminating on a jumbo bucket of popcorn and suck down the high-fructose soda of our choice. We should allow our limbic system to ascend to the throne room of consciousness to simply let the spectacle pull us along, as in a trip through a high-tech funhouse.

Historically, a component of fascism has been the visceral appeal of mass spectacle – the drowning of the burdens of Industrial Age selfhood into an intoxicating immersion in the anonymity of the mob.

Another aspect is the promotion of shadow projection, i.e., the attempt to lessen inner conflict and shame involving dark-tinged, hidden emotions and yearnings by projecting those traits on outside groups, e.g., the political use of racism to displace class-based resentment; the caricatures created to demonize the enemy, appropriated by governments and promulgated in popular culture to mobilize support for war.

In "The Dark Knight Rises," Nolan (perhaps unconsciously he doesn't seem all

that bright and self-aware) deploys the psychological trope of shadow projection by portraying members of an Occupy Wall Street-type popular insurgency as boilerplate, comic book villains who rise from the city's underbelly, compelled by murderous grievances, to inflict a reign of chaos, reminiscent of Terror-gripped, late 18th Century/ early 19th Century France, on the city's economic elite.

What is the writer/director getting at here? Whether Nolan is aware of it or not, he has made a fascist epic.

Batman, from its inception was always a hyper-authoritarian myth. Comic Books, at their inception and rise during the Great Depression of the 1930s, reflected a middle/upper class unease regarding those popular heroes of the disaffected laboring class such as Pretty Boy Floyd and John Dillinger. Woody Guthrie's take on song writing is germane to the subject of movies as well. Woody averred: All songs are political.

Hollywood movies are suffused with capitalist false consciousness? And how could they not be? The "successful" members of the entertainment "business" have done quite well by the system, thus have been bestowed with all the privileges of the One Percent.

Moreover, certain self-appointed arbiters of good taste and social propriety have posited the canard that the recent madman-inflicted, firearm-wrought tragedy at an Aurora, Colorado, cinema exhibiting Nolan's "The Dark Knight Rises" should not be politicized. Nonsense.

The assertion, in itself, is political, for it is a (tacit) admonition to refrain from challenging the status quo – and the status quo of U.S. gun culture comes down to this: blood-drenched shooting spree followed by blood-drenched shooting spree.

Withal, the Second Amendment is not the word of God writ large across the eternal heavens. It is an archaic notion of a past, rural/agrarian era, and crafted by an assembly of land-holding, powdered wig-clad aristocrats.

Does the uncertainty of these times and the fading of cherished concepts evoke feelings of unease within you? Then how about trying this? Quit stroking your guns and hyperventilating over the depleted embers of dying delusion: Get over the hagiography of this sham democratic republic, and begin to re-imagine and remake the world anew.

Regarding all the bombast and braggadocio of rightist Second Amendment true believers, who claim that guns are the last, best hope to stand against government tyranny: Where were these sentinels of freedom when the operatives

and enforcers of the U.S. national security/police state brought its brutality down on peaceful Occupy Wall Street dissidents?

Neither they nor the vast majority of people in the U.S. possess any concept of – nor do they give a rodent's rectum about freedom. Because the fledgling nation's solution to what they termed the "Indian problem" was addressed by the use of firearms, the habit of viewing and deploying guns as a solution to societal ills has bequeathed a violent, blood-sodden legacy upon the culture.

To all you compulsive gun-strokers – heirs of the hateful legacy of your genocidal ancestors – I ask you this – how do you like existing under dismal, degraded conditions such as these?

Seemingly, from their graves, my Native American ancestors (My late father was born of half native descent.) have cursed you. But the grim truth is, on a collective basis, through our acceptance of a toxic cultural mythos, the people of this nation have conjured this curse, and have, by their clinging to death-besotted attitudes and attendant actions, seeded the winds of fate.

Regarding gun violence in the U.S., the situation is very simple. The Second Amendment is not only antiquated, but is an outright menace to public good. Nations that do not fetishize guns, and have said fetish codified into law and imprinted into the public's imagination are not afflicted by any degree of violent gun deaths.

Although its origins and workings seem to us mysterious and evanescent, evil remains proliferate because our traumatized psyches see it as a force of good. Evil is a deranged angel of self-preservation, convinced his wicked machinations and destructive fury are bulwarks against outside forces aligned to bear his doom.

"A man who is unconscious of himself acts in a blind, instinctive way and is in addition fooled by all the illusions that arise when he sees everything that he is not conscious of in himself coming to meet him from outside as projections upon his neighbor." – Carl Jung: "The Philosophical Tree" (1945). In CW 13: Alchemical Studies. P.335

To those firearm apologists who proffer the assertion that one should not blame guns for the acts of madmen let me ask you this? There are unstable individuals residing all over the world, and have throughout every era, what is it about the U.S. that engenders a social milieu wherein so many unhinged individuals go on murderous rampages, and why is the death toll so high therein?

The startlingly obvious answer: The easy availability of firearms and a toxic mythos surrounding these weapons that promotes their ownership and drowns out

reasoned discourse on the subject.

Restricting the manufacture, thus profit motive, of firearms is a must ... to keep them out of the hands of criminals, psychopaths, and idiots, and that includes the cops.

The problem of evil would be more easily remedied if evil people saw themselves as evil. But evil does not arrive in the form of a new computer application (Irredeemable Wickedness, version 13. 13) that foul-minded types can download into their psyches. Evil creeps up on you when you're going about the mundane business of the day.

Will we, as a people – inculcated by cultural mythos and saturated by shallow, sensationalist mass-media narratives – learn anything about the hideous, tragic nature of non-virtual reality violence from this latest in a long series of gun-wrought mass murder?

In grim contrast to comic book-based, movie-style, violence porn, these repeated incidents of gun violence displayed for us the effects of actual violence. These events should serve as object lessons in the consequences of having large segments of a population, stressed to the point of collective madness and dwelling in a nation that, culturally, evinces demonstrably psychotic attitudes regarding firearms.

Gun-clutching pathology – and sorry, people, that is exactly what it is – is engendered by emotionally displaced feelings of powerlessness. The ridiculous number of guns, combined with racism and wealth inequity, in this deeply troubled nation, contributes to the endless number of firearm-related tragedies that nations that have sane gun laws – meaning tight restrictions – don't suffer.

You boys and girls can swoon in all the hyper-macho, retrograde, Sarah Palin-level, Second Amendment-conflating fantasies that your besieged minds can conjure – but it will not change the reality that it is the people of this country's sacred illusions and attendant fetishizing of guns that makes worse the very situation of which they live in fear. What a waste of human life and mental real estate.

Accordingly, the work of Hollywood artificers, such as Christopher Nolan, reflects collective pathologies at large in the culture.

All too many big-budget, Hollywood action movies, epic in scale and one dimensional in content, are saturated with the empty grandiosity of fascist thought. Carl Jung noted that evil generally comes with an aura of emotional detached coldness. Apropos: The shop-worn device of the super-villain is fascist

conceit – a projection of the coldness and overkill of the U.S. police state/militarist empire on imaginary villains.

Evidently, Nolan has internalized the fascist inclinations inherent to late-stage capitalism. His cinematic images are over-wrought, yet cold – a fascist paradox that are catnip to troubled personalities, such as James Holmes, whose inner torments and concomitant actions mirror the collective nature of this violence-worshipping culture.

Only a society as violently (and, I fear, irredeemably) bughouse crazy as the one extant in the U.S. would arrive at the assertion that an individual who carried out a deadly shooting rampage in a packed movie theatre could be feigning madness, or, in the words of a corporate press headline, “James Holmes’ behavior sign of psychosis or faking it, expert says.”

In a nation that, for example, accepts as normal the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, supports state-applied torture, and the slaughter of children by predator drone attack, yet gibbers on about the latest outrage committed by some sub-cretinous, Reality Television celebrity – the standard for psychosis and the standard of so-called normal will dovetail. To paraphrase one wit: Fish should be the last creatures queried regarding the existence of water.

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## Bohemian Grove & Reagan’s ‘Treason’

**Exclusive:** This weekend, Occupy protesters are targeting the Bohemian Grove in California, where well-connected rich men go on retreats several weekends each summer. The secrecy of the 1980 encampment became a factor in the cover-up of possible “treason” by Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In 1992, the protectors of Ronald Reagan’s legacy and George H.W. Bush’s presidency were in a bind. They had gained the upper hand in shutting down an investigation into allegations that Reagan and Bush had gone behind President Jimmy Carter’s back in 1980 to undermine his negotiations to free 52 Americans



held by Iranian radicals, but then one of their crucial alibis collapsed.

In a stranger-than-fiction moment, these protectors turned to the exclusive Bohemian Grove the target of a new round of Occupy protests this weekend as a location for cobbling together a replacement alibi, thus sparing the Establishment the unpleasantness of a thorough investigation into what had the appearance of "treason" by the widely admired Reagan and Bush Sr.

Official Washington had thought questions about the so-called "October Surprise" of 1980 had been put to rest in November 1991 when the neoconservative New Republic and the pro-Establishment Newsweek splashed debunking articles on their covers.

Both magazines claimed that an alleged meeting between Reagan's campaign chief William Casey and Iranians could not have happened because Casey had an alibi. Instead of meeting with Iranians in Madrid on Monday, July 28, 1980, as Iranian businessman (and CIA operative) Jamshid Hashemi had indicated, Casey was at a historical conference in London, his presence established by attendance records, the magazines said.

Gloating that they had proven once and for all that the October Surprise suspicions were "a myth," The New Republic and Newsweek mocked any remaining doubters as "conspiracy theorists."

The impact of the magazine stories and their ridiculing tone could not be overstated. Ted Koppel's ABC News "Nightline" program, which had aired an interview with Hashemi about the Madrid meeting, was humiliated. The producer who had brought Hashemi in for the interview was soon out of a job.

Armed with the magazine articles, congressional Republicans blocked a full investigation in the Senate and convinced House investigators to simply go through the motions before ratifying the innocence of Reagan and Bush. But then something unexpected happened. The London alibi collapsed.

It turned out that historian Robert Dallek, who had given the lecture to the morning conference on July 28, 1980, had looked for Casey in the board room at London's Imperial War Museum and was disappointed to find that Casey wasn't there. Other attendees also noticed Casey's absence; they recalled him arriving later in the day.

And a careful examination of the attendance records revealed that Newsweek and The New Republic had misread them. The markings actually showed Casey arriving in the afternoon, not the morning. In other words, the much-touted Newsweek/New Republic "alibi" was worthless.

## A Back-up Plan

So what were the House investigators to do? They certainly weren't going to get serious and conduct an aggressive investigation. That might raise the ire of powerful Republicans and draw fire from influential neoconservatives. Instead, the investigators simply substituted a new and possibly even more ludicrous alibi. For that weekend in late July 1980, they put Casey at the Bohemian Grove.

The House investigators concocted this alibi by having Casey (who died in 1987) travel to northern California that last weekend in July 1980, take part in the exclusive retreat for rich and powerful men, then drive to San Francisco on Sunday afternoon and take an overnight flight to London, arriving for the historical conference on Monday afternoon, July 28, 1980.

The only trouble with this alibi was that there was not a shred of credible evidence to support it. Indeed, the clear evidence including records of Casey's transactions at the Grove and a contemporaneous diary entry by one of the members who stayed in the Parsonage camp with Casey showed that Casey attended the Grove on the first weekend of August, not the last weekend in July.

But the House investigators were determined to create this new alibi for Casey. They went so far as to throw out the documentary evidence of Casey's attendance in August, claiming that they had trumped that evidence with a notation by Reagan's foreign policy adviser Richard Allen who had written down Casey's home phone number on Aug. 2, 1980.

That act of writing down Casey's home number proved, the House investigators said, that Casey must have been at home and therefore not at the Bohemian Grove the first weekend of August. Ergo, the only alternative date would have been the last weekend in July and presto! the new alibi was created.

Some of you might object to this reasoning. It might seem to you that just because someone writes a person's home phone number down doesn't mean the person is necessarily at home, especially since Allen told the investigators he had no memory or record of reaching Casey at his home.

As an experiment, you might test out the investigators' logic yourself. If you're, say, out to dinner with someone and you write their home number down, are they still sitting across from you or have they vanished and rematerialized at home?

One of the Democratic congressmen on the House task force investigating the October Surprise issue even made this observation. Rep. Mervyn Dymally, D-California, wrote a draft dissent that said "just because phones ring doesn't mean that someone is there to answer the phone." But Dymally said he was

subsequently bullied by task force chairman Lee Hamilton into withdrawing his objection.

So, with the new Bohemian Grove alibi grafted in along with other alibis almost as meritorious the October Surprise allegations were again debunked, assigned to the loony ward of conspiracy theories along with the two dozen or so witnesses and various documents that indicated that Reagan's team had gone behind Carter's back on the hostage crisis to gain an advantage in the 1980 election.

Thus, the reputations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were preserved. Everyone who mattered in the U.S. political/media structure could breathe a sigh of relief.

### **Finding a Photo**

But the absurd Bohemian Grove alibi and the task force's other strange cover stories never sat well with me, leading me in late 1994 to arrange access to some of the raw documents from the 1992 October Surprise task force investigation.

Inside the boxes of those records, I found a number of documents that pointed in the opposite direction from the official conclusion of Reagan/Bush innocence, including some that were marked "secret" and "top secret," apparently left behind with the unclassified documents by mistake. I managed to make copies of some of these papers and later posted them on the Internet.

But one photo was particularly interesting to me. It was a group picture of the Bohemian Grove members and guests who had stayed at the Parsonage cottage on that last weekend in July 1980. The Parsonage is where Casey had been assigned in 1980. So, it would seem material to the October Surprise investigation whether he was in the group photo or not.

I scanned the photo (and you can, too). Casey was not in the group that stayed in the Parsonage the last weekend of July 1980. In other words, the October Surprise investigators not only had documentary evidence showing that Casey was at the Grove the first weekend of August; they had a photo showing that he was not there on the last weekend of July.

Not surprisingly, I guess, the House task force investigators hid the photograph and went ahead with their Bohemian Grove alibi.

After obtaining the photograph and other concealed evidence that revealed the House task force debunking to be more a cover-up than an investigation, I tried to speak with Rep. Lee Hamilton and chief counsel Lawrence Barcella about the discrepancies, but they refused to engage in the details. They clearly felt that

I lacked the clout to get anyone to take my criticisms seriously and they were right.

To this day, the House task force debunking of the October Surprise allegations, with the Bohemian Grove alibi a key link in the chain, is the Official Wisdom of Washington. It also stands as a case study of how power and influence can trump logic and fact.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Where's Bill Casey](#)" or "[Unmasking October Surprise Debunker](#)" or Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

To read more of Robert Parry's writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [click here](#).]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](#). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

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## Higgs Boson/Nature's Bosom/US Bozos

The announcement that scientists may have discovered a mysterious particle, called the Higgs boson giving mass to all matter, was a reminder of the majesty of the universe. But it comes at a time of a dumbed-down culture in America that is inflicting devastation on the planet, as Phil Rockstroh observes.

By Phil Rockstroh

On July 4, the people of the U.S. marked the passing of another year's perfunctory, Independence Day festivities. The date, also, was occasioned by the formal announcement from physicists at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) that, according to the banner headline at CERN's official website, "Higgs within reach Our understanding of the universe is about to change [Our] experiments see strong indications for the presence of a new particle, which could be the Higgs boson."

Thus, augur the smart people at CERN, a change in our fundamental understanding of the universe, and our place as human beings in it, is at hand. From their

lips to the mouth of the God Particle, this development, if true, would be cause for celebration – that a display of fireworks should be in order – because of an embrace of the philosophical and social implications of this discovery could be the starting point of a profound form of independence: the release from ossified systems of thought and being, such as those dominating the present era, including the hagiography of U.S. Independence Day.

The people of the U.S. need independence from the demonstrably false notion, held by so many that within their debt-enslaved, corporate interest-beholden lives, they possess any degree of meaningful independence.

As U.S. citizens, we are free to, without question, proclaim to the now credulous world how free we are – but when a citizen resists and takes action (e.g., Bradley Manning) he will, in rapid order, grasp the true nature of this sweet land of liberty. As Occupy Wall Street activists have recently apprehended, under the present order, an individual is at liberty to practice freedom of speech, as long as by doing so, one does not threaten the agendas of the privileged and powerful.

Any fireworks tracing the night sky should be viewed as a demand for the explosion of self-deception. Withal, the concept of independence, clutched by so many under late U.S. empire, is loud and showy, but ultimately evanescent and leaves one feeling empty at its conclusion a hollowness that traditional Fourth of July fare, in the form of obscene portions of hormone-injected, antibiotic-ridden, industrially slaughtered, barbecue-charred animal flesh and beer (the true opiate of the masses) can never sate.

The indicators strongly suggesting the existence of the Higgs Boson – a particle that serves as a creator and connecting principle of (seemingly) disparate matter – comes to us in an age, when the people of the U.S. seem unwilling or unable to connect the fact that greenhouse gases, emitted from the tailpipes of their automobiles idling at drive-thru windows of fast-food outlets serving industrial-bred, raised, hideously exploited, cruelly slaughtered, and carelessly processed animal flesh (an even larger contributor to Climate Chaos than the aforementioned automobiles' exhaust particles) are responsible for less than propitious changes to global climate patterns.

News of the Boson particle – the so-called God Particle – into public consciousness arrives, as well, at a time, when as Carl Jung aptly posited, “the gods have become diseases.” In short, estranged gods (i.e., patterns of the human psyche that are analogs of terrestrial and cosmic patterns) invade the ego and reside therein as pathologies, i.e., compulsions, depression, anxiety, addiction, because their purpose has been discarded and forgotten, e.g., the recognition of the sacred quality of life and the evocation of the numinous

through ritual.

And mainly to bring to humankind the recognition that we, most definitely, are not gods ourselves to the understanding that our mastery of fire and machine should not infect us with the hubris to believe we are the masters of the universe.

Moreover, we can start with a bit of humility regarding our relationship to the planet upon which we reside and depend on for our survival. The heat waves, droughts, wildfires, and super storms extant should serve as warning enough that there are forces larger than ourselves (that are beyond the control of our tiny, mad will) afoot in the world.

The existence of the Boson particle would pose essential questions regarding the nature of interconnection and interdependence, cosmological and terrestrial, and our place, as a species, among the order of things.

For example, through our hubris, we have conjured raging fires and rising sea levels. Ancient poets would have grasped and vehemently chanted tales of warning that the gods of fire and the sea had taken offense at our arrogance. We have reached an age when their metaphors are being made manifest.

Yet, give Americans the choice between freedom, art and science or all-you-can-eat buffets and the viewing of "Jersey Shore," and, well they have already made their choice clear. Hence, we find ourselves, as a people, stranded in a howling wasteland of destiny deferred.

In a banana republic, there exists a vast stratification of wealth, wherein the middle and merchant classes have been conditioned to harbor little identification with the poor, but feel affinity, thus side with, an economic and military elite. In these societal structures, militarized police are used to quell dissent. The military is glorified and intellectuals are scorned. The function of the political class is to serve the status quo, and they are generally well rewarded for their efforts in behalf of their economic betters.

Any of this sound familiar? Rather than bananas, we have fast food burgers (grass-fed, free-range variety, of course, for the minority endowed with economic privilege). Would you like an order of fries (or, in the case of the latter class, an arugula salad) with your fascism?

Due to the consolidation of wealth and privilege into fewer and fewer hands, requiring escalating amounts of officially mandated surveillance and brutality to maintain social order, the natural trajectory of late-stage capitalism tends towards hyper-authoritarian excess, even towards fascism.

Therein, liberals retreat to their comfort zones, while the forsaken laboring class constructs insulating walls of resentment. Dialog becomes prohibitive. "Reasonable" liberals gape with mortification at those to the political Right and Left of themselves, and attempt to cope by erecting buttresses of unassailable reason that outsiders perceive as citadels of implacable snobbery.

As important as the function is, and how devoid the retrograde Right seems in regard to it, in the struggle to re-imagine and remake the present order, intellectual prowess alone will not suffice, because the intellect, when it marries a like-minded soul, produces a progeny of idiots.

But when the intellect learns the painful dance of self-awareness i.e., develops an awareness of the living landscape of the heart, alive with breathing imagery, then it becomes possible to know the world, sans a fool's swoon of self-referential arrogance.

As is the case with any natural disaster, the seemingly boundless font of stupid extant in the current day U.S. is a sublime thing (as in the relationship between the words, awe and awful) to behold. The scene unfolding before us evokes the mortifying sense of awe experienced while watching a seething nimbus of locust descending on a region's harvest crop.

Images such as these can incur awful pain. There are so many walls of exponential inanity rising before us, in the present day U.S., that one can go mad with grief. We find ourselves within a labyrinth of idiocy; whatever direction we turn, we trudge headlong down yet another corridor of the dumb.

Yet, obstructions are not necessarily a bad thing. Barriers can stop one's drift and slow down manic evasions. There must be something providential glimpsed when gazing upon the blank visage of the hopelessly dim something we can learn from those unwilling or incapable of learning. But what that is, I, myself, am apparently too dim to glean.

Then it follows: I am humbled. Humility is one key to learning. The loss of arrogant preconceptions opens one, heart and mind, to the novel to an emergent font of new forms. The unmovable wall of stupid becomes a holy obstruction unfathomable as the face of divinity.

I feel like an idiot when I contemplate the unfolding of eternity. How can one match the eloquence of the night sky, or the weave of a spider's web stippled with morning dew?

Madame Spider and Mother Bosen, I stand before your craft a gibbering fool. But you have taught me this: Continue with the work you were born to perform. Live in the world to demure, would entail falling into the ranks of an idiot's parade

comprised of one.

There is much to learn from the stupid, unless the lesson is being presented, exclusively, in the form of first person singular. No compulsion to gain permanent control can be successful. The field of battle, scattered with the slain corpses of our obsessive aspirations, stands as a testament to our desperate folly. Victory is a vain fantasy of the naive and the psychopathic.

Conversely, allow yourself to be touched by life caressed and buffeted by beauty, necessity, even mortification and grief. Just continue unfolding into life. All things are transitory. No state of being is permanent. This is the reason attempts at tyranny are an exercise in futility from the get-go.

On the day that Independence Day is celebrated in the U.S. arrived confirming evidence of the existence of the Boson Particle, a possible connecting component of matter. Accordingly, let's make a few connections:

The present order has wrought economic tyrannies and inevitable environmental collapse, and is proliferate with the seeds of its own destruction. It should be evident to anyone with the cognitive capabilities of an over-ripe squash that global, neoliberal capitalism (and its game-rigging, political class-owning, mammon-worshipping cartel of privileged thieves) has entered into an exponentially increasing state of entropic breakdown.

Moreover, measures can be taken to give a push to its doomed trajectory. For example, deflating of the privilege-garnered, liberal comfort bubble, because mainstream liberalism is the buffer zone and graveyard for progressive change insofar as providing true aid for the laboring class and minority communities.

Let current day conservatives keep riding their train of crazy. Their vehicle is in runaway mode; therefore, the sane option is to get out of its hurtling way. Our tactic: Act as if the doom system has already collapsed (becoming part of the system is like a chicken going to work for KFC to "change the system from within") and beginning to imagine and create the world anew.

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# Footlong Hot Dogs of the Apocalypse

Since World War II, America's wealth has sheltered the population from harsh realities that other fellow humans face. But that protection is breaking down, from the greed of the super-rich and the stubborn insistence of many Americans to stay focused on their footlong hot dogs and super-gulp drinks, writes Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

Almost exactly ten years ago, in June of 2002, my wife and I were driving through Colorado, on our way from Los Angeles to New York City. In the early afternoon, while paused to tank-up our Toyota Corolla, at a massive convenience store/self-service gas island that boasted of "two-for-the-price-of-one, One and One Half Footlong Hot Dogs," we watched a family of six emerge from a late model, oversized pickup truck, proceed into the store, and return with a bounty of hot dogs and super-gulp soft drinks.

A few minutes later, we passed their vehicle on Interstate 70, and I remarked to my wife on the connection between oversized consumer goods, oversized people, and the oversized amount of greenhouse gases trapping heat in the atmosphere. I queried, "Do you think they would even look up from their titanic hot dogs, if the world before them ignited into flames?"



After a few more minutes, my question was answered when a series of wildfires (very much like the ones that are scorching Colorado to ash and cinder, as I write these words) began to close in on our periphery.

Stunningly, mortifyingly, the answer to my question was, no. The occupants of the pickup proceeded straight through the screen of wafting smoke without averting their gaze from their gigantic snack food. When the world is on fire

and a people refuse to take note we're apt to find ourselves in a bit of a fix.

People, I have seen the Footlong Hot Dog of the Apocalypse. Apparently, the end of the world, as we know it, comes with your choice of condiments.

Often, when walking the streets and avenues of New York, one is forced to dodge a fellow pedestrian who walks directly into one's path as he/she stares distracted into the screen of some electronic appliance. There have been times when I have stopped in my tracks at the approach of one of these mindless denizens of the Cult of Endless Distraction as he/she has walked head-on into me.

At times, they evince an aura of victimhood feeling an injustice has transpired, because I fail to clear a path for them. Their trope of entitlement is delivered thus, "Why didn't you get out of my way. You saw me coming."

"Yes, but didn't you notice yourself proceeding," I reply. At this a blank stare as if I had just posited some fragment of arcane law, adhered to by some alien race lost to time.

Indulge me in the following digression: In the (failed) attempt to create a republic, the early U.S. aristocracy deemed and codified into law that property rights were paramount to human rights that self-interest would, as a rule, proceed before public good. Later, the age of advertising introduced the notion that instant gratification trumps self-awareness.

The combination of these two principles have engendered a series of generations of consumers (the practice of citizenship barely exists, at present) for whom the concept of civil engagement is so obscure that, for these sorts, sharing a city sidewalk seems a task too complicated to envisage.

"I was born here and I'll die here against my will/ I know it looks like I'm moving, but I'm standing still/ Every nerve in my body is so vacant and numb/ I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from/ Don't even hear a murmur of a prayer/ It's not dark yet, but it's getting there."

-Not Dark Yet | Bob Dylan

Individually and en masse, U.S. citizens are checked-out, lost, possessed by inertia or manic jags of distraction, feelings of hopelessness and powerless rage, and are desperate for some kind of quick fix as if that were even possible. For example, why else would so many be addicted to unhealthy corporate food, anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications? Why are so many so desperate for relief from reality itself?

One reason: There exists a void of purpose, both communal and personal; a keening hollowness that becomes present when a person has been rendered by circumstance bereft of the belief that life can be resonant with meaning that he is in possession of a unique destiny. The concept has been lost that one's life is a fascinating question that is addressed to the world – and it is imperative that one quests for answers.

The tragedy is that too many look to their exploiters for answers. Those who insist on dwelling in an ad hoc architecture of denial – as flimsy as the prefab edifices of this Strip Mall Nation, as empty as the soul-devoid rooms of a McMansion – conjure disaster, and those who evince a noxious innocence (when no adult is innocent in a blood-sustain empire) become monsters.

It is one's societal (perhaps, even sacred) duty to strive for awareness. Those who demur will become slaves, and, in ways overt and tacit, argue for the exploitative and cruel caprice of their masters.

Too often people practice freedom of speech, rather than committing to the more difficult task of pursuing freedom of being thus, all too often, mistaking the din of a prison for freedom of expression.

To dwell in the domain of the heart ... is to choose to live in a dangerous terrain, for the choice will forever alter the world you (believed) you knew. The thoughts of the heart are dangerous items to carry in this age of the facile and fascist; it is the dangerous cargo that the national security state is searching for when applying body scans and pat-down searches. The thoughts of the heart are at the top of the state's "no fly list."

Why does one choose to call the stultifying enclosure of a self-constructed prison of the mind freedom come to regard his jailers as his benefactors, and hate those who point out his predicament insisting the clanging of his chains is music to his ears – the stirring melody of a patriotic hymn?

I am amazed at the talent on display by the oppressed of the corporate/military state: In particular, their impressive skills as contortion artists – who are able to lower a boot on their own necks, as, all the while, they march in lockstep to the dictates of their economic overlords – a damn impressive talent, and more than a little unnerving to witness.

Thus, the fallback taunt of the witless to those who question (or cannot adapt to) the current order, "get a job."

The global economy does not have an underemployment problem; we suffer an over-employment tragedy i.e. the precious moments of this finite life that are squandered laboring for a corrupt elite of pathological greedheads.

In fact, those active in the Occupy Wall Street Movement do have jobs: Our job is to transform the present order – to put out of work the capitalist criminals who have enslaved too many, body and soul, for far too long. Our job is to eliminate their jobs.

Moreover, do not believe for a moment the corporate media/police state dismissal that Occupy Wall Street is so “last year.” When, in fact, trusting in neoliberal propaganda is, oh so, last millennium.

The resonance and reverberations of the global-wide uprising against neoliberal exploitation and injustice – which is woven into the molecular structure of the OWS movement – is far from done, because the global banker/corporate plundering class are not done yet. By the very nature of building a prison or sweatshop, you have introduced the dream of freedom into the hearts of the enslaved.

As many readers are aware, vis-À-vis my recent essays, last month, I returned to the region of my birth to bear witness and bid farewell to my father as he departed this life for cosmic points unknown.

An experience whereby one is confronted by the demarcation point dividing life and death, or the transitory nature of time, brings what is essential into stark relief. Visits home, to the precincts of one’s youth exited, long ago can buffet one with enveloping sorrow.

When catching up with old friends, who never left the area, one becomes subject to the Mortality and Contretemps Report a gawky girl you exchanged French kisses with, when you were thirteen, has succumbed to brain cancer a seemingly level-headed, steady friend that you (thought) you knew a scientist, a father, a man of humor and forbearance committed suicide.

Fortuna’s Wheel, it seems, is a chaos-proliferate fractal of perpetual hurt. The fate of others (and ourselves) is providentially unknowable. The present moment opens before us so astounding to behold that we feel we can go on forever, held in beauty emboldened by evanescent grace.

There is birdsong that enswathes the air of the graveyard. Joined with the chorus of the dead, it pierces the heart with more precision than prophesy. This song of the living’s eloquence and the deads’ abandon carries us towards evening.

Its melody wends through Time, through Fate’s indifferent landscape. No mathematician can map its course nor calculate by statistical prediction its

destination.

What we know is this: We are riding this song together, and have done so through eternity. Marrow-fruited bone, drifting dust, and omnipresent birdsong – all of our forms and guises – propel us through the impossible ... the Unfolding Fate of All Things.

Self-knowledge begins when one is open to an acceptance of life's dark verities, as well as, to an awareness of one's deepest and darkest drives and desires, even awful, hateful thoughts and impulses. Otherwise, denial of these aspects of one's nature creates what James Hillman termed – toxic innocence, whereby one's psyche is so driven to protect one's perceived innocence that it becomes overwhelmed by its hidden drives.

In short, an underpinning reason how distressingly large segments of the U.S. populace began to evince the mode of mind on display under fascist rule.

Conversely, to the mode of mind of a tyrant – one possessed of a compulsion for control of others, mind and body – one should become fond of exploring psychic landscapes, even those of hostile, fact-resistant, capitalist true believers, fundamentalist religious types, crackpot pragmatists, puritanical ninnies, insular liberals, Obama cultists, and self-referential tyrants and dogmatist tight-asses.

There is a great deal one can learn about oneself when confronting strange, even hostile landscapes of the human soul; in particular the assertions and actions of others that induce despair and reflexive rage within you.

Human engagement, like art, involves more process than principle. One must engage the process, evoke the ritual, show up at the ceremony, join the protest to see what spirits have been summoned e.g., the unsettled ghosts of memory, the strutting spirits of the age, the admonishing/beckoning spirits of the deep.

It is not enough to deliver light; one, also, must listen to the soliloquies of restless shadows just don't take them at their word. Moreover, light is a deft liar as well. Yet, when tales of light and shadow are entwined, we start to move in the direction of a compelling tale.

Do not demur from dialog with difficult feelings, and those seemingly irredeemable aspects of your hidden nature even if doing so engenders inner conflict and involves trespassing into your comfort zone. Violate the fascist catchphrase: "Don't go there."

By all means, go there. "Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go." – T.S. Eliot

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## Madness of Late-Stage Capitalism

Late-stage capitalism has similarities to an aging billionaire terrified of microscopic germs imagine Howard Hughes at the end of his days trying to extend life by frenetically worrying about invisible dangers, writes Phil Rockstroh in this reflection on his father's death.

By Phil Rockstroh

My parents modest, single-level, brick home stands on property that was once part of a sprawling estate owned by the Candler family, Atlanta's Coca-Cola patricians. Built during the post-World War II, 1950s building boom, the small house is situated in a deep ravine that once served as the grounds of the Candler's private zoo. On the hilltop above, the point of highest elevation in the Atlanta metro area, the Candler family, in the tradition of the powerful and elite, laid claim to the highest ground.

In the 1960s, and apropos to the era, in an odd twist of historical circumstance, the grounds of the estate – earlier endowed to the state of Georgia by the heirs of the Candler fortune – were appropriated for development as a state mental health institution, a sprawling complex of modernist structures, housing those committed for treatment for issues related to psychological disorders.

Emblematic of the decade of the 1960s, the highest ground in the city became the site of a madhouse. Aptly, as opposed to emanating from its traditional source i.e., insular precincts of privilege and power, in the 1960s, spontaneous upwellings of cultural madness were more egalitarian in nature seemingly, a development that the corporate and governmental elite found so troubling that they swore that they would never again abide similar types of cultural phenomenon – instigated by underling upstarts who (apparently) forgot their social station – to rise unfettered.

Consequently, the swift and brutal repression that the Occupy Wall Street movement has endured in its struggle against the present structures of calcified psychopathology known as the corporate state.

Yet, cultures must allow for creative chaos. Otherwise, stultifying social structures tend to engender a sense of powerlessness among the populace, creating a pervasive sense of nebulous unease. Repression creates outbreaks of hysteria, because the source of demeaning power cannot be confronted directly without prohibitive consequences.

From witch burnings, to public lynching, to xenophobic fears of immigrants, to the bullying of homosexuals and social outcasts – depression-mitigating misapplication of misdirected, public rage has been inflicted on unpopular groups and social outcasts. The larger the degree of social stratification and economic inequality in a given society the more noxious the displaced anger becomes, as economic-engendered resentments and group rivalries provide the fuel for flames of pent-up aggression.

Often, the animus is internalized within the psyches of the official operatives of the state (e.g., police and soldiers) who are given carte blanche to harass and oppress minority groups, political dissidents, and enemies of the state, real and imagined. Thus the state, acting through its anonymous operatives, becomes a force of lawlessness abducting, torturing and killing *sans* sound reasoning and remorse for all intents and purposes evincing the modus operandi of the criminally insane.

A lone, psychopathic killer views himself as a self-contained society of one; therefore, he feels accountable to no one outside of himself. He is a freelancer (a mirror image of the lawless state itself) who has assumed the murderous agency of state power.

No wonder, we, as a people, so greatly exaggerate the danger these extreme cases pose to us on a collective basis – no wonder we insist that the most punitive forms of punishment be inflicted upon individuals afflicted with these rare afflictions that they be locked away in the most secure prisons and executed with utmost expediency for if we gazed upon them for any length of time, we would notice affinities of mind and action – their violent, reprehensible deeds are microcosmic representations of official state policy and cultural norms.

Therefore, we clear these overt monsters from sight, lest we awaken to ourselves – to the casual and mundane monstrosities required to adapt to this prison of the criminally insane we know as daily existence within late capitalist empire.

Here howls the chasm: Between the apparatus of the privileged and powerful, in place, to create false fears and those things that should be rightly feared. For example: being in possession a healthy fear of the damage wrought by the corporate media by their incessant promulgation of manufactured fears.

Conversely, one should fear the harm resultant from the contrived fears perpetrated by ruthless political leaders and mercenary media figures committed in the name of protecting the public at large from imaginary enemies.

This is not so much a problem of: fearing fear itself; rather, it is a matter of gaining a healthy fear of the overkill exacted when self-serving institutions use counterfeit fear as a means of preserving their power – standard modus operandi when institutions, public and private, have lost legitimacy.

The overreactions and overkill of the national security police state are similar to that of a germaphobe (a sufferer of mysophobia) e.g., the forces of state power marshal overwhelming numbers of militarized riot police and recruit entrapment-happy undercover provocateurs against peaceful political dissenters.

Yet: Obsessive hand-washing deployed against imagined microscopic invaders will not serve to sooth the tormented mind of an individual seized with mysophobia, because, in reality, the problem is rooted in the psyche of the sufferer. The further one afflicted withdraws from the world the larger his fears will loom. Isolation causes the mind to become a self-resonating feedback loop of self-referential fear (e.g., an encampment of peace resisters must be met with violent force to preserve the health of the state's social order).

Providentially, the most propitious treatment for OCD (of both the personal or institutional variety) is exposure to the very things the suffer fears most, i.e., being induced to touch the surfaces that he imagines seethe with vile contagion. Conversely, an army of riot police and billions upon billions of dollar squandered on military hardware and state surveillance can never quell the terror within the isolated elite of a decaying culture.

The neoliberal state resembles Howard Hughes in his final days shuffling the penthouse floors of a succession of resort area hotels muttering about microbes his vast riches and security details offering no balm; his fear of human touch served as a self-issued death warrant. In a nondenominational Pentecost of redemptive paradox, the very thing that evoked such overwhelming fear in him might have served as the very agency of his salvation.

My family's death vigil has come to an end. My father passed from this world early in the morning of May 21. In the last few days of his life, he drifted between unconsciousness and excruciating pain. When he would rise to awareness, he would quake in agony, his bone-thin arms raised, grasping into empty air, imploring, "Help! Help" futile pleas that proved to be the last words he uttered in this life.

He died as he lived a vivid presence, although inconsolable regarding what he



deemed the implacably cruel nature of human life. At last, his pain has ceased. His flesh and bones will soon be rendered ash almost weightless, his remains will be free to drift in air released from his imprisoning pain.

I shuffle through memory; itself a dimension of imprisonment – its confines circumscribed by fate and limited apprehension. I festoon the walls of my individual cell with fragments of imperfect remembrance. What was once flesh has been transmuted by time into shards and vapor.

You are now free, my father but for the solitary confinement of my memory.

Not too long ago, I had a dream wherein I stood gazing over the atrium of a large complex of multi-story structures. Inadvertently, I dropped my “special” writing pen. It glinted silver as it spiraled down into the lobby, below the atrium, where it came to rest on the carpeted floor. I searched for a down stairway or an elevator in order to retrieve it, but discovered the only means of descent would entail having to make my way down the floors of a public hospital adjoining my present location.

The dream communicated to me – as occurs, at times, in the lingua franca of the soul – the tacit understanding that in order to regain possession of my writing instrument I would be required to view and chronicle much suffering (as well as healing) in the wards of the hospital that I would be shirking my duty as a writer (I would lose the instrument of my art) if I avoided the task of looking upon affliction, recovery, madness, birth, and death.

This spring, upon my journey south, I have gazed upon suffering and death, as my father made his agonized exit from this keening sphere. My father – who was a man of half Native America ancestry, brought by tragic circumstance to the Deep South of the U.S., to later marry a woman, my mother, a survivor of the blood-besotted madness of 20th Century Europe – carried the wounds and evinced much of the madness of his times.

He imparted his wounds to me. I carry them with my own wounds – those incurred by unavoidable circumstance and those that are self-inflicted.

As I trudge through the wards of the wounded and the restored, I will do my utmost to send out dispatches bearing my observations. From maternity ward to madhouse to morgue and all the precincts in between, I will attempt to chronicle what I witness for to ignore the admonitions of one’s soul and its dialog and dance with the Anima Mundi of one’s time is to drift toward the tragic fate of a life deferred.

I close this essay seated on an Amtrak train, trundling through the June night. ... Sleepless. ... A full moon skirts through ink-black clouds ... the landscape

visible in snatches of sheeted light and silhouette. Towns and cities drift past. Northward bound, Georgia recedes behind me but memory holds fast.

At hospice, my father succumbed to death in a morphine-induced coma. Too heavily medicated to desire drink, he died of thirst his face and body as gray as granite when the attendant from the mortuary service arrived to transport his corpse for rendering by the Cremation Society.

When my father was seized with rage – a frequent occurrence throughout his life, and only diminished in the last stages of his protracted illness – his blood would rise, in an instant, from his chest to his face; his anger-contorted countenance would flush a deep, reddish brown ... the color of steak gravy broiled out of raw beef when cooked at a high temperature.

Seemingly, the veritable thunder of an outraged god, his outbursts terrified me. Shortly after my fifth birthday, after being witness to a fit of my father's temper, I have a memory of slipping out the back door and coming upon a bed of fire ants that had erected an outpost of their larger colony against the concrete foundation of our small, brick apartment building in Birmingham, Alabama.

The insects seemed to me to be a seething mass of coruscating rage – and I answered their animus by kicking at their ranks with the tips of my high top Keds. The sight of their crushed bodies, frozen in death, affixed to the side of the wall, held me enthralled. The illusion of control seized me momentarily mitigating the terror that my father's rage had instilled in me. Is this the mental architecture of sudden violence murder war?

In the seats around my own on this train, African-American grandmothers are holding an impromptu confab on the subject of the sins of our age. ... The topic: A generation has been lost because the art of dispensing regular beatings for infractions, large and small, is in the process of being discarded by hapless parents. One proclaims, through a wizened grimace, "My father ... took to hitting me all the time, and it never did me one bit of harm."

Sure thing, Granny ... each blow served to move you closer to God in his Heaven.

I, myself, in a fit of righteous fury, sent a troop of fire ants his way when I was five.

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# How Crucial Is Media?

Perhaps the Right's biggest advantage in U.S. politics is its advanced media infrastructure built over several decades and designed to reach the entire country on a variety of levels especially when it's compared to the Left's general neglect of a messaging system, an imbalance that Danny Schechter addresses.

By Danny Schechter

When do you feel like you are over the hill?

When you get letters like this one from Jose Hevia after writing an op-ed featuring an essay from your recent book *Blogothon*, recounting your experiences as a network-TV-insider-turned-independent-media-outsider. The essay offered a case study of how the nominally non-commercial network, PBS, turned its back on a human rights TV series I co-produced. It is about the challenges progressives face in offering a counter-narrative to parochial mainstream thinking.

My critical correspondent wondered what I was whining about: "Complaining that the old media is getting more and more monopolized Is ... who cares about old media? Nobody in my inner circle under 30 watches old media any more. Bye."

Take that, old man. Hahaha!.

I am not sure his view is totally true, what with the Comedy Channel, movie channels galore and unlimited sports coverage. The New York Times reports "Television is America's No. 1 pastime, with an average of four hours and 39 minutes consumed by **every person** every day." At the same time, Jose is right that Americans ages 12 to 34 are spending less time in front of TV sets. And, what they are not watching is traditional TV news, maybe because it is so uninteresting and disconnected from their lives.

One problem is that we live in a country where there's plenty of news but little diverse interpretation, context and background. Viewers are interested when it is presented interestingly, not in canned infotainment-oriented formats. When it's not, they're not. Breaking news is everywhere only to be replaced by more breaking news that distracts your attention from what broke before.

It's odd but almost all the most active and militant youth activists who disagree on so much agree that an 80-plus-year-old named Noam Chomsky is one of their heroes. Punk groups write songs praising him. His books are passed from hand to hand. They are the most popular titles in the Occupy Wall Street Peoples

Library. Chomsky just released a pamphlet about Occupy.

A few years back, Chomsky got a rare long interview on cable TV. No, it wasn't MSNBC or Fox or the Comedy Channel the networks that are widely watched but CSPAN's Book TV. I stared at the screen for what seemed like forever to watch a scroll listing some 80 books he's written go by ever so slowly. I am not sure how many people watched but it was fascinating.

I am nowhere near Chomsky's prodigious output. I have ONLY written 14 books not to mention essays published in scores of others. I am not sure it matters but I do what I can. And, yet, yes, as a journalist I am still a book guy because of my years as a student and immersion in a political culture that reveres ideas and intellectual thought.

At the same time I have also spent years inside the mainstream media machine where my work reached many more millions, even when I felt I was pumping it out into the maw where shows whiz by and are rarely remembered.

When I worked at ABC News, there was an expression that counseled producers not to get too detailed. The instruction was to avoid "MEGO" standing for "My Eyes Glaze Over." That's how they believe the audience reacts when exposed to too much analysis. They tune out!

So it's not surprising that online media like You Tube, Twitter, Facebook, etc. are so popular. They are personal, quick, easy to upload to and snappy. The Occupy Movement has taken advantage of this technology, too, with websites and twitter feeds but to their credit, also longer-form outlets.

Old-time activists like one of my mentors as an organizer, Stanley Aronowitz, now a social theorist, believes many in this generation don't understand the importance of reaching beyond their Facebook Friends and digital communities. He told me for a TV series I am doing about "Who Rules America":

"We don't have a Left that really continually, in an effective way, talks about who has power in America. The Occupy movement talked about ninety-nine percent being deprived of economic power and about inequality, but it is not even close to being an analysis that can be disseminated throughout the entire society.

"We don't have a system of daily newspapers. We don't have a weekly newspaper. We have Twitter. We have, you know, various other kinds of social media that we have access to, but it does not replace the kind of systematic analysis that can take place as a result of having our own media."

Maybe that's why I write a daily 3,000-word blog every day at [newsdissector.net](http://newsdissector.net) and churn out books even though I know it's a kind of Neanderthal pursuit in an

age when even popular magazines and newspapers are facing enormous obstacles in reaching audiences. The book business seems to be barely limping along as a transition continues to heavily hyped digital nirvana.

At the same time, along with my younger critic, I do use and believe in the power of social media. I have had a computer since 1981, and been online since '86. I tweet (Dissector Events), have a Facebook page, use a smart phone, watch videos and relish the power of interactivity. I think we need to be involved in as many media outlets as we can be.

The journalist I co-founded Globalvision Inc. with, Rory O Connor, has a brilliant must-read book out on social media, *Friends, Followers and The Future; How Social Media are Changing Politics, Threatening Big Brands, and Killing Traditional Media*. (City Lights)

Yes, he's right this "new" media is transforming our world and providing key tools that help organize revolts and even revolutions. It's all very exciting, but also potentially dangerous as governments create cyber-war commands to use the Internet as a tool for aggressive intervention, spying, surveillance, information collection, and social control. Social Media also addicts us to big corporate brands with questionable commitments to change and democracy.

I am reminded of a poster I saw that was created by the students at the Beaux Arts College in Paris during the May-June 1968 uprising. The slogan was more of a mocking warning than a celebration. It read, "I Participate, You Participate. We Participate. They Profit!"

Democracy should not be about enriching a techno elite, giving us more toys and apps and devices to distract us from becoming the change makers we should be. (How much is Apple or Google giving back?) That's why I wrote *Blogothon* with the title inspired by old TV telethons that once ran around the clock. I have been blogging almost every day since Sept. 11, 2001. I believe you need to have a regular presence to win influence.

If the progressive movement is to build support, it needs to be present in all media in an effort to reach and persuade the mainstream about why change is needed and how to go about it. It needs to critique old media and vitalize new Media. We have to build a mass audience for our ideas, not just focus on chatting with so-called friends. Outreach is essential without being condescending. We must influence the mainstream.

Then, we have to also go beyond media and get actively involved in the struggle to transform the status quo in an America of growing economic inequality, poverty and war. My *Blogothon* essays treat all of these issues with perspectives

rooted in my long “career” in media and activism.

Have a read, and you tell me if they can contribute to the movement we need to build? Bye.

**News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at [newsdissector.net](http://newsdissector.net). In addition to *Blogothon*, Cosimo Books has also just published his *Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street*. His latest film is *Plunder the Crime of our Time* on the financial crisis as a crime story. ([plunderthecrimeofourtime.com](http://plunderthecrimeofourtime.com).) He hosts *News Dissector Radio Hour* on *Progressive Radio Network (PRN.fm)*, [Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)**

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## Contemplating the Abyss

The urgent question facing the planet is whether today’s late-capitalist era, possessed of unbridled greed at the top, can be turned to meet the needs of the world’s people or will hurtle onward to a global abyss, disrupting age-old patterns of life and bringing mass destruction, a crisis pondered by Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

On May 1, after a day of May Day activities on the streets and avenues of Manhattan, my wife and I and a troop of other OWS celebrants marched into Zuccotti Park to jubilant exhortations of “welcome home” from a throng of fellow occupiers. The next day, my wife and I boarded a southbound Amtrak train to join family gathered at my dying father’s bedside to bid him farewell.

May in Georgia In this age of climate chaos, the local flora comes to bloom a full month earlier than in decades past. This season, magnolias and hydrangeas blossomed in early May. Their petals opened to the world as my father’s life is fading. The magnolia petals have grown heavy; his body is shrinking. Soon he will drift from this world carried by the scent of late spring blossoms.

In our once laboring class neighborhood, McMansions blot out the late spring sun. In the arrogant shadow of these shoddily constructed, bloated emblems of late capitalism, the neighborhood’s remaining 1950’s single level, brick homes seem to recede fading like memory before the hurtling indifference of passing eras.

In late spring, veils of pollen merge with shrouds of Atlanta traffic exhaust.

Timeless nature has awakened as the noxious capitalist certainties underpinning the aberration known as the New South are dying.

Hospice has arrived in the home of my father. A death vigil has begun, as well, for our culture.

Lost, starving, wailing into a void of paternal abandonment, my father, left on the doorstep of a Baptist church adjacent to an Indian Reservation in rural Missouri, arrived into this keening world. Now, he is refusing to eat and is wailing, once again, into an abyss of helplessness His bones, eaten by cancer, and his bowels seized up by the side effects of opiates, he is starving himself to death.

He now lies in his bedroom; his sight set on the undiscovered realm of death. This world denied him succor; now Death offers the embrace that he was denied (and later) refused, as he proceeded through this life in a resentful fury. His wounds cauterized by rage-lit flames.

Now, I must comfort him as he did me, when I was a child, seized by night terrors that he both placated and caused. He whimpers into the air of the small home that he once shook with rage. Now, betrayed by his body, and again orphaned by fate, he will soon leave this world – a place from which he was perpetually estranged.

I hope the womb of night will bestow a peace upon him that was denied to him by this world. I hope whatever dawn he meets will hold him in an embrace so all encompassing and gentle that he will shed his compulsion to bristle and retreat. I hope he will, at long last, know he was loved.

My father was born on an Indian reservation and abandoned on the doorsteps of a Baptist church in rural Missouri in the early years of the Great Depression. A Jewish mother and Protestant father adopted him. In those days, it was a standard practice of adoption agencies to offer up for adoption children of so-called mixed ancestry to interdenominational couples. Caucasian babies, the conventional wisdom of the time presumed, would carry a stigma for life from being raised in a home headed by such social deviants.

My mother escaped Hitler's Germany (barely) on a Kindertransport. My wife is from the rural South Carolina Low Country. She's a flat-lander, a swamp bunny. As for myself, I was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. I'm an accidental Hillbilly The lay of the land endowed me with a hill country perception of existence, yet I appreciate the mode of being evinced in places like Charleston and New Orleans ... the humidity slowing down the pace of life ... the mind as a gnat flurry.

My blood, as is the case with all of us, is composed of ancient oceans that long to know land and sky. On a personal basis, my atavistic blood is a sea of diverse ethnic consanguinity that meets the shore of a global polis. The waves of this body of water are changeable sometimes, caressing the shoreline placid, at ease in the world; sometimes, agitated and enraged by what I witness becoming a series of antagonistic waves crashing against the insensate rocks of the mindless social circumstances that damaged my father so.

Soon, my father will return to the vast ocean of eternity. I consider it my duty to sing the song of my blood to compose and give voice to sacred hymns, both of the personal and the collective.

This is my poet's prayer: Life rose from ancient oceans so that mollusks could gaze upon the evening sky. Likewise, we emerged from the cosmic brine to know physical embrace made resonate because of its finite nature – the loving limits imposed by Time. Accordingly, the immaterial longs for the caress of the summer breeze and to rage into a winter wind. Spiritus Mundi is dependent on us to cultivate our individual souls to have our blood sing biographical ballads to audiences gathered in Eternity.

My father's song is almost at its end. The endless song continues.

A song of tribute to the life of my father (or, for that matter, any human life) must combine elements of a fight song and a love song. One must love life enough to take a stand in its behalf.

During the Great Depression, my father was (again) left fatherless when his adopted father suffered a debilitating stroke, resulting in a protracted decline that left their small family penniless and homeless. Consequently, my father, along with his nearly incapacitated father and his mother managed to make their way from rural Missouri to Cleveland, Ohio, and then went on to find lodging with members of his mother's family who had settled in Birmingham, Alabama, where shortly thereafter his father died.

In the Deep South, the dark hue of my father's Native American skin marked him for abuse by belligerent locals. Although he had been deprived of detailed knowledge of his ancestry, his Comanche blood resisted intimidation. His tormentors wounded him deeply, but they also succeeded in opening deep reservoirs of ancestral rage.

My father harbored an abiding animus to bullies – a trait he bequeathed to me by both blood and circumstance.

Apropos: At the foot of Broadway, on May Day, I stood near a bristling array of NYPD officers who were tasked with the crucial mission of protecting the statue



of Wall Street's iconic "Charging Bull" – where I heard one of the witless, uniformed thugs, through a smirk, opine, "These rich, lazy bums go to college and study women's studies and the history of Negroes – then come out here in the real world and whine that they can't get a job These brats should have thought about what they're going to do in life when they were in school?"

I turned to face him and averred, "I guess they could follow your example and they could stand here on Wall Street stroking a billy club protecting ultra-wealthy criminals and their ill-gotten riches." Of course, he responded by calling me a socialist.

Even though that was, most likely, the first accurate statement he posited all day, I replied, "As opposed to following your noble example: choosing to spend your days as a mindless fascist bully?" His smirk still in place, he spat, "As if you even know what a fascist is!"

I replied, "As a matter of fact, I do, and you, being posed as you are in front of that bull [with its bronze form cast to crouch in a stance of impending aggression; its form, permanently locked in a position of myopic fury] will serve as a perfect backdrop for me to illustrate the situation. Mussolini, who knew a bit about the subject, proclaimed fascism to be the merger of the corporation and the state. Therefore, since it follows that the state pays your salary, and you spend your days protecting the corporate order that you, to a jackboot, fit the profile of a fascist Don't you now?"

At that, his smirk solidified into a mask of belligerent stupid. He slapped his truncheon into his meaty palm, and told me that if I knew what was good for me I better move along. I told him that he was probably right, due to the fact, I suspect, he could very accurately and with much relish impart to me the true nature of fascism with that nightstick of his.

His lipless, reptilian grin indicated he would be more than happy to take a personal interest in tutoring me on the subject.

"The ghetto that you built for me is the one you're living in." – Bob Dylan, Dead Man, Dead Man

But the fight is not with this individual enforcer of the present, doomed order. The encounter is emblematic of what those who devote themselves to the unfolding struggle are up against: an armed and fortified wall of sneering arrogance – a violent, human torrent of surging ignorance.

For us, the living, breaching Death's wall, possessed of the intention of changing its implacable order, is, of course, impossible – but challenging the present, calcified order – a death-addicted arrangement, created and maintained

by mortal men that has existed well past its given and rightful time – has become imperative.

For my father, the struggle is nearly at its end; for those of us who remain in this breathing world, the struggle has just begun.

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