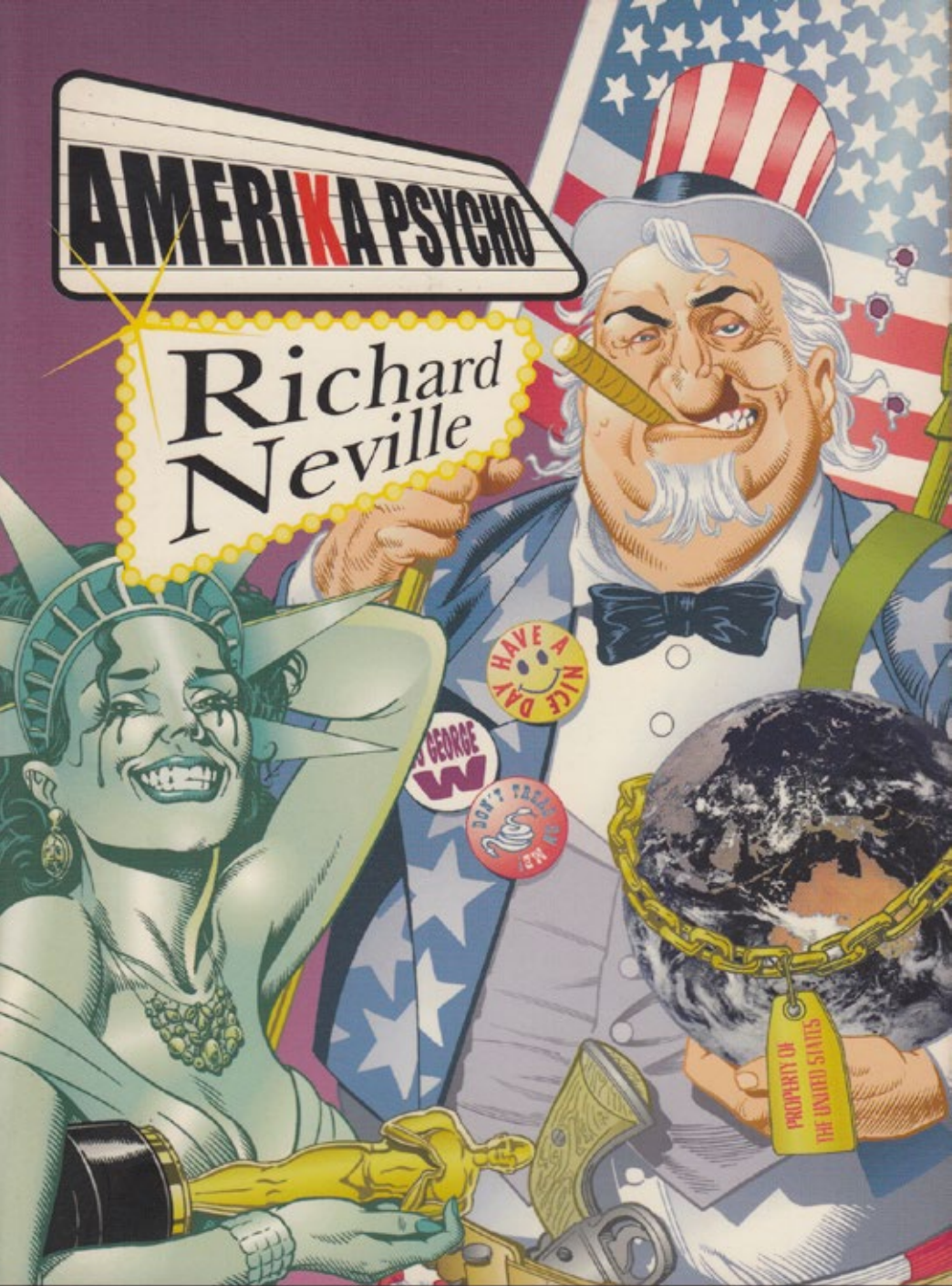


AMERIKA PSYCHO

Richard  
Neville



BEHIND UNCLE SAM'S MASK OF SANITY

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BEHIND UNCLE SAM'S MASK OF SANITY

## **Previous Books by Richard Neville**

*Out of My Mind* 1996

*Hippie Hippie Shake* 1995

*The Life & Crimes of Charles Sobhraj* (with Julie Clarke 1979)

*Playpower* 1970

## **OFF THEIR HEADS ABOUT *OUT OF MY MIND***

“Poignant... smart... passionate... he finds himself saying the previously unsayable... Neville’s greatest achievement has been to sidestep the cynicism, world weariness or opportunism that has afflicted so many of his contemporaries.” Mick Brown, *Sunday Times*

“New essays from an all-round countercultural veteran... never less than benign, liberal and humane.” *Glasgow Herald*

“Neville may resemble a modern citizen these days, but his trains of thought are still dangerously close to derailment... This class collection spans sex, drug, rock and all life in between.”  
*The List*, Edinburgh

## **REVIEWS OF *HIPPIE HIPPIE SHAKE***

“Some of the funniest lines I’ve read in years.” *Guardian Weekly*

“Breathless... affectionate... entertaining... crammed with period detail and colour.” *Sunday Times*

“I shall not read it. Ever.” Germaine Greer

“The antics of the underground in all its guises seem absurdly innocent and, as richly observed by Neville, hilariously funny. Germaine Greer doesn’t know what she’s missing. There again, perhaps she does.” Penelope Denning, *Irish Times*

“An admirably forthright, self-critical, clear-eyed retrospective. Extremely funny.” Michael Horovitz, *The Independent*

## **MORE REVIEWS OF *HIPPIE HIPPIE SHAKE***

“A portrait of an era. A large part of the responsibility for all that went on at the time can be laid at Neville’s door. He shaped the hearts and minds of at least two generations... If it was happening, Neville was there.” *Times Literary Supplement*

“Fascinating, vivid, frank, foul-mouthed. Very amusing.”  
*The Times*, London

“Funny, enjoyable, lively; an important chronicle...”  
John Mortimer, *The Spectator*

“Clear, biting, pithy... compelling.” *New Statesman*

“Of value to future travellers... engrossing... a valuable social document.” Robert Drewe, *Australian Book Review*

“Superb, gossipy... The best book I’ve read on those brave, unique, acid-rocking bisexual times... Shows the origins of today’s gay and lesbian lifestyle.” Peter Blazey, *Outrage* magazine

“An entrancingly wicked account of one of the greatest decades ever.” *marie claire*

“Gripping. Riveting. A massive antidote to humbug... deserves and urgently needs the widest possible circulation among ‘alternative’ people today.” *Fourth World Review*

“Utterly unputdownable.” *Sunday Times*

“Funny, frank and oddly touching.” *Esquire*



**BEHIND UNCLE SAM'S MASK OF SANITY**



**Ocean Press**

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**Richard Neville** cofounded the satirical magazine *Oz* in 1963 and later brought it to London, where it broke new ground, becoming a controversial forum of radical politics, culture and sexuality. A “schoolkids’ issue” of London *Oz* was prosecuted for “corrupting public morals”. Neville defended himself at the Old Bailey, winning a 15-month jail sentence, after which, the judge ordered, “the convict Neville” be transported to Australia. Acquitted on appeal, he became Fleet Street’s “alternative voice” and covered the 1972 U.S. presidential elections for London’s *Evening Standard* and Australia’s *Nation Review*. Since the 1980s, Neville has based himself in Sydney, writing the odd book, preening on TV and stirring the possum. As a professional futurist (not a psychic), he tries to help people and organisations engage with the unexpected and to create their own tools for decoding the future, to read its footprints on the sand. He is married, with two daughters, three laptops, one dog, a weird job title and an eponymous website:

[www.richardneville.com](http://www.richardneville.com)



## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

Two of the essays that appear in this book, “The Wildest Rogue Nation on Earth” and “Beyond Good and Evil, After 9/11”, were originally published in the Australian magazine, *Good Weekend*. The emails printed in this book were either responses to those essays or to other material published on Richard Neville’s website.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This book is built on the research and ideas of so many people that I hesitate to claim the copyright (though not the royalties). Books, TV, movies, magazines, newspapers, the net, conversations... have all fed into the mix, making it largely a work of involuntary collaboration – thanks! To Fenella Souter and her team at the *Good Weekend*, warm hugs for expunging some of the dross of earlier drafts, and for an independence of spirit confirmed by the widespread reader response of, “wow, how in hell did you get this published?” A fraction of the feedback has been appended to the essays, and I apologise for not being able to consult in advance with the correspondents. To avoid embarrassment, their identities are not disclosed. The sizzle from the Futurist Manifesto of 1909 was seized from the Robert Hughes’ opus, *Shock of the New*. Finally, thanks to all the ratbags of the web for upholding the core value that makes America amazing: freedom of speech.

To every reader who let me know these words struck home

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## **CONTENTS**

### **Part One**

The Business of Being Human	3
-----------------------------	---

### **Part Two**

The Wildest Rogue Nation of All	13
Richard's Inbox: an email firestorm	31
Toxic Texas: Killing You Softly With My Fumes	41
Who Killed the Counterculture?	44

### **Part Three**

Beyond Good and Evil, After 9/11	51
Richard's Inbox: another email firestorm	75
War Update: Weddings, Funerals, War Crimes	80

### **Part Four**

To Love, Honour and Throw Away	89
Richard's Inbox: an email sunshower	107

### **Part Five**

From The Cave to K-Mart	115
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# **PART ONE**

**THE BUSINESS OF BEING HUMAN**

## **THE BUSINESS OF BEING HUMAN**

HATING AMERICA IS a popular indoor sport, and I've been known to succumb to its pleasures. I also love America. This brash land sings its own praises with gusto, so there is no need here to enumerate its finer points. In the United States I have lived a series of brief episodes, none of them majestic, all of them taxing, some rewarding. As I string together the recollections in my mind, I can't believe it's the same "me" who has ponced about on U.S. soil in a multitude of guises, over so many decades.

In 1968 in Union Square, New York, I watched in awe as the feisty jesters of hippiedom dreamt up pranks

for the forthcoming Democratic Convention in Chicago. The action was planned as a love-in, a festival of life.

Instead, for the thousands who came, it was a near death experience. Truncheons and tear gas flew in the night. The headlines screamed “Blood in the Streets”. The televised brutalities of Mayor Daley’s police gave middle America a glimpse of the darker side of City Hall. If this is what our leaders are doing to the children, then what are they doing to the Vietnamese?

Yet almost 25 years later, few in the West publicly condemn the foreign policies of the United States, despite the ongoing scale of carnage.

Activists from the bygone counterculture were often flawed saints in flairs, who understood with visceral clarity the cruelty and madness of dropping bombs on distant strangers, while singing hymns. It’s different today. White House looniness is fired with righteous vengeance. Kids are workaholics, their parents more fearful than ever. Protest simmers, mostly in cyberspace, yet to bubble into the malls of America.

I don’t claim to be an authority on the United States, on its politics or emotions. Over the years, however, I’ve kept in touch. It’s a land that can be generous to new arrivals. I’ve watched several waves of fresh-eyed immigrants throw themselves into the Manhattan mosh pit, emerging bruised and triumphant, thrilled to have been Americanised.

You don't have to go there anymore for that to happen, because now America comes to you.

It was late on a Saturday night in 1997, as I stood in the foyer of Melbourne's Crown Casino, that I was reminded of Uncle Sam's propensity towards colonising the future. Banned in the Australia of my youth, such places are now just another entertainment franchise. Oohs and aahs bubbled from the crowd, transfixed as hi-tech fountains spurted impossible arcs. Glittering glass beads cascaded from the ceiling and settled into dazzling sculptures that moved in time to the piped pomp of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Grog gushed, food courts throbbed, gaming tables were mobbed. Bizarre, sinister and extravagantly costumed carnival figures on stilts waded through worshippers at the windows of Armani, Prada, Gucci and Tiffany's. Intercoms crackled, slot machines spun.

Acre after acre, floor after floor, with ante-rooms reserved for the high rollers, this was a never-ending spectacle, the "best of Rio and Vegas", a wonder of our age, encircled by stretch limos and exploding fireballs. So why did I feel so ill at ease?

Because it all seemed so fake; staged and manipulated by hidden hands?

Yes, but it was more than that. I felt like a refugee from a lost war, suddenly transported to the camp of the victor. Overwhelmed by this glitzy colossus, I recognised



its power as a metaphor. The casino's brochure proclaimed, "A WORLD LIKE NO OTHER". If only. This was a world that increasingly resembled... the rest of the world.

The rise of the megacorp, global marketing and the pathological hoarding of wealth are major forces shaping the future. Where can we debate their impact? Media forums are controlled by institutions that have the most to gain by accelerating the process. This is turning our culture into a closed-loop of compliance with the corporate worldview.

The point of business is to provide profit. The point of culture is to provide meaning. Can the two be reconciled? Not entirely; and we are doing our best to overlook the fact. Such denial fuels our thirst for distraction, glorifies all things ugly and endangers the ecosystem. Shopping options multiply, while lifestyle choices diminish. The further afield we travel, the more familiar it seems. As corporations grow, the world starts to shrink, and we seem to be shrinking along with it. On the other hand, it's kind of fun. Just look at the queues for the movies.

When we possess something of real value – doors unlocked at night, laughter in the playground – we are asked to name its price, otherwise it can't be audited. The immeasurable world is slipping away. There is a collective sense of "dumbing down", of the disappearance

of childhood and time, along with a widening wealth gap. The anarchists of the 1870 Paris Commune foresaw the tyranny of time when they shot the clocks. Today, we inhabit a perpetual “state of emergency”: politicians have short attention spans; capitalists dance to the fluctuations of finance markets. In my youth, speed was a drug, now it’s a lifestyle. Trapped in the frenetic present, dizzy with data smog, we’re too busy to reflect on the future.

Late last century I was asked to speak at the conference of a mighty pharmaceutical company on how to prepare for alternative futures. To my forecast that 21st century stakeholders may come to demand from managers a heightened sense of social responsibility, the reaction was sceptical. “I don’t think you realise just how big we are”, an executive said. “With the resources we have at our command, we can make the future just how we want it.” Over the Earth’s dead body.

Has it come to this? Have we internalised the values of global profiteers and merged their aspirations with our own; even redefining what it means to be human? Once we were individuals, now we’re a small business. We used to hang out in society, now we strive in an economy. Students once brooded in fashionable cafes, chatting about poetry, romance and revolution, now they prattle on cell phones about stock options, digital cameras and software solutions. The rise of “groovy-biz” has

liberated the inner accountant – the new Frankenstein – and we dutifully equate our self-worth with our net worth. Today’s U.S. role models are no longer charismatic misfits, like James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Mick Jagger, but slick millionaires, like Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Mick Jagger.

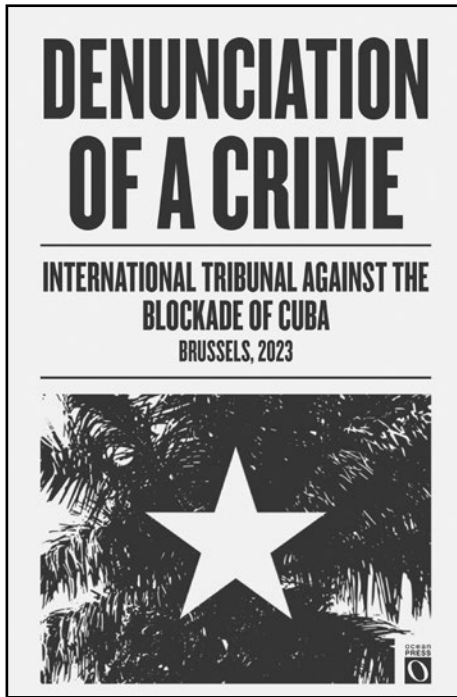
“You are a brand” proclaims biz guru, Tom Peters, “develop yourself as a brand... be head marketer for the brand called YOU”. The rise of the megacorp and the interlocking alliances between media, publishing, entertainment, marketing, politics, arms sales, theme parks, theatre, tourism – the whole shebang of casino capitalism – is not only retooling our psychological make-up and moulding our tastes, it is shielding us from an awareness of the process.

In the 1970s, after a spell in an oft-burgled Manhattan loft, I relocated to the serenely insular Shelter Island, off Long Island, to research the biography of an Asian-based serial killer, Charles Sobhraj, then imprisoned in Delhi. Sobhraj had become so swept up in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, he used its Superman yearnings to develop the dark side of his own human potential – and to deadly effect. In the quest to unravel the fate of the backpacker victims, I tracked the survivors across several continents, along with co-author, Julie Clarke. Both of us were stunned by the affection many of the prey held for the predator, their enduring admi-

ration, loyalty, even love, for the man who had drugged and robbed them in a foreign land. The charms of Sobhraj had left a deeper mark on their memories than his misdeeds. This duality of impact is the trademark of a psychopath.

In the world at large, the jovial nature of Uncle Sam also belies a darker purpose. The pursuit of excess at any cost lies at the heart of corporate book-cooking. While happy to reap the spoils of globalisation, America is indifferent, even hostile, to its deeper obligations.

Shortly after his installation as U.S. president, George W. Bush bailed out of the global effort to curb greenhouse emissions because it might “harm the economy” of America. It is in the aftershock of this decision that this book begins.



**DENUNCIATION OF A CRIME. INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL AGAINST THE BLOCKADE OF CUBA**

Ocean Press, Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP)

On November 16 and 17, 2023, the International Tribunal against the Blockade of Cuba was held in Brussels, Belgium. The impacts of the application of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act and the inclusion of Cuba on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism were denounced. Irrefutable evidence demonstrated that the blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba is not a bilateral issue between two countries, but violates international law and is an attack on democratic values and the peoples of the world.

2024, ISBN 978-1-923074-32-3

# **PART TWO**

**THE WILDEST ROGUE NATION OF ALL**

## **THE WILDEST ROGUE NATION OF ALL**

MAYBE GEORGE W. BUSH has done the world a favour. When he renounced the Kyoto treaty on greenhouse emissions, he helped peel away the mask of sanity from Uncle Sam, revealing him for what he is, in all his savagery and nonchalance – a glutton and a psychopath. Forget the Taliban, Gaddafi or the beastly Saddam Hussein, it is the United States that is out of control, the wildest rogue nation of all.

The assertion of America's lifestyle rights, come what may, over any other consideration – including the survival of future generations – was made during the week of the Oscars. Catching a transit-lounge glimpse of this

spectacle, I marvelled at its imperial might, its furious flame-fanning of consumer desire. The desire for beauty (although of an exterior kind), wealth, fame, luxury and crappy movies. The Oscars are Hollywood at its height: an off-camera underclass at beck and call, the comedians neutered, cosmeticians in the wings, the cost of designer gowns ranging from US\$10,000 to \$40,000 per star, not to mention the diamonds. An orgy of opulence. The confirmation of America's technical flair and export prowess came with the crowning of "Gladiator", along with an unconscious identification with Imperial Rome. See, we rebuilt the Colosseum.

And therein lies the beguiling genius of Uncle Sam – the dissemination of illusions consumed as reality. Not just in movies, but in its products, politics and foreign policy.

*America is the land of the free.* Really? How about an Oscar from the World Academy of Jailers for holding the highest proportion of its citizens in custody. Of the global prison total, one quarter is incarcerated in the United States, minus the 152 inmates executed by George W. Bush when governor of Texas – a state that provides no funds for the defence of the poor. Much of Australia's prison system is now in the managerial grip of a U.S. correctional chain.

*America fosters unbridled competition, to the benefit of all.* In media, manufacturing, high-tech, entertainment, oil,



groceries and much more, the giants are on a roll. Four companies now control 87 percent of American beef, another four control more than 84 percent of its cereal, and just two companies control almost 80 percent of the world's grain trade. Almost all primary commodities are controlled by six or fewer companies. From such an elite are drawn the president's puppeteers: US\$2.3 million from Exxon Mobil helped elect Bush, whose administration is awash with former oil executives. Another Bush supporter, Rupert Murdoch, is now seeking to bypass cross-media ownership restrictions in New York and extend his opinion-shaping domain. The man who pays the piper produces "Gladiator" as well as the daily news. As in the ecosystem, diversity is shrinking.

*Happiness is honoured.* How come the most prosperous nation on Earth exhibits the highest rates of clinical depression? The country which wrote the happiness quest into its constitution reels from an epidemic of the malignant sadness. This, too, is a marketing opportunity. The annual report of pharmaceutical company, Eli Lilly, chortled, "Prozac changed everything, and that's just the beginning".

*America promotes the global expansion of human rights.* Not according to the record. Kyoto apart, the United States has spurned vital international treaties on war crimes, land mines, biochemical weapons, the prohibition of the execution of juveniles, arms controls, test

bans and even the Convention on the Rights of the Child (standing alone with Somalia). The refusal is based on a fierce assertion of U.S. sovereignty. As law professor Peter J. Spiro noted in the journal *Foreign Affairs*: “Only free trade agreements, as long as they are limited to free trade and do not include environment, labour issues or human rights, pass muster... because they are thought to serve American interests.” The nation so keen to safeguard its own identity is quick to submerge that of its trading partners. The key human right promoted abroad is the right to shop.

*The land of opportunity.* Yes, but the deck is stacked. The richest one percent has more financial wealth than is possessed by the poorest 90 percent of Americans combined; the starkest inequality among major Western nations. The net worth of Bill Gates, according to Ralph Nader, is equal to the combined net assets of the poorest 120 million Americans. The impact of such division percolates through the country. You see it the moment you land at the airport and feed a credit card into the trolley machine: the tattered touts, the stretch limos, the battered buses, the bright lights of Tiffany’s. What’s unseen is worse. About 40 million U.S. citizens are not covered by any form of health insurance, a figure that is increasing each year.

And so on, and on: the decline of public education, infrastructure, welfare and all the rest. Basically, the

United States is a republic of lobbyists attached to a global public relations machine bent on turning the whole of life into a series of paid-for, staged events, like guzzling fake food in themed restaurants, while displaying designer sportswear, and chattering about “Gladiator’s” special effects as we wash down Viagra with a Starbucks soy latte, and remain largely oblivious to the deeper tragedy taking place on the late great planet Earth.

George W. Bush is not an original. He is pursuing the doctrine formulated by his father on the eve of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992, which laid the groundwork for Kyoto. Bush the Elder said he was prepared to talk about the environment, but – here’s the rub – “the American way of life is not negotiable”. Got it? This mantra should be burnt into the brains of six billion earthlings, because the American way of life is now diminishing the life of everyone else. In disaster movie-speak, it’s Planet Hollywood versus the world.

Already, with less than five percent of the global population, the United States uses almost 30 percent of the planet’s resources. Its emission record is the world’s worst, spewing 20 tonnes of greenhouse gas per person per annum – a quarter of the world’s total. (Australia comes in second with 18 tonnes.) The United States consumes a quarter of the world’s oil, a third of its paper, and 40 percent of its beef and veal. The reason

given by the U.S. president, G.W. (Global Warming) Bush for his abandonment of Kyoto was uttered with commendable brevity: "Emission controls do not apply to the developing world." So? In most cases, their energy use is minuscule, only five percent of the per capita output of the West, while its inhabitants are climate fodder already, living and dying on the frontline of hurricanes and floods.

Emissions from developing nations will rise, but let's not overlook the reason. Their farms, factories and infrastructure are throbbing to service the appetites of distant consumers, whether it's Kenya airlifting flowers to the Netherlands, or Korea shipping cut-price cars. The source of the fumes ascending from their smokestacks is... us.

Meanwhile, the average U.S. citizen uses 10 times more coal than the average Chinese person – and contributes over 50 times more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. The average U.S. person also requires four times as much grain and 27 times as much petrol as the average Indian. The land of the free is also the land of the fat; its citizens are plagued with obesity.

While many may deny the existence of global warming, the overwhelming advice of the scientific community is that we should prepare now for rising seas and disruptive weather. The massive Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), reported that the 1990s

were the hottest decade since the 1860s, when instrument records were first taken, and that 1998 was the hottest year. (The second hottest year was 2001.) It foretold “future large-scale and possibly irreversible changes in Earth’s systems”. This view was actually supported by a Bush administration report earlier this year, eliciting a presidential swat: “that’s what the bureaucrats say.” Both reports broke new ground by citing the cause of the warming as “mostly due to human activity”. And this activity is not about to wind down.

The American way of life is not negotiable. Worse – the American way of life is inescapable. And the nation that runs the world is ruining the world as it runs amok in Armani, dazzling us with Julia Roberts and gangsta rap, making us sick with fast food, workaholia and porno violence, as its hordes of silent seamstresses in tropic locations stitch Calvin Klein onto our Y-fronts. All for the glory of shareholder value.

And yet, according to the Economic Policy Institute, “85 percent of the increase in the stockmarket since 1976 has accrued to one percent of the population”. It’s worth it, you say, it’s worth it. On highways, at airports, at universities, for a splash of change, I can slake my thirst with a Burger King strawberry milkshake. Even in Kathmandu, probably. It’s the nearest thing to mother’s milk, evoking dairy maids and Jersey cows, a singing-dancing Julie Andrews plucking the fleshiest berries.

Actually, this beverage contains more than 50 chemical flavours, including yummy amyl acetate, ethyl methyl-phenyl-glycidate and methyl anthranilate. Most of the flavour in most of the food eaten today in the United States is concocted by a handful of chemists in New Jersey. Like the Oscars, it is the triumph of illusion over reality. It might be bad for our health, bad for the ecosystem, but it's good for shareholder value. The economy, stupid.

The deeper you dig, the worse it gets. As soon as I write it, I hate that sentence. It's not that I think everything about America is appalling – far from it. Much of its culture is brilliant, amazing, its jazz, literature, Jewish humour, the free speech safeguards, creative dissent, the Macintosh PowerBook. On a dark, stormy highway with famished toddlers, I've even felt a rush of gratitude at the sight of the Golden Arches – sure, we'll have fries with that, unaware such an impulse serves to shrink the world's variety of crops. As with other food chains, according to the Worldwatch Institute, McDonald's demands in each country it enters that the varieties of potatoes grown by local farmers be replaced by their global standard, the Idaho Russet. Taste and technique must remain uniform, so the world's potato harvest is now "precariously homogenous", dependent on pesticides of declining oomph. As the climate warms, the range and resilience of the pests increase, invoking fears

of a potato blight – a global replay of the Irish famine.

In my madder moments of reflection about America, it seems like it's the Vietnam War era all over again; except, instead of "killing gooks", it's about making a killing. Instead of poisoning the forests and citizens of Asia with Agent Orange, it's about despoiling the biosystem of Earth with agents of all kinds. Back then a "peace probe" meant the napalming of a village; now the term "outsourcing" stands for a sweatshop. In the old days, the generals falsified body counts. These days the auditors falsify profits. Once it was the Vietcong who were blitzed with U.S. propaganda, now it is the rest of us who are blitzed with U.S. propaganda. Maybe the old slogan is true, after all: "We are all Vietcong."

The ad biz is a friendly harbour for creative types and some of its output is witty and fun. At its core, however, the industry is a volcanic eruption of lies: CDs will never scratch, you too can have the shiniest hair in the world, the stealth bomber is invisible, we appreciate your patience and will be with you shortly. No longer confined to promoting products, advertising has insinuated itself into the culture in such a way as to be indistinguishable from everyday life. It is not just the commercials seen on TV, it is the lifestyle depicted by the TV: the logos, restaurants, cars, facelifts and how-to-solve-a-problem-with-a-gun. The ads and the programs are synonymous. Without being aware of it, we live

inside a nonstop marketing carnival.

As insistent and pervasive as it is – piped into planes, buses, schools, motels, Borneo – its source is singular. *Seinfeld*, *Becker* and *Friends* are screened on Qantas flights; the menu of movies-on-demand in Australian hotels is almost exclusively from Hollywood. Does this matter? You be the judge. When did you last watch a sitcom from Brazil, a pop clip from India, a movie on love and marriage among Kurdish refugees in Paris? (On SBS TV, the last one. No guns, no fisticuffs; riveting.) While U.S. content lately honours ethnicity, to the point of caricature, and even alternative attitudes, the slant is quintessentially *God Bless America*. “Ours is a wonderful culture”, a U.S. soccer star said on TV. “We’re individualistic, we’re competitive, we’re aggressive.” Her warriors went on to conquer our local team, the Matildas, just like her “wonderful culture” is set to conquer the world.

Back in 1924, Monsieur Costil, then head of the French Gaumont cinema chain, predicted it would be “a very long time” before French films found favour in America, as they were “too strange and complicated”. Success in the United States required “a formula”. Three-quarters of a century later, Costil’s deconstruction of a Hollywood hit remains intact: “voyages, sports, dances, records and audacious examples of force”. Meanwhile, U.S. movies and the values they embody have swept the world. From his grave, Costil’s final caution has



bite: “remember, every American is at heart a ‘business man’.” And so too now are we.

The Man from Snowy River, having turned himself into a brand, is hunched at midnight over an intrusive “business activity statement”, pitting the depreciation of assets, including his “small and weedy beast”, against earnings for product endorsements. Perhaps he now regrets his capture of the colt from old Regret. Most people I know are working their guts out, even the ones who should be singing soft-rock ballads around the piano in pink dressing-gowns at Shady Acres. “Have you been on the Harbour Bridge at 7.30 p.m.?” gasps a friend, “It’s still peak hour”. In 1800, the governor of New South Wales set the working hours for convicts at 50 hours a week, much less than today’s relentless grind.

Workaholia is not the only Wall Street export. Share options and pay for performance have also spread to Europe and Australia, further sharpening wealth disparities. In the past decade, the salaries of CEOs in the United States have jumped 481 percent while worker pay has risen only 28 percent. Overall, U.S. CEOs earn 419 times the pay of the average U.S. worker. In 1976, an Australian CEO earned three times the average wage, today it can be up to 30 times as much. A survey conducted by the Australian *Financial Review* found that two years ago, CEO salary packages of Australia’s top 100 companies rose by 22 percent to an average annual

whack of \$1.45 million. On top of that come share options, with an average gross value of \$6.15 million.

Everyone is desperate to be a millionaire, a superstar, a dot.com (still!), a brand name – even the teens. This trivialisation of desire reaches into our innermost being, and that of our offspring. Marketing prattle is unstoppable, without any sense of its own absurdity: “Teens have a keen sense of ‘me’,” notes an analyst, whether it’s “selecting the colour of their laptop... or customising the colour of their cell phones”. Being aware of the latest fad has come to define what it means to be a child. The website *iTurf* uses “hip street talk to lure its young customers and sell them products online”, reported *The Sydney Morning Herald*, “...discussing such topics as breast size, how to attract sensitive boys and repel body hair”. Its founder plans to expand *iTurf* to offer teens their first credit cards, their first mortgages, their first chat-room romances. His goal is clear: “We’re going to own this generation.” Perhaps he will.

Thin on the ground are the anti-heroes; the mystics and mavericks who proclaim alternative values and hold in contempt the obsessive accumulation of wealth – today’s Jack Kerouac, Martin Luther King, Ned Kelly, Timothy Leary, the young Germaine Greer... Since I can remember, New York has hosted a profusion of wild young things, rebels without a super fund, or even a charge account at Gap, whose mission was to have fun

and shatter the self-confidence of millionaires. They set alight dollar bills at the stock exchange, let buzzards loose in Macy's, raged, plotted and howled against the machine. While times a-change and all that, even so, during a brief visit last year, I was taken aback by this fabulous city's capitulation to materialism and its brazen credo: get as much as you can as fast as you can.

People pound pavements shouting into mobiles; the skyscrapers double as billboards, the cafe dockets are emblazoned with bold reminders, "gratuity not included", each worthy recipient allotted a dotted line: chef, maître d, waitperson, etc., plus tax. The fixed price is becoming obsolete, inciting haggling, even over the price of toothpaste. This is fine in Morocco, enfolded into a ritual of mint tea, pipe passing and Sydney Greenstreet, but wears a bit thin in an alcove of Macy's at rush hour.

Don't imagine you can counter the vibe by cruising the Museum of Modern Art, where the "voluntary donation" is compulsory and the marketing relentless. (In the mid-1990s, gallery space at 120 large museums grew by three percent while the amount of space given to museum stores jumped by nearly 30 percent.) Even the message of the themed exhibition – "the idealists" – mirrors the mood of the times: marvel at these hoodwinked dreamers who contemplated a fairer world and wound up with Stalin. Silly Picasso.

Another light that's failed, certainly in Manhattan, is environmentalism. The only endangered species that sparked concern during my visit was a trench coat by Yves Saint Laurent, costing US\$9,250, which had been "scooped from the stores". The coat is made from the skin of rainforest pythons. More than 10 million pythons have been taken from the wild in the past 15 years. (From 1985 to 1998, Indonesia exported more than 4.5 million pythons, either skinned or alive.) A pink python jacket from Chanel, with white chiffon trim and matching skirt, retailing at US\$8,455, had also slithered out of the boutiques. "Spokeswomen for four fashion houses that use python", the *New York Times* wryly noted, "said they had no idea where the skins come from".

Hardly anyone knows or cares where anything comes from, or where it ends up, because it is only what's on show that matters, in the windows, in your face, on the billboards, at the Oscars... fame, riches, power; these are the drivers that seem to be shaping the third millennium, whether we like it or not, despite their ravaging of planet and personhood. "Wealth beyond what is natural is of no more use than water to a container that is full", said the Epicurean philosophers of Ancient Greece, but the dazzling package of popular culture proclaims the opposite – happiness depends on high consumption. We'll keep on splurging till the wells run dry.

Soon after the trip to New York, I visited Tonga, one

of the poorest nations on Earth. Its political system is unjust, resources are few, and yet I was surprised by joy. Not only mine, but that of the inhabitants. Laughter echoing through open doorways day and night, none of it canned (scarce TV), extended families and communal lifestyle (free babysitting), time plentiful, shops few, food fresh, a profusion of local poetry, song and dance, none of it tech-dependent, and the people not bent on turning every tourist into a meal ticket. Not yet, anyway.

Sure, most of us would prefer to live in pulsating New York than to emulate the Tongans, including the Tongans themselves, probably, and therein lies the dilemma of our time. If everyone lived like New Yorkers, what would be left alive? Perhaps the flurry of survivor TV shows is a subliminal playing out of a post-apocalypse foreboding. Solar panels and recycling are not much chop against melting ice caps, rising seas, gaping ozone holes and the mass extinction of species. Even if Kyoto is fully enforced, it will only reduce atmospheric carbon by five percent within 10 years. What is required to stabilise climate is a reduction of between 60 and 80 percent.

The American way of life is not negotiable. And it is not sustainable.

The loss of biodiversity, according to Worldwatch's editorial director Ed Ayres is "arguably the most dangerous of all threats to human security at large, and to the long-term sustainability of civilisation". He cites an

American Museum of Natural History survey of 400 biological scientists, which found “a large majority” believe that during the next 30 years one of every five species alive today will become extinct. It is no longer enough to have an ecological notion; we need to create an ecological self. This is a hard call when you’re wearing a trench coat stitched from pythons.

Sooner or later, the business community will need to come to its senses. It will need to go further than putting in skylights, sorting waste and green-washing its logos. Can we rely on its leadership? Corporate titans would rather win a battle for market dominance than save a species from annihilation. But in the end, there may not be a market, unless the wholesale theft of the future is stopped.

What Monsieur Costil foresaw as the philosophic flimsiness of U.S. movies all those years ago – action, force, a formula – was more recently echoed in the *Harvard Business Review* by consultant Gary Hamel as he skewered the lack of managerial foresight: “The future is left largely unexplored and the capacity to act, rather than to think or imagine, becomes the sole measure of leadership.” A common trait in this country, too, both in business and politics.

What an illusion to believe that a bunch of competitive, self-interested workaholics all trying to get as rich as possible can build a sustainable future – an illusion

largely fostered by those at the top.

Will globalisation accentuate future-blindness, or can it also trigger a countervailing wave of enlightenment? It will do both. Thankfully, a growing number of U.S. citizens share the above concerns, although few of them sit on Capitol Hill. The global Green Party boycott of Exxon Mobil and other predators of the commons is a clue to future strategy, as was the showdown over proprietary drug rights in AIDS-stricken Africa. Global tax, global justice and a global environmental agency are all on the horizon. The concept of sovereignty was already transcended by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982, which protects the ocean as “the common heritage of all humankind”, in which all rights in the resources of the area are vested. By similar means, eventually, all arms trading can be ended and an agency can be established to distribute surplus food to the starving.

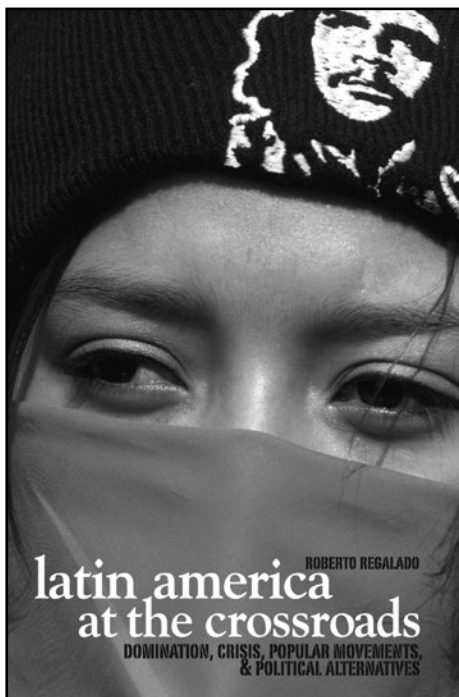
At its deepest level, globalisation is about sharing, just like the internet, and once understood will incite a value revolution of such sweep that within 100 years the main business of business will no longer be business, and politics will no longer be about swapping preferences, placating nutters and jailing refugees. The total goal will be planetary restoration – social, economic, ecologic.

The question to ask ourselves as we journey into the 21st century is this: is each of us at heart a businessperson,

or is each of us at heart a human being? On our answer will hinge the fate of the Earth.

May 19, 2001





## **LATIN AMERICA AT THE CROSSROADS**

Roberto Regalado

With remarkable clarity and breadth, Regalado describes a resurgent Latin America struggling anew to break free from its history of domination and exploitation, explaining how the recent strengthening of popular movements — from the water struggles in Bolivia to the landless movement in Brazil — has led to the strategic and tactical redefinition of left political parties and social movements and a revisiting of the perennial question: reform or revolution?

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## **Richard's Inbox** ***an email firestorm***



Ditch the hyperbole. The Bush administration scraped in by the skin of its teeth, most likely won't last more than one term, so how much damage can it do in that time? Is America forcing the rest of the world to eat its hamburgers? No, this is a free choice (something not seen in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan) made by individuals in other countries. Obviously you have a problem with that. If you want to get all hysterical and bent out of shape that's your choice, but I doubt reasonable folk will be buying your apocalyptic vision.



I was appalled by your bigoted, anti-American, anticapitalist and antidemocratic diatribe. Why single out America, other than to demonstrate your open prejudice against it? You have quite some conspiracy theories there; connecting the Roman age with Gladiator. Do you really believe that Mr. Bush organised for Gladiator to win? Education, access to technology, access to investment funds, ability to live in a house, ability to feed oneself and one's family, quality of public infrastructure such as roads, utilities etc. Aren't these the opportunities we are talking about here. Is it a crime that people become rich? From start to finish I felt that your vindictive, inciteful words were the product of a bitter, dogmatic mind. I wondered whether you have ever stepped foot in the United States. If I want to read some thinly veiled left-wing, anti-American propaganda I'll drop by the local socialist party gathering – at least there they do not hide their real thoughts.



Re: mass extinction of species, I believe the human race is on the way out. Latest figures show that birth rates are dropping around the world, male impotence rates are rising (in spite of Viagra), AIDS is rife in Africa and China, while Indonesia and the Middle East are due to implode before long. The Russian Mafia will sell an atom bomb to bin Laden, or the Hamas, or some other fanatic, who will set it off in Washington. I'd give the world another 100 years at most. Rogue plant genes will wipe out crops. A few mad scientists will go one better than Dr. Frankenstein and clone an android or build a machine that thinks. Hopefully, at the age of 73, after being in two wars, I'll be gone before the whole thing comes to pass and the Earth becomes like Mars. No I'm not paranoid – just fatalistic. I enjoy life, have an excellent wine cellar and friends to share it with. America reminds me of the old Vikings, plundering the world to fill their pockets and maintain their lifestyle no matter what. George W. Bush is born for the role.



Some Americans do see behind the official mask. They work for the environment, social justice and public health. Their struggle merits acknowledgement. "It is not just the commercials seen on TV, it is the lifestyle depicted on TV..." So true, but what scares me, as a regular visitor to China, is that it applies equally to that rapidly developing land. Even in rural areas, many Chinese now have TV or have access to it, and the consumption message is far stronger than in Oz. They believe that they have to modernise and catch up with the USA. Indeed, mindless consumption is an important status symbol to China. On one visit to Beijing, my hosts insisted that we sit with them in a motionless taxi, stuck in a traffic jam for 45 minutes, only 100 meters from a metro station that could have taken us to our destination in five minutes. Pepsi, McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken are all well established in China with the young, despite their high prices and inferior products compared with local food.

Nevertheless, I keep returning to China because, despite the such indoctrination, sustainable development appears closer there than in the USA or Oz.



Yes, the USA is a monster. History demonstrates that other monsters will be spawned to counter and/or exploit the USA. Some of these will be created by America's thirst for enemies to feed its military industrial complex. China was well on its way to democracy despite its fading, out of touch Communist Party. Then George Bush came along to give them a lifeline. Militant Muslim fundamentalism will also get a kick along in gaining support from nonaligned and moderate Muslim countries, who feel they have more to fear from Bush and his cowboys than they do from Osama bin Laden.



Was recently in Nairobi, Kenya and saw the hothouses from whence come the flowers destined for Europe. Was struck by the almost comic (black, of course) absurdity of it – having seen and experienced so much dire poverty in that country. And yet, and yet... I also saw and experienced more laughter and joy in poor Kenyan villages than in the suburbs of Sydney.



The most interesting question is whether all "empires" in history have had similar attitudes. The ultimate problem from a sustainable point of view is that the same behaviour that leads a species or social group to ascendancy will also lead to disaster.



Your article contains too many truths of the kind that people are either (a) aware of and can't deal with or (b) unaware of and don't want to know about. I feel this way myself. The never-ending litany of problems confronting Mother Nature is rarely accompanied by a list of viable solutions. The result: I, we, feel helpless and hopeless and switch off in every sense of the word.



I'm a political advisor at the Parliament of Victoria and, unfortunately, I accord wholeheartedly with your analysis. I'm unsure of the best and most effective method of change. If more people read, we would have a better chance. But unless it moves on a screen, or is "interactive", attention spans border on nonexistent. I have no answers. This is not a hardline environmentalist issue, in fact it goes to our very existence.



Gluttony has taken hold of this country in forms other than food. America is not the Great Satan – it is the Great Pretender. It rots from the inside, like a tooth that by all external appearances is perfectly stable.



One football game in the United States uses the same amount of electricity as Bangladesh uses in six months!!



As I flicked through the *Good Weekend* I could not help but notice that on page four an advertisement for a car 95 percent of the population will never be able to afford, page six cosmetics beyond the reach of a single working mum, appliances that cost more than some entire kitchens, hotels most see only in (American) movies, outfits that cost more than cars, the list goes on. Does this make anyone at the *Sydney Morning Herald* feel even the slightest bit uncomfortable? It could be worse. I suppose, you could have published in the *Financial Review*.



In recent years the focus of American corporations has moved from "growth by identifying and satisfying customer needs" towards "increasing shareholder value" – American shareholders. This has been fostered by "payment for performance" where all levels of management are measured by the cost reductions they must meet, regardless of the sales growth

achieved. I worked in a division of Kodak in Melbourne dealing with the Motion Picture Industries in Australia and New Zealand. Despite outstanding growth in a market where Kodak holds a virtual monopoly, my position and those of colleagues were made redundant soon after a new General Manager was imported from USA. This scenario has occurred a number of times in recent years at Kodak, where the drive to feed the insatiable hunger of the American corporation has caused restructuring and ongoing staff reductions in Australia. The “good corporate global citizen” image that American corporations try to foster is a disguise for a culture that only thinks of the world as a feeding ground for American profits.



You dismiss energy use of developing nations as relatively small, and rising due to the West’s consumer demands. I have lived here in Hong Kong for nearly a decade, and every year the air pollution increases. From the island, it is a rare day when you can see the hills of Kowloon. Much of the pollution rolls down from the Motherland, where the Chinese are gung ho capitalists toiling to save for cable TV, or Gucci. How did it happen, this belief that consumerism will make us happy?





There is no doubt that the America you describe is the dominant paradigm. But in my recent extensive travels I unearthed a surprisingly vast sub-culture of “AlternAmericans”. Not the overt counterculturalists, the try-hard hippies and Generation Xers in their Doc Martens and slogans. Rather, I mean the invisible Americans, the reflective Americans, the Yanks with conscience and consciousness. They do exist. I have to confess that this trip I spent a lot of time in meditation centres, in hot springs, bookshops and student cafes. I spent time at people’s homes and at universities, in national parks and at fishermen’s pubs. I talked to people in laundromats, in toilets, on buses and street corners. And what I began to sense in the people I met was a genuine humility. Quite at odds with the careless, doubtless, opaque face


of the America we mostly encounter, this quality intrigued me and I followed it, like a seam of gold, encouraged by its glimmer. For all their cheesy talk and slip-on smiles, I discovered that Americans truly possess a far greater optimism and openness than we Australians could ever muster. By comparison, we are gloomy and reluctant to offer anything without a strict guarantee we will receive something in return.

Where I anticipated judgment, I was often embraced with friendliness and good humour. Everyone oozed a kind of implicit trust in life's possibilities. This "can-do" attitude, whilst responsible perhaps for America's self-assured, self-assumed world leadership, is also responsible for the groundswell of feeling against mainstream popular culture. Environmentally, creatively, ethically, idealistically, I became aware that America is forging ahead with complete faith in a better future. AlternAmerica not only believes it's possible to turn things around, but is doing something about it.

They sell organic vegetables at the Farmers' Market; they build earth-covered homes in the hills of Ojai; they deliver meals to the homeless in the neighbouring park; they car pool across the Bay Bridge; they sit in meditation and take a long hard look at themselves; they plant community gardens along the rail lines; they build entire suburbs with the disabled in mind. This belief in their own power, generates a momentum that is both exciting and inspiring. By sheer numbers alone, Americans exert enormous pressure on their government and thus on the world at large. Offer a suggestion for change in Australia and you are liable to be accused of big-noting yourself. Offer the same suggestion in the States, and they'll ask how they can help you achieve it, clap you on the back and announce "Good for you!" As someone who thrives on creative challenges and inspired ideas, I found this atmosphere invigorating. Yes, I missed the more subtle analytical approach that Australian culture is founded on, but at this crucial time in the planet's demise, is that of much help? I personally feel we have long moved through the stage of assessment and need now to be taking action.

 Globalisation is not the problem. I argue for an increased internationalism of people, to defy the boundaries of nation states, to destroy the ideas underlying racism and sexism. By couching an analysis focused upon the United States you deny the similar eco-atrocities happening in Australia. Global capitalism will never be about sharing. There is only one solution – that is revolution, not just of the mind, but of the material basis of the distribution of wealth and labour! From the Third World I have no doubt this will come, and be bloody. By which time I ask: will the world still be able to sustain life?

 Less than 10 percent of the world is being “homogenised” as you would put it (US, Canada, UK, Australia, odd bits of Western Europe, all of Philippines). The remaining 90 percent is still full of diversity and hard to tame (Spanish speaking South America, Africa, China, Indian subcontinent, all of Eastern Europe, and much of Western Europe). Before the advent of satellite TV, there was a huge uproar in India about the evil influence of STAR TV, CNN, CNBC and MTV. Now all have been overtaken by Hindi program content and local film music.

 I have some doubts about the logic behind your virulence:

- 1. The 80-20 rule** All over the world (except extinct communist regimes) 20 percent or less of the population control 80 percent or more of the wealth. So your observation is also applicable to Europe, Asia, Australia and South America. Maybe even Africa. In fact, the disparities are less justifiable in poor countries from an egalitarian point of view. So why does it happen? Simple: the IQ of people falls within a Gaussian distribution. So ability to grab or create wealth and smell opportunities also follows same Gaussian distribution. Only five percent can do it. Blame it on the genes not Global Warming or Bush. It is part of human inheritance.



2. **Funding of Elections** There are four methods: business, labor unions, state funding, corruption. Which is better? With globalisation the unions are a spent force. If business demands its pound of flesh after getting their man in, so would the unions if they had the clout. State funding is never enough as it never gives the "competitive edge". So we need to decide if funding by corrupt practices is better than funding by business. Maybe Richard feels corruption of the Indian variety is a superior form of election funding. Many in India may disagree.
3. **America and competition** If in fact there is no competition and [there are] just cartels, how come companies report such poor performance. Except for services, there is the constant pressure of low priced goods from the developing world (witness the riots in Seattle and Geneva). In the case of services, the fact that AT&T is doing badly shows that monopolies have been broken up. Even in drugs, India has forced American companies to offer AIDS and malaria drugs at lower costs than available for US citizens. There will always be vested interests to safeguard accustomed life styles. For example, during Harold Wilson's stint, as prime minister of Britain, the health workers went on strike. As soon as the lowest were paid better wages, the unions clamoured for maintenance of HISTORICAL DIFFERENCES. It is all a question of the continuing battle between individual greed and its regulation. I do think the regulatory authorities in the U.S. are pretty good.

There will always be a set of bright human beings who now and then get the better of the people in the regulatory institutes. After all it is humans v. humans and the brighter will win. *It is not for want of trying.*

4. **Material well being and mental health** The false linkage between material well being and happiness is a feature of all parts of the globe. Even India where ancient sages have postulated otherwise. I think lifestyles and priorities are personal not national issues. You can neither force consump-

tion of Prozac nor can you force abstinence. In fact, in the 1950s and 1960s, the head of an American family working 40 to 45 hours (wife at home) could provide a decent living. Only now it is necessary to put in 80 to 90 hours (so both husband and wife have to work) to get similar lifestyles. So what has happened? Global competition. And what I can say is that the developing world has indeed benefited.

5. **Seinfeld and Friends** You won't find them in China or most of rural India or Europe. Reason? Language. That is it. Language. Do not blame the Americans if Australians speak English or what passes for English.
6. **Workaholia** It is *not* a U.S. export, Richard, you got it wrong. Horribly wrong, my dear. It is a U.S. import from India, Bangladesh, Thailand, the Philippines... An engineer drawing \$4,000 in India does as good and as much work as an engineer drawing \$60,000 in the U.S. Hence the 70-hour week and Prozac.
7. **Everyone wants to be a millionaire in America** Same in India, though I agree it is less virulent. Mainly since opportunities are less and so are the chances. Not for want of trying...
8. **Global Warming** This indeed is a bit worrying. But enlightened self-interest has also been practiced by all e.g., Japan (whales, dolphins) Norway (whales) Australia (coal, uranium) UK (the royal household). In any case even the Kyoto committee could muster courage to ask only for a five percent cut and it would have done no damn good. So all that G.W. Bush did was to reject something less than useless. Anyway, America is not like most African countries where the head of state lasts a lifetime.
9. **Food for the starving** We have the same comments made in India. Why allow food to be exported or rot in warehouses when people are starving. It is lack of purchasing power not absence of food grains that is at the root of starvation in most places. Any distribution system (except in totalitarian regimes where such articles as yours would be scissored out) based in the free world has its inefficiency. Food stamps

are stolen. A decent welfare cheque keeps idle people away from honest labor. So we come to means testing. Same old problem. Large systems lack empathy. America is not the problem. It is humankind. You and me.

Over the weeks, the email flood became nerve-wracking. Long gone are my soapbox days and the strategies for change are no big secret: educate, infiltrate, organise, agitate. The last correspondent narrows it all down to the mystery of humankind. You and me. Relationships. It is one of the issues tackled later in this book in Part Four. I get the sense that as the world hots up, many people's patience is wearing thin. My personal strategy is to think aloud, perhaps too loud, and to spark debate.

**TOXIC TEXAS:  
KILLING YOU SOFTLY WITH MY FUMES**

DEATH ROW ISN'T the only way Texas keeps its population down. It is also America's most polluting state, "top in the belching of toxic chemicals and carcinogens into the air", writes Ed Vuillimay in *The Scotsman* (June 13 2002); "top in chemical spills, top in ozone pollution, top in carbon-dioxide emissions, top for mercury emission, top in clean-water violations, top in the production of hazardous waste." Two hundred oil-related industries are based in Houston alone. Thirty of the world's dirtiest polluters are among those that bankrolled the Bush campaigns, both for Texas governor and the U.S. presidency.

These include Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Shell, Amoco and Alcoa Aluminum. Their grip is tight on Texas politics, the judiciary, the environmental regulator and much else besides – Kyoto didn't stand a chance.

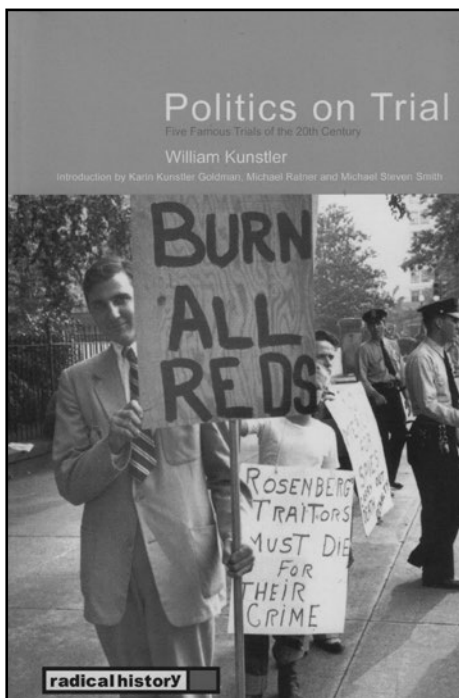
Oil industries often suffer “upsets”, or massive unexpected toxic effusions, that are not penalised under Texan legislation, or even disclosed to the public. A “grandfather clause” offers immunity from fines to firms with worn down, clapped-out facilities, which merely serves to discourage upgrades. The “grandfathered” Alcoa smelting plant at Rockdale exuded 100,000 tons of toxins in a single year. And its former chairman, Paul O'Neill, now U.S. Secretary Treasurer, has lectured Wall Street on business ethics.

The sky is often dark in Texas. Croplands turn barren. Trees wither and die. Children are born with deformities. Families downwind from the “dirty 30” polluters contract a range of ailments. Such a scenario might seem ripe for the likes of an Erin Brokovich, the scourge of polluters portrayed with charismatic flair by Julia Roberts, the angel of compensation.

Legal initiatives instigated in haste by G.W. Bush during his early days as governor have made it “all but impossible” for victims of polluters to bring a class action against big corporations. Commenting on recently disclosed deals between the Bush family, energy companies, arms traders and the White House, the seasoned

political editor of Texas's respected *Austin Chronicle*, Michael King, explained to *The Scotsman* why he dismisses the Bush corporate elite conspiracy theory: "It is perfectly clear from what they do in public what they're aiming at: managing the global economy to their own advantage, and doing a pretty good job of it."

Given that the United States is considered the most polluting nation on Earth, then it follows that Texas must be the foulest place on the planet.



## **POLITICS ON TRIAL**

### **Five Famous Trials of the 20th Century**

William Kunstler

As the United States once again finds itself adrift in a violent sea of patriotism, bigotry and fear, it is an appropriate time to address this country's dark past of political repression and racist scapegoating.

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## **WHO KILLED THE COUNTERCULTURE?**

THE YEAR 1968 saw a series of youth rebellions in the West, ricocheting from Paris to Chicago and beyond, all challenging the materialist paradigm. Beatle-mania and bra-burning heralded a reversion, so it was thought, to a radical, low consumption lifestyle. In the headlines, it was a time of revolution, in the boardrooms, it was time of counterrevolution. The United States may have lost the war against Vietnam, but its leaders won another significant battle – for the hearts and minds of their own children. It began with a phonecall.

In 1968, Florence Skelly, a cofounder of Yankelovich Inc., then a fledgling U.S. consulting firm specialising in



consumer trends, took a call from the president of Playtex, the renowned manufacturer of women's underwear. As the partners from Yankelovich later recounted, it was the "call that would forever change the way marketers think about their customers". The president of Playtex was in a state of distress. His wife had done something shocking, defiant, unbelievable. She had thrown away her girdle.

Florence Skelly tried to soothe the ruffled titan. Then came the question that would, according to the Yankelovich memoir, change the course of marketing forever. The Playtex president bellowed: "What does this mean for my business?"

A short future, most likely. The forces that were transforming culture were beginning to impact on Playtex. "When mothers tried to pass on esoteric girdle knowledge to their daughters", recall the team at Yankelovich, "their daughters weren't listening". So the marketers "counselled" Playtex on new advertising strategies that would appeal to a new generation of women. This "translated into salvation" for the company, which abandoned stiff bone stays and introduced flexible fabrics. "Playtex sales snapped back." Phew. And a new consumer strategy was born – generational marketing.

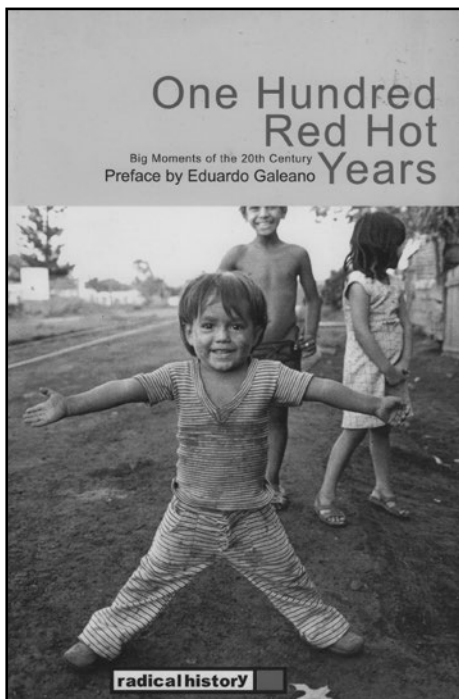
It was the beginning of the end for the counterculture. In 1970, two founders of Yankelovich were summoned to the 56th floor of the Rockefeller Centre by

John D. Rockefeller III, heir to one of the greatest fortunes in U.S. history. Like the president of Playtex, he, too, was flummoxed by the protest generation, the riots, the rhetoric, the anti-Vietnam War marches, the drugs, the lawlessness, the bra-lessness. Rockefeller had finally got wind of it all, from a state-of-the-nation documentary hosted by Walter Cronkite, and re-researched by Yankelovich Inc. At this fateful skyscraper summit, “clouds swirling past the windows”, the mass marketers were handed a plum assignment – one that would rescue the status quo, presided over by the most powerful men in the world: *Find ways in which business leaders could interact with this rebellious new generation of American youth.*

And they did. Rockefeller’s funding allowed Yankelovich to build a bridge between social science and business strategy, and to evolve a “sophisticated” understanding of the generationally driven changes in values and lifestyles that shape the way consumers spend. The payoff? For the West, streamlined foundation garments, junk bonds, hippies-turned-yuppies, creative accountancy. For Yankelovich, a lucrative corporate legend and a flashy focus on generation gaps.

“Xers have a very different sense of the pace and intensity of life” proclaim the marketers today. This sense of a swift acceleration of time is not just an attribute of the moment, but a basic condition of Xer life. For Yankelovich, the implications are immense. If time-starved

Xers can't be bothered buying a different pair of sneakers for every sport, no problem! "Out of this shift in generationally driven values, cross-trainer athletic footwear was born." Again, phew. Business as usual forever, and more of it.



## **ONE HUNDRED RED HOT YEARS**

Preface by Eduardo Galeano

“It’s the adventure of making changes and changing ourselves which makes worthwhile this flicker in the history of the universe that we are, this fleeting warmth between two glaciers”.

—Eduardo Galeano.

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# **PART THREE**

**BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL, AFTER 9/11**

## **BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL, AFTER 9/11**

MY HEAD STILL reeling from live footage of the September attacks on the World Trade Centre, an email burst forth from a U.S. marine. “I bet people like you are happy now”, it said, “probably smiling inside a little, thinking ‘glad it put you in your place’ or ‘maybe now they won’t be so damned arrogant’. I promise you that won’t happen, we will be stronger.” As the world’s news readers were starting to focus on Osama bin Laden, why had this soldier targeted a stranger in Australia?

Bill K. had been “meaning to write” since coming across the main essay in Part Two, (published in the May 19, 2001, edition of *Good Weekend*), during one of his fre-

quent visits to Sydney. Bill had wanted to republish these views for a wider audience: "I think Americans should know what people like you think of us, and our values." Perhaps this slim volume will satisfy him. "You go on hating us, for what?" he asked. "If you and other Australians didn't watch our TV shows, and our movies, eat our foods and buy our stuff, we wouldn't be so strong and then you wouldn't hate us so bad would you? What is it that you hate? Do you hate Americans because we are successful, or is it some other wacky thing, similar to the weak-minded cowards who did this act on us today?" His anger at this moment in history was understandable, if misconstrued. He asked, "what makes you so right, and us so wrong?"

Criticism of U.S. values should not to be equated with a hatred of U.S. people, I hastily replied. "I love American people. What's happened is obscene... and what might yet come. Don't waste your rage for revenge on the wrong target. This is not only a bad day for the United States, it's a bad day for humanity. I wish you well."

The marine shot back. How dare I depict his president in a bad light ("when you hardly know him") or mock the Statue of Liberty, or Uncle Sam. "Don't worry about my 'rage'. I have been in areas where the likes of you would never venture, but [where] many of your country folk have [the Australian military] – who have

accompanied the likes of me in many a conflict, despite what you would like to admit.” The United States is deservedly triumphant, according to Bill, which is why it attracts so many immigrants, including Australians. “We would even welcome you and others like you with open arms, because we are better than you! Bill K., Proud American!”

My first reaction to this email was a stab of sympathy, even guilt. I regretted my failure to make clear that the butt of my critique was his country’s imperial state of mind, as seen in its foreign policy and cultural overkill, and not his warm-hearted compatriots, most of whom are oblivious to the deeds done in their name.

George Bush the first had flaunted this imperiousness with a gritty phrase on the eve of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro: “The American way of life is not negotiable.” If that’s so, as I argued in Part Two, then it will eventually cost the rest of us an arm and a leg and a lung; and maybe more. While I would rather live in the shadow of the White House than at the mercy of sharia law, the policies of Washington, I came to realise, reflect the ruthlessness of corporate America, which treats other lands according to their rating: market, mine, sweatshop or basket case. Uncle Sam’s rapaciousness is both driven and disguised by a mix of pop culture, mass media, brand fetishism and propaganda so clever and tantalising that most of us feel the sooner



we're indoctrinated into the American Dream, the better. Hey, don't stop the music.

The events since 9/11 have heightened my concerns. The wounded Goliath is on a rampage – armed to the teeth, adored by the polls, unfettered by law, answering to no one and licensed to kill. Western nations fall in behind the furious avenger, beguiled by the notion of civilisation protecting itself, striding forth with the flame of freedom. Our commentators applaud. The “Axis of Evil” speech is hailed by *The Australian's* foreign editor as a “key defining document of the new era” in which George W. Bush guides us beyond the “magnificent” Cold War strategy of deterrence to the brave new magnificence of “pre-emption”, where the United States upholds democracy, topples tyrannies and makes the world a better place.

A better place for whom? Some see Uncle Sam as he sees himself – a Santa Claus for all seasons, dispensing lollies, gadgets, global justice, Oscars, blue-chip stocks and fizzy beverages. Others see him as the school bully in charge of the tuckshop. Perhaps it's a case of split personality: a good Uncle Sam and a bad Uncle Sam. America provides more freedoms, thrills and opportunities for its own citizens than can be matched by any other nation. The good Uncle Sam regards this as a hot franchise to market for the betterment of all. The bad Uncle Sam wants to preserve the cash flow at head office

by any means necessary, even if it destroys the planet and all the wretches who get in the way.

Bush's "new kind" of war in the name of freedom is actually an old kind of imperial excursion to extend America's grip on the wealth of the world. A wealth which should belong to everyone.

But instead of a misnamed bombing spree, which incubates terror, what the world needs most is an ongoing, unconditional fairness revolution to eradicate the roots of rage. Such a sweeping global ethic is absent from the priorities of the millionaire mogul hawks who run Washington, but it was briefly glimpsed at street level in the rubble-strewn surrounds of the twin towers.

New Yorkers responded to the attack with courage and compassion, refuting their caricature (by me) of being a bunch of hard-nosed money-grabbers bent on ripping off their best friends. A storeowner handed out sports shoes to the women fleeing the mayhem, so they could fling off their high heels. "That is a New Yorker", noted a senator, "and there are millions of us". This surge of mateship was matched by a spell of self-examination which offered hope for how the White House might deal with the attacks, once the president could be located. "Let us take time to deliberate", suggested a foreign relations expert, who argued that military force would be less effective in undermining terrorists than a demonstration of restraint. Others, too, urged the

United States to hold its fire, and avoid further suffering. The United Nations or World Court could put Osama bin Laden on trial, “even in absentia”, condemning him and his network as criminals. Some called for a period of deep reflection.

These voices were submerged in a sea of flags as the loudspeakers blared *God Bless America*. Network anchors dressed like brigadiers and frowned over maps. *Newsweek* beat the drum for military strikes, covert attacks, confiscation of assets, rapid arrests, closure of safe houses, the boosting of state power, regardless of the “prattling of civil libertarians”. For the rest of the world it was, mysteriously, “the end of the free ride”. Foreigners could no longer “denounce America by day and consume its bounties by night”. Our own commentators, adopting the mantle of honorary Americans, echoed these sentiments like drunken parrots, dismissing the few doubters as traitors.

When the twin towers collapsed, so did America’s sense of invincibility. Perhaps this is why the grisly deaths in Manhattan seemed so much more shocking and outrageous than the deaths of hundreds of thousands of terror victims elsewhere in the world. The mob wanted vengeance. “The response to this unimaginable 21st century Pearl Harbour”, roared Australian expatriate Steve Dunleavy, a columnist for Rupert Murdoch’s *New York Post*, “should be as simple as it is swift – kill the bastards.

A gunshot between the eyes, blow them to smithereens, poison them if you have to. As for cities or countries that host these worms, bomb them into basketball courts.” And so it came to pass.

When the world’s mightiest air force unleashed itself on the world’s poorest nation, the result was never in doubt. Carnage, and lots of it. Among my reasons for opposing the action in Afghanistan was the awkward fact that the Taliban, however insufferable, did not plan or execute the attacks on the United States. But why let the truth get in the way of a sitting duck? The Taliban was a vile theocracy which subjugated women, mutilated criminals and disallowed free speech. It deserved to be crushed. Maybe so. In which case, why does our coalition ally with Saudi Arabia?

Until recently, the Taliban was seen as a commercial ally. In 1997, its officials were flown to George Bush’s home state of Texas, where they barbecued T-bones beside a swimming pool with the vice-president of the oil giant Unocal. With less than five percent of the world’s population, the U.S. consumes over a quarter of the world’s oil, for which it relies heavily on imports. On the Unocal agenda was siphoning at least 60 billion barrels of oil (maybe up to 270 billion) from Turkmenistan, part of the last great resource frontier. The plan was to pump black gold across the landlocked wastes of Afghanistan, through Pakistan to a terminal in the

Arabian Sea. Until recently, these talks were thought to have collapsed in December 1998, when Unocal pulled out, citing civil unrest. In fact, soon after its election, the Bush administration resumed the talks, believing the Taliban could be trusted to support the pipeline, as it supported the War on Drugs. (Washington partly funded the Taliban's curbs on cultivation of opium poppies, now back in bloom.)

Another party to the pipeline negotiations was Enron, the famously bankrupt energy trader which, with Washington's backing, managed to deregulate, privatise and vandalise several developing nations. Enron's disgraced chairman, Ken Lay, a former Pentagon economist, was the biggest single investor in George W. Bush's campaign for president. In return, Lay was able to appoint White House regulators, shape energy policies and block controls of offshore tax havens. Enron had "intimate contact with Taliban officials", according to a report in the web newspaper *Albion Monitor*, and the energy giant's much reviled Dabhol project in India was set to benefit from a hook-up with the pipeline.

These negotiations collapsed in August 2001, when the Taliban asked the United States to help reconstruct Afghanistan's infrastructure and provide a portion of the oil supply for local needs. The notes of this meeting, which took place only weeks before the strike against America, are now the subject of a lawsuit between

Congress and the White House. Was the Taliban really destroyed for harbouring terrorists? Or was it destroyed for failing to further the ambitions of Texan millionaires?

At the end of 2001, George Bush appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as the U.S. special envoy to Kabul. Another appointee, the likable, green-gowned interim president, Hamid Karzai, is credited with setting up a post-Taliban, pro-oil regime. Both men are former consultants to Unocal. (And, according to political commentator Tariq Ali, Mr. Karzai is “from the CIA”.)

Apart from a thirst for revenge and a thirst for oil, the official reason for the bombing of Afghanistan is to eliminate terrorists. In that case, why isn't America bombing itself? The United States is both a retirement village for seasoned terrorists and a traditional training ground, as others have argued in detail. Prominent torturers, executioners and death squad commanders from Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti and even Pol Pot's Cambodia have been resettled in suburban serenity, far from their former killing fields. Florida reportedly seethes with a multitude of hot-blooded anti-Castro saboteurs and hijackers. The future supply of career sadists is guaranteed by the U.S. Army's training centre at Fort Benning, Georgia, once renowned as the School of the Americas, which makes the al-Qaeda camps seem like a Teletubbies picnic. Among its alumni are South America's titans of torture, including the former head of

General Pinochet's secret police.

When George Bush depicts his fellow citizens as “good” and his quarry as “evil”, it mirrors the mindset of his enemy, the holy warriors against Great Satan. And it means anything is permitted. In Washington, the torture of suspected terrorists by the FBI and other agencies – either with “a truth serum or beatings” – was promoted at the highest level. The captives at Guantánamo Bay, hooded, bound, head-shaved and spotlit, are deemed the “worst of the worst”, and denied the protection of the Geneva Convention. Those tainted with al-Qaeda connections have been secretly sent to lands where torture is legal, according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* report which cites the CIA-friendly regimes of Egypt and Jordan. One diplomat crowed: “It allows us to get information from terrorists in a way we can't do on U.S. soil.” The procedure of extradition is bypassed.

America was congratulated for the speedy assembling of its “coalition”, conjuring up an image of the steely, speedy Orcs mustering Hobbits, with Tony Blair bouncing up and down to prove his inner Orc-hood. America defined the goal, led the chase and dictated the strategy. It seemed puzzling, back in October, that so little time was spent in trying to cut a deal with the Taliban. (Nothing was known then of the oil imbroglio.) Instead, a deadline was peremptorily set to hand over Osama... or else. Not such an easy task, as it turned out.

Was there any other way? Perhaps, with time, dollars, pressure from Pakistan and the mediation of senior Islamic clerics, the Taliban may well have been enticed to join the hunt. (A police operation in partnership with host countries has since proved more effective in flushing out al-Qaeda than the bombing.)

The more the war dance hotted up, the stranger became the mood. So much so, I felt I was suffering a spontaneous acid flashback, one of the few mental events a gnarled hippie awaits with delight. The former boss of the KGB, lately the butcher of Chechnya (and since implicated in the Moscow apartment bombings), Vladimir Putin, was no longer the goon in “Matrix”, but an Armani-clad freedom fighter for the coalition. The Chinese leaders, their elbows aching from cudgelling the mild-mannered meditators of Falun Gong (and let’s not mention Tibetan monks), were suddenly champions of peace, love and a global Woodstock. Perhaps the most amazing sight of the ensuing months was Israel’s Ariel Sharon lecturing the world on the horrors of terrorism as his missiles rained down on the Palestinians, his tanks flattening their homes, his assassins on double shifts. As a Belgium tribunal considered Sharon’s indictment for war crimes committed in Lebanon in 1982, the star witness against him, Elie Hobeika, was blown up by a car bomb in Beirut, along with his three bodyguards. Strange, that.



Such was the overwhelming support for the “War Against Terror”, that the Western media became its cheer squad. Early White House briefings had the air of a locker room. Quizzed about the lack of targets in Kabul, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld snorted, “First, we’re going to re-hit targets, and second, we’re not running out of targets, Afghanistan is...” The press corps exploded with cackles. Meanwhile, the body count mounted, although no one was actually counting. The Pentagon promised smart bombs and the avoidance of civilian deaths. What we got was 600 cluster bombs (each containing 200 bomblets) and repeated images of limb-torn children in dirt-floor tents, without access to anaesthetics or even aspirin. Never mind. Uncle Sam launched a token drop of photo-op food parcels promoted as “ethnically sensitive”, containing cookies, jam, peanut butter and moist serviettes. Their yellow packaging, by dumb coincidence, resembled that of cluster bombs. Images appeared of bandaged children who had confused the two, though not on CNN.

The U.S. media complied with the Pentagon memo to “minimise” reports of civilian casualties. Not a problem, responded Michael Barone, a Fox News pundit. “Civilian casualties are not news. The fact is that they accompany wars.” The fact is, this war was triggered by a slaughter of innocents and that became its ultimate justification. Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch, put a pistol-packing

reporter into Afghanistan who vowed to kill on sight “that dirtbag” Osama bin Laden. Fox encouraged its newshounds to “tap into their anger and let it play”. Murdoch execs proclaimed: “Morally neutral journalism is now inappropriate.” As directed, the tapes of bin Laden’s ravings were shelved.

In Australia, the media seemed a little more relaxed, thanks to SBS and the syndication of newspaper stories from Europe, although deep criticism of our ally was rare. While not to everyone’s taste, John Pilger’s coverage of trouble spots over the years and his prickly media profile should have earned him a place on national opinion pages. It didn’t. Arundhati Roy, who had triumphantly toured Australia with her Booker prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, published a lucid essay in *The Guardian* on the darker forces propelling the war. It was not seen in Australia. In the United States, it was rejected by every major magazine, as was an antiwar essay by Gore Vidal. From all this battening down of flagship hatches, however, something interesting happened – the web was reborn as a vibrant nexus of media revolution.

Even before the bombs fell on Afghanistan, the missiles of Noam Chomsky surged through cyber space. One day a public cyber library will be built in his honour and our children will toast his devotion to freedom of thought. “When IRA bombs were set off in London”, he

noted, “there was no call to bomb West Belfast... or Boston, the source of much of the financial support for the IRA”. It was rather a matter of finding the perpetrators, putting them on trial and addressing the grievances.

It may have surprised Americans to be informed by Chomsky that the only nation ever condemned by the World Court for perpetrating international terrorism was their own. In 1978, when Somoza’s dictatorship of Nicaragua was sent packing by the Sandinistas, Washington had dreaded “another Cuba” and tightened the economic thumbscrews. Later, during the Reagan years, the anti-Sandinista strategy turned deadly. Washington’s proxy army of *contras* set about sabotaging the country’s infrastructure, including schools, ports and health clinics. During this time, in which tens of thousands of people reportedly lost their lives, the *contras* raped, bombed and tortured. Nicaragua initiated proceedings in the World Court, which in 1984 ruled in its favour. The United States was condemned for the “unlawful use of force” and ordered to pay reparations. Instead, the United States escalated the attack. The State Department approved the CIA’s creation of a “terrorist army” to destroy “soft targets” in Nicaragua, including agricultural cooperatives. A UN General Assembly resolution (passed two years in a row, with the United States and Israel opposing) called for the United States to observe international law. This was ignored.

Another fact-packed antiwar website is that of William Blum, founding editor of the 1960s underground newspaper *Washington Free Press*. Today, Blum is still looking for trouble. “Accessing this site automatically opens a file for you at FBI headquarters”, is the greeting of his home page. “This warning, of course, comes too late.”

According to Blum, from the end of World War II to the beginning of this century, the United States has “attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments and to crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes. In the process, the United States has caused the end of life for several million people, and condemned many millions more to a life of agony and despair.” Blum makes the point that Americans are taught it’s wrong to murder, rob, rape and bribe, but that it’s okay to topple foreign governments, quash socialist movements or drop powerful bombs on foreigners, so long as it serves the national interest. From plenty of examples which prove, despite the current rhetoric from the White House, that the West is not always on the side of the angels, these three capture the essence of much U.S. foreign policy:

- 1985, Lebanon. The CIA plants a truck bomb outside a mosque in Beirut, aiming to kill a Muslim cleric. As the faithful leave the mosque, the blast kills 80 and wounds 250, mostly women and

children. (By comparison, the March 2002 attack on a Protestant church in Islamabad killed five worshippers and injured 40.) In Beirut, the targeted mullah was unhurt. None of the victims was compensated.

- 1989, Panama. After sustained Orwellian “hate week” campaigns against former U.S. ally and puppet president Manuel Noriega, along the lines of those previously directed at Fidel Castro, Colonel Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein, an aerial assault is launched on Panama City. The official reason is Noriega’s drug trafficking, long known to Washington. Another motive is maintaining control of the Panama Canal, in the face of populist stirrings. An activist tenement barrio is bombed to rubble, a compliant government is installed. Various independent inquiries put the deaths between 3,000 and 4,000, most of the corpses still rotting in pits on U.S. bases, off limits to investigators. American news networks did not regard the United Nations’ overwhelming condemnation of the attack to be worth broadcasting.
- 1998, Sudan. The reign of Bill Clinton, the first black-schmoozing rock’n’roll pot-head president, is now derided as a time when the United States went soft on recalcitrant regimes (a period of “turning the other cheek”, as one dipstick *Sydney*

*Morning Herald* columnist put it). How soft is soft? In August 1998, Bill Clinton sent Tomahawk missiles to flatten the Al Shifa pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan, claiming it was concocting chemical weapons. Actually, this plant had bolstered pharmaceutical self-sufficiency, and produced 90 percent of the drugs needed to treat malaria, TB and other diseases. Accusing its owner, Saleh Idris, of associating with terrorists, Washington froze his London bank account. The case was contested and the United States backed down.

The Sudan's death toll from this attack "continues quietly to rise", notes Chomsky, citing the "tens of thousands of people, many of them children", who have suffered or died from a range of treatable ailments. The chairman of the board of Al Shifa, Dr. Idris Eltayeb, remarked that the destruction of his factory was "just as much an act of terrorism as the twin towers – the only difference is we know who did it".

This perspective is at odds with the one espoused by Roger Ailes, chairman of Fox News: "What we say is, terrorists, terrorism, is evil, America doesn't engage in it, and these guys do." One is reminded of Big Brother's slogans in George Orwell's laboured masterpiece, *1984*: "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength." In this dark vision, the Ministry of Truth manipulates the media to suit the political objectives of Big Brother.

In our world, the media are fun-loving and raffish, but the core priorities reflect the priorities of people in power. Images of the twin towers' collapse are indelibly impressed on the planet's collective memory. And so they should be. But other images have vanished from history.

In the 1990 Gulf War, a bomb hurtled through the air duct of Baghdad's "safest" shelter, burning alive 500 people, mainly women and children. A documentary looking at U.S. foreign policy from an Islamic perspective, "Letter to America", recently screened on SBS, shows footage of relatives in the ruins of the Baghdad shelter weeping over rows of charred corpses. For such victims, no memorial service, no replay, no justice.

The toppling of the Taliban is portrayed as a triumph, and perhaps it is, for the victors. On the ground, improvements are marginal. An early image of liberation was of Kabul's haggard residents watching TV, a seamless advertisement for freedom. Except, whose TV? The last U.S. bomb on Kabul hit the studios of al-Jazeera, the independent voice of the Middle East. Funny, that. The Afghans may now need to settle for CNN and Fox, a victory, perhaps, for civilisation and U.S. exports, as well as for the pipe dreams of Unocal. The Pentagon claims this "smart bomb" lost its bearings, as another one did over Belgrade in 1999, when it flattened Serbian TV, killing and maiming the staff.

For the Pentagon, media-seeking missiles are not enough. In February, it announced plans to provide news items to foreign journalists, “possibly even false ones”, in order to manipulate emotions.

After three months’ bombing of Afghanistan, an estimate of civilian casualties was hard to find. It took Marc Herold, an economics professor from the University of New Hampshire, to amalgamate the disparate reports of “collateral damage” and come up with a total. If the evidence conflicted, said Herold, he settled for the lower death count. The number of injured was not included, not even of those likely to die from their wounds. Let me ask you, dear reader, in this ongoing “war against terror”, how many innocent Afghans have lost their lives? If the number is unknown to you, what does that say about our media culture? At the very least, according to Marc Herold, the death toll is 3,700 – greater than the number slain in the twin towers. In January, Herold told ABC Radio that “a much more realistic” estimate of civilian deaths is 5,000. His research covers only the period from October 7 to December 10, 2001, since which time the missiles have continued to rain down upon Taliban and toddler alike.

Herold’s estimate was given wide publicity in Europe, and next to none in the United States. Surprised that the U.S. “quality press” had been so circumspect, I emailed the casualty count to a journo mate



at *The Washington Post*, asking, why the blackout? His reply was cool: “I think you would find most people here focused on our own thousands killed intentionally.” End of discussion. The loophole, it seems, is intention. Civilian deaths are the price of ridding the world of terror. When B52s are sent to unknown lands with big payloads and bad intelligence, it is certain that civilians will die. Surely such a strategy reveals a “reckless disregard for human life”, a legal definition of murder.

In December, Marc Herold stopped counting and the military action shifted to the Afghan mountains of Tora Bora, focusing on al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden. How hard could it be, tracking down this tall, sick, neurotic figure attached to a dialysis machine? He was hiding in a cave, but which cave? It didn't matter. The Pentagon had a plan. It would blast apart every cave in Afghanistan.

Enter the “daisy cutter”, a 4WD-sized bomb whose name evokes a firework display with floral motif, and which packs the punch of a tactical nuclear weapon. It is triggered above ground to clear vast surfaces of all structures and life. The blast inferno vaporises everything within hundreds of metres and produces a mushroom-shaped cloud, resulting in a vacuum of such force that it sucks out human eyes. A rush of oxygen then reignites what's left and sets off another explosion. In a sane world, the daisy cutter would be banned; right now, it's

despoiling everything in its path.

During four weekend raids that struck villages near Tora Bora, at least 80 noncombatants were killed, according to pro-American local commander Hajji Muhammad Zaman, who kept asking: “Why are they hitting civilians?” Meanwhile, George Bush brooded over his dead terrorist scorecard on the White House desk, ready to cross out the names of senior al-Qaeda officials. “I’m a baseball fan”, he told Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*, “I want a scorecard”. Alas, it was left largely incomplete, as the opposing team slipped away, not for the last time.

On January 24, 2002, enter the U.S. special forces, and an attitude of “whatever it takes”. A stealth attack on two small compounds in Hazar Qadam resulted in the deaths of up to 21 Afghans and the capture of 27 others. Released two weeks later, the men revealed they had been severely beaten and rib-kicked. Rumsfeld later admitted these Afghans were not, as first announced, Taliban or al-Qaeda fighters, but troops and local officials loyal to the current government. Photos appeared on the web showing bodies of those shot displaying white plastic wrist restrainers bearing the words “Made in USA”. As pointed out by the U.S. magazine *The Nation*, Article 23 of the Hague Convention forbids a warring party “to kill or wound an enemy who, having laid down his arms, or having no longer means of

defence, has surrendered". General Tommy Franks, the head of the U.S. Central Command, defended this apparent war crime: "I will not characterise it as a failure of any type."

By mid-February, the baseball scorecard of George Bush was still blank. The Pentagon and the CIA dispatched a missile to kill three men near the village of Zhawar Kili, close to the Pakistan border. The reason? One of the men was tall. "Maybe it's Osama." In fact, it was three impoverished scavengers, now obliterated. A *Washington Post* reporter who tried to poke around the scene was turned back at gunpoint by U.S. troops. Rear Admiral John Stufflebeem lost his cool: "The Taliban has vanished. Al-Qaeda has vanished. It's a shadow war; these are shadowy people who don't want to be found." That's the thing about terrorists. They can't be trusted to die easy.

Stufflebeem got one thing right – it is a war of shadows. Whose shadows, and who has the most to gain? An interlocking network of powerbrokers in oil, arms, politics and media, for whom the world is a goldmine and this war their windfall.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, for instance, is a boardroom veteran of the mighty Tribune Company, publishers of the *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*. He is also a former director of Gulfstream Aerospace, acquired by General Dynamics in 1999, a deal which netted him a

cool US\$11 million. What is General Dynamics? A major defence contractor. And so it goes. Early warnings to the White House of Enron's hidden debt must have been timely for the 35 Bush officials holding its stock, including Army Secretary Thomas E. White, whose portfolio had topped \$50 million.

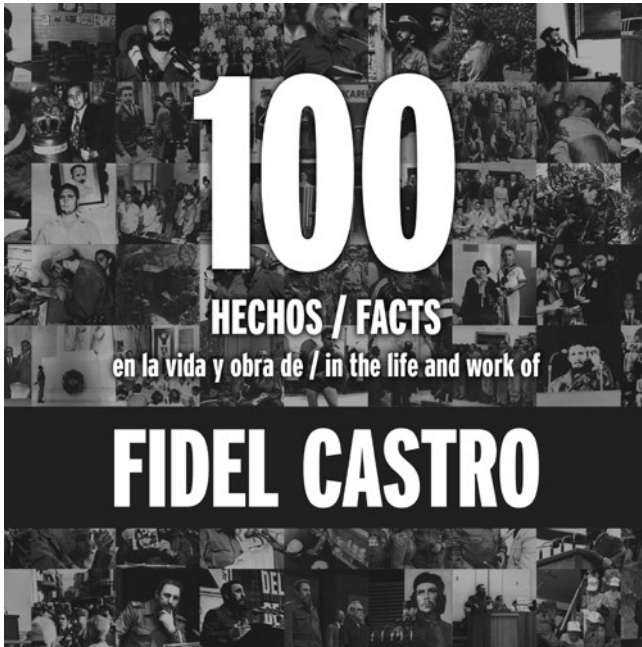
But there is another America. A questing, compassionate America, which yearns to share its good fortune with the rest of the world and break the psychic gridlock of us/them, good/evil. New York on Valentine's Day saw the launch of a poignant initiative, "September 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows", named from an utterance by Martin Luther King: "Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows." One member, a woman whose husband died in the twin towers, said she resented being used as an excuse to start a war, "a horrific thing, the idea that someone would do this for me to someone else". Peaceful Tomorrows raises funds to help the families of the Afghan dead, like the Afghan widows now sending their toddlers to beg. Such a spirit may jolt Americans to consider the rest of the world's pain, as it jolts me to honour that country's ongoing contribution to the evolution and celebration of humanity.

Like the 17 founding families of Peaceful Tomorrows, it is time to transcend the belligerent imperialism of Old Guard America that is prepared to ravage the whole of Earth in order to foster, for its spoilt elite,

a lifestyle of careless opulence.

The promise of globalisation is a shared destiny of nations working together to minimise conflict and poverty, restore ecosystems, reduce emissions, ban arms trafficking and thrash out an evolving agenda of ethics and fairness to which all can be a party, especially the strong. Its deeper meaning is a belated awareness that we are all connected – and connected in a deeper way than the choice of being with America or against America, of being a target market, or a target.

April 13, 2002



## **100 FACTS IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF FIDEL CASTRO**

Rodolfo Romero Reyes y Elier Ramírez Cañedo

Fidel Castro is one of the most universal figures of Cuba and Latin America. This book synthesizes, in a brief chronology, 100 significant facts of his life, accompanied by many rarely seen photos. The moments narrated here offer the reader a comprehensive overview of the personality and the historical significance of the principal leader of the Cuban Revolution. Facts and photographs from his childhood and youth, the guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra, his decades as Cuba's head of state and leader of the Revolutionary Government until his last days are the features of this book.

2021, 208 pages + images, ISBN: 978-1-922501-12-7

## Richard's Inbox

### *another email firestorm*



Dicky boy, how does it feel to be irrelevant. Like all soft-cough lefties your hypocrisy is astonishing. There you go bagging everything you can imagine about the United States when your whole modus operandi of the 1960s – which got your name in lights and contributed to your middle-aged comfort (*I wish!*) – was borrowed from the hippies. Anyway, you're no longer the smart as a whip young pseudo-revolutionary, get used to it. Today's culture shakers out there don't take shit from old farts either. Trouble for you is they're better informed, funnier and smarter than you and they're armed with high-tech bullshit detectors that can sniff out a lazy old socialist's cant from the next galaxy. Fancy quoting all those astral travellers. Jeez Dick, the drugs must be catching up with you. It's never too late to be rational.



I guess you're entitled to your opinion – be glad you still have that right in Australia! You probably soon will not, the way your government is stripping the rights of your citizens!! Hey we have folks like you bashing the USA all the time – have a nut. I'll be sitting here with my nice cold beer in my big ass house and watch the whole rest of the world take a crap. But when you've all been taken over by the Muslims – don't come asking us to bail your sorry butts out. Because for you sir, I wouldn't lift a finger to help. And I don't want the blood of one American wasted on you! Good Day Mate! American First and Always!



Richard, you have been writing for a long time. But nobody cares what you have to say anymore. Frankly, it's flowery crap. You have always been long-winded and loved the sound of your own voice. But now you have become completely irrelevant. We will not indulge you anymore. Stop writing. Start gardening. Sincerely, Aussies in New York.



Here goes you snivelling hypocrite. You are the worst kind of rich national socialist, anti-anything USA add UK. When the revolution comes you will be one of the first up against the wall. Your email address ([futurist@richardneville.com.au](mailto:futurist@richardneville.com.au)) should read "The Past".



The average guy or girl on the street doesn't give a rat's arse about what type of spin Murdoch/Fox, CNN, NY Times, *Sydney Morning Herald* etc., put on the stories they relate. Believe it or not, us average guys see through all the bullshit our politicians and their journalist mates spew out, and we look at the big picture (and in particular, the indisputable facts) and we react to events based on the facts. Frankly, if the Tamil Tigers or the Mujahadeen or the IRA or the Bolshoi Ballet crashed a couple of jumbo jets into my neighbourhood I'd be looking for swift reprisals, not a deeper understanding of their regional grievances. As you were honest enough to point out that you'd rather live in the shadow of the White House than in the shadow of sharia law, and as I know you have witnessed what lawless minds can condone (e.g. in your bio of serial killer Charles Sobhraj) I think you should not be so ready to lump us all in with the terrorists, politicians and clerics.

When you refer to America as the only country ever condemned by the world court for perpetrating international terrorism, don't make it sound like anyone (including you) actually believes it. The Israelis and the Palestinians have made a



career of it, and I'm sure there are dozens of other hot spots around the world where it is almost a daily occurrence. As an Aussie you are undoubtedly aware that the bloke next door to you is from Sri Lanka, the cute girl in the milk bar is from Afghanistan and your doctor topped the class at UNSW despite arriving here from Vietnam at 17 years of age with hardly a word of English in her vocabulary. Sound familiar? Some journalists surely try to present a fair view of the world, but the majority are prepared to exclude facts that would in any way diminish newsworthiness. I am glad that I live in a country where this self-serving exuberance is tolerated, but I don't like having it portrayed as a reflection of how the vast majority of us feel.



To me the United States represents the embodiment of free thought and liberty. It stands like a beacon for all to see that success and abundance flow to wherever man is free to think, work and live without fear of a government or dictator's brutality. America is targeted the world over by those who find particularly abhorrent the notion that man is capable of improving his own life, by his own work and living successfully. Western civilisation owes a huge debt of gratitude to the United States.



The proposed option of actually negotiating with the Taliban is almost as laughable as the notion they were not involved in some material manner. Laughable that is until one realises the author was actually serious. Negotiation is a wonderful tool that allows people to talk (or jaw jaw jaw as Winston Churchill would have it) rather than shoot. The unfortunate part of the process is it requires BOTH parties to be operating on the same plain of rationality. As we have seen in history nearly all conflicts that result in violence as a means of communication have at its core one party that is not rational. (Or, in the case of Israel/Palestine, both). It would seem the left wing of politics (and journalists) have yet to grasp this point.



You have exceeded my most wild expectations of you with your latest rant against the United States and Israel. Are you sure you are not plagiarizing the Elders of Zion with the “it is all a rich American plot stuff”. This has to come pretty close to being racist. Not the old fashioned skin and religion type but the new 21st century postmodern Chomskyised variety. Whether you are prepared to admit it or not, new-age racism is anti-Americanism sub-coded to include anti-Semitism. Doesn't it go, the Jews control America therefore all Jews are Americans. It's a bit like a nasty version [of] Faulty Towers – don't mention the War (Jews) – nod wink cynically coded stuff.

Oh you say I've got it all wrong, sorry my friend it is you who are still dropping the acid. In the real world, the dark and hidden world which people like you and I are protected from, there are much nastier bastards than loud vulgar annoying Americans. Why don't you check out the activities of European neo-Nazis and their view of your good mate Osama. He is top of the pops with this disgraceful lot. Swiss neo-Nazi Ahmed Huber, one of an increasing number of neo-Nazi Islam converts, recently bragged to the International Tribune that old SS officers were so impressed by Osama's anti-American anti-Jew actions they made him an honorary Prussian. These same Islamic Nazis tried to send a German “Condor” unit to Iraq in 1991 to support Saddam and have attempted on to meet and coordinate actions with Hamas and Hezzboulauh in Lebanon. I doubt you have ever travelled widely in the Middle East, but I have lost count how many times in Saudi newspapers I have read blatant pro-Hitler pro-Nazi articles praising Hitler and disparaging the United States and its allies for defeating him before the job was finished. Richard it is time your removed your head from Chomsky's Cloaca Maximus and opened your eyes to let some of the real world in, otherwise the flashbacks are only going to get worse.



You are suffering from delusions, living in a country that conquered/killed all the people living there, and now you claim to be a humanitarian. All animals compete for resources to survive, that's natural. Even in a socialist society people compete for political position and form elites (same as the rich). We will all die. Although all the nice people like yourself are supposedly seeking justice and a fair world, it's really all about yourself and making you feel better by showing what a great person you are. Do you want to hear the truth? Life has no meaning, we are just as insignificant as ants. Attempts to make political points are just a passive means to gain power. We lost our freedom when laws were introduced. Don't worry about anyone else because they don't care about you.

## **WAR UPDATE: WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, WAR CRIMES**

NEARLY A YEAR on, the war against terror has achieved the outcome predicted by critics, an escalation of terror. State assassination is now so popular it could qualify as an Olympic sport. In May 2002, when factional leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, returned from Iran to Afghanistan, he was considered fair game, though neither a member of al-Qaeda nor the Taliban. His crime? A “sworn desire” to topple the regime of Hamid Karzai and to expel foreigners. The chosen method of assassination? Robotic – a strike by a Predator drone carrying Hellfire antitank missiles. Perpetrator? The CIA. Source of report? Pentagon officials. Result of attack? The target

survived. Interpretation? Another attempted murder by the CIA, for which no one will be held to account.

In June, there was a chilling moment on ABC TV as a truck driver in the Afghan desert, his face a digitised blur, described how he witnessed a U.S. soldier cut off the tongue of a Taliban prisoner of war: “the Americans did whatever they wanted. We had no power to stop them.” Another Afghan said that a U.S. soldier broke the neck of a prisoner and doused others in acid. The source of these allegations is a documentary, “Massacre at Mazar”, produced by Jamie Doran, which alleges that around 30 to 40 U.S. Special Forces took part in the torture of Taliban prisoners at Shebarghan in northwest Afghanistan and are implicated in the massacre of around 3,000 Taliban prisoners.

The former chairman of Amnesty International, Andy McEntee, viewed the footage, much of it wisely shot in secret, and issued a statement that there was prima facie evidence of serious war crimes being committed by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, both under international law and U.S. law.

In July, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that, “senior officials in the British prime minister’s office [had delivered an] astonishing attack on America’s handling of the hunt for Taliban and al Qaeda fugitives”. The officials decried the “march-in-shooting” approach of U.S. forces who led house to house searches in the tribal

zones of the Afghan Pakistan border. The tactics were said to be “backfiring” and boosting support for bin Laden, a view supported by Arsallah Hoti, described as a leading member of the powerful Yusufzai tribe, who was then on a visit to London: “I think people who were ambivalent to the al-Qaeda in the tribal areas are now supporting them.” Hoti complained that U.S. forces had “even burst in on a wedding because they heard the traditional firing of Kalashnikovs and assumed it was al-Qaeda”.

A spokesman for U.S. Central Command rejected this criticism. “Our entire approach to removing the Taliban from power and eliminating the al-Qaeda threat has been sensitive to regional issues.” And yet, at the time this report was published, the United States was in the process of intruding on another wedding.

“Eight-year-old Kako was among those woken by the bombing”, reported *The Guardian*. “She ran outside after hearing a loud bang. ‘I saw the pool in the courtyard filled with blood, there were bodies lying all around. I saw a woman without a head’.” The raid continued for five hours. Late the night before and in the early hours of Monday morning, July 1, U.S. planes and helicopters swooped on several villages in the Dehrawad district of Uruzgan province, about 175 miles southwest of the capital of Kabul. Fifty-four people were killed and over 100 injured. “It was like an abattoir”, said a survivor.

“There was blood everywhere. There was smoke and dirt all around, and people were running helter-skelter. It was a doomsday scene.”

For the next two weeks the U.S. military refused to accept any blame. Colonel Roger King offered this gem: “The easiest and best way to avoid civilian casualties is to avoid firing at coalition forces in the proximity of innocent civilians.” Survivors told reporters that Afghan and U.S. forces had tried to block the roads to stop them getting to hospital. After two rockets hit the house where the wedding was being celebrated, those who fled for their lives said they were shot at from the air.

On July 4, 2002, as millions of Americans celebrated the freedom enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, 200 Afghans gathered in the streets of Kabul to demand their freedom from U.S. bombs. “We cannot tolerate more innocent victims”, said an organiser. A Pentagon spokeswoman, Victoria Clarke, claimed the U.S. investigators who visited the scene of the wedding attack, “saw some evidence of damage, but there was no determination of what caused the damage”. Three days later, Yahoo News in Singapore interviewed one of the wedding guests, Mohammad Anwar, whose wife was killed in the raid. He said that after the bombing, U.S. soldiers “stormed into the houses and tied the hands of men and women. They refused to let the people help the victims or take them away for treatment.”

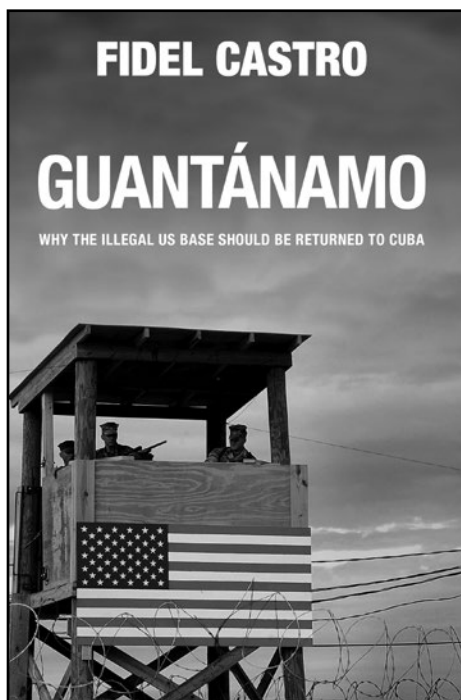
Most of their clothes had been burnt off. “They kept filming and photographing the naked women.” A week after the raid, the local District Commissioner Abdur Rahim paid out to relatives US\$200 on behalf of each person killed and US\$75 for each of the wounded. In addition, the U.S. forces had provided “a few tents and blankets”. Rahim commented, “We will kill two or three Americans and then give them some tents and blankets. Would it be adequate compensation?” This question is yet to be taken up in the U.S. media.

On July 22, after a six-month onsite review of 11 Afghan locations bombed by the United States, the *New York Times* announced a “discovery” that seemed to come as a surprise – “the Pentagon’s use of overwhelming force meant that even when military targets were located, civilians were sometimes killed”. Well, blow me down. At the selected sites only, they estimated a civilian death toll of 400 – about a 10th of the total suggested by Marc Herold.

As for the continuing bloodbath in the Middle East, Amnesty International calculated that by March 2002, over 1,000 Palestinians, including 200 children, had been murdered, by “shelling and bombing residential areas, random or targeted shootings, especially near check points and borders, by extra-judicial executions and during demonstrations”. Over the ensuing months, such operations intensified, as did the suicide bombings,



inciting a rare moment of candour from Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who said in June that his country's current strategy was "the incubator of terror to come". A month later, at midnight, Israel sent an F-16 bomber to drop a one-tonne bomb on a block of flats in the Gaza Strip, killing 14 Palestinian civilians, nine of them children.



## **GUANTÁNAMO: WHY THE ILLEGAL US BASE SHOULD BE RETURNED TO CUBA**

Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro puts the case to close the illegal base remaining on Cuban territory, not just the prison. This book also features a comprehensive chronology of the base's history and extensive appendices, including key historical and recently declassified documents through which Washington has justified its continued occupation of the territory.

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# ***PART FOUR***

**TO LOVE, HONOUR AND THROW AWAY**

## **TO LOVE, HONOUR AND THROW AWAY**

WHAT IF SOCRATES had been in a hurry? Instead of strolling barefoot, chatting to layabouts, cooking up Western civilisation, what if he was zooming about on Nike Tailwinds, gulping Beroccas, a Nokia jammed to his ear, surfing a PalmTop? Would he have uttered anything worthwhile?

People worry about heroin, but the most popular drug of addiction today is adrenalin – the enemy of leisure, the thief of time. As the information age gathers momentum, so do we. The quicker time disappears, the fiercer grows our impatience. “We are enslaved by speed”, thunders the website of the slow food movement,

“and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Food.”

In 1970, I published a book promoting alternative lifestyles, *Playpower*, which foresaw a “cybernated age” in which jobs would be eliminated and tedious tasks handled by “Mr. Digital Computer and his jolly gang of electronic circuits and cybernated steam shovels”. So far, not bad. Then came predictive overreach: “Work would be voluntary, the new incentives would be pleasure, pride and social responsibility.” Leisure would prevail, the barrier between work and play dissolve.

Instead of a counterculture, we have created a hyperculture. Its hallmark is “a pathological, self-justifying speed inimical to humane values”, according to Canadian academic Stephen Bertman, who believes that in such a culture, deviant behaviour, including violent and criminal acts, “is not an anomaly, but is in fact consistent with society’s highest goal: Get as much as you can as fast as you can.”

The office “lunch hour” has shrunk to 36 minutes, according to a U.S. study, and nearly 40 percent of workers do not sit down to eat at all. Instead, they use the time to shop, run errands, or – of course! – to jog. And jog while completing a tax return; the metallic threads of a keyboard woven into a T-shirt – tap, tap, tap – the headband holding a screen, reflected in a mirror, puff,

puff, puff. On an everyday level, the products we buy – or, rather, the brands we are manipulated to consume – conceal their social consequences. Fast food serves a time-poor society of workaholics in which social relationships are expendable. The discman reduces the listening of music from a shared joy to a solitary buzz and promotes the consumption of interlinked goodies, like batteries, jogging shoes, tracksuits and Star Wars soundtracks.

Years ago Adam Smith foresaw the impact of the untrammelled market on our mentality. Around 1770, in his *Lectures on Justice*, the doyen of free traders noted, “Another bad effect of commerce is that it sinks the courage of mankind... everyone’s thoughts are employed about one particular thing. The heroic spirit is almost utterly extinguished.”

Even so, we desperately cling to archetypes of heroism whether in the movies, sport or corporate jargon. Yesterday’s sales rep is today’s “road warrior”, buffeted by schedules and the rigours of hypermobility. At Brisbane airport recently, a group of corporate reps pondered the side effects of incessant travel. It was not uncommon, I gleaned by eavesdropping, to “blank out” while careening to departure gates, to misremember destinations and current whereabouts. What city is this? An IBM itinerant said she was so afflicted by spasms of existential forgetfulness, that her therapist told her to

write herself a note every night, recording her current location and the next destination, so she could refresh her memory in the morning.

This culture of impatience insinuates itself into the deepest recesses of our being, literally! In 1998, a Brazilian medical journal reported a surgical operation on a man with an unusual obstruction in his rectum, a Nokia 2000. During its extraction, the phone rang several times.

What is the social cost of vanishing time? Rising stress, depression, road rage and the three-second sound byte. But are there other, less obvious costs? Does the culture of impatience distort the nature of relationships; making them ever more nasty, brutish and short?

I believe so, and this is only part of the picture. Just as we have learnt that the future itself is fragile, and needs to be rescued, so too we are reminded that relationships lie at the core of the human condition, and need to be negotiated with educated finesse. The information age requires unprecedented cooperation and collaboration between a diverse range of people over vast distances. Are our interpersonal skills up to the task? If not, can we enhance them?

Most future thinking is focussed on technology. How about human psychology?

In grating contrast to the elongation of our physical

lifespan, our attention span gets shorter and shorter. This applies to people and products, both of which are now supremely disposable. Our culture of impatience – driven by consumer society – elevates disposability into a lifestyle. To some it seems the consumer society has been around since Adam and Eve. In fact, it didn't take off until after the World War II. Its ascension is usually monitored in dollars, while its psychological impact is overlooked. This impact was both foreseen and welcomed by sales analyst, Victor Lebow, an unconscious futurist who, in a mid-1950s edition of the *New York Journal of Retailing*, issued this rallying cry: “Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction and our egoistic satisfaction in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever-increasing rate.” Lebow got his wish, and the rest of us are stuck with it. It is a religion of hyperconsumption, which has crept upon us by stealth, seeping up from the corner store.

The threefold personality of this Divine Spirit – its Holy Trinity – can be expressed as obsolescence, disposability and the never-ending upgrade. It is a religion which shapes our buying patterns, disrupts the weather and degrades our environment. (According to author Paul Hawken, an astonishing 99 percent of the original



materials used in the production or creation of USA-made goods become waste within six weeks of sale.) The ecological impact is dimly recognised. Now it's time to enlarge our concerns from the external landscape to the internal mindscape, from the change in our climate to the change in our consciousness.

We are what we buy. The more we buy the mightier we are, and the healthier the economy (it says so on the news). The more we own, the smarter we seem and so our colleagues bestow on us the symbols of excess, the Rolex, the share options. We become valued through our glittering objects, and so we start, unconsciously at first, to value others by the same insidious standard, including our friends and lovers, all too accurately referred to as the objects of our affections. Objects date, however, even precious accessories, and the expert is summoned to restore them to former glory: the watchmaker, the plastic surgeon. In the United States in the last five years, the number of breast implants increased threefold.

In the wake of September 11, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported that patient consultations and bookings had increased by almost 50 per cent – the hot procedures being eyelids, buttocks and collagen injections. “What is it about a country in crisis that makes people run to the operating table?” asked *The Australian*.

“They understand that life is uncertain”, replied

plastic surgeon, Michelle Copeland, “and feel compelled to do things they have been putting off”. One of her patients, an interior designer, said she “wanted to make a permanent change”, and was not alone in “looking in the mirror post-September 11 and deciding there was no more time to waste... when it came to fixing facial flaws”.

The speeding up of inventions and the shortening of their adoption times has beneficial effects, especially in the field of medicine, but it glorifies the ritual dance of consumerism – discard, replace, upgrade. New inventions create obsolescence and wealth. The ancient alchemical dream of turning lead into gold was achieved with the transformation of sand into silicon. Whether implanted in the women’s chests or embedded in the brains of computers, silicon allows for instant upgrades and takes the notion of obsolescence to new extremes. Anyone who exits a showroom with a new computer is aware it will be out of date by the time they reach home. For vertebrates, evolutionary leaps are measured in millennia, for mobile phones they are measured in months.

The shopping religion shapes national accounts, as well as the contours of our loved ones. Its revenues are a measure of prosperity, its products are a measure of progress. For many, shopping is why we get out of bed in the morning. According to economist Clive Hamilton, an emerging body of psychological research “strongly

suggests that the more our media, advertisers and opinion makers emphasise financial success as the chief means to happiness, the more they promote social pathologies". A range of studies in leading journals looked at the two sets of beliefs about the sources of happiness. The first set, coinciding with Lebow's vision in the New York *Journal of Retailing*, revolved around the external goals: wealth, attractiveness and fame. The second set of beliefs favoured "intrinsic rewards", such as deeper relationships, personal growth and contributing to the community.

Adherents of the first set of beliefs, according to the new research, were more likely to experience a "lower quality of life", than those who pursued intrinsic goals. Also, they had "shorter, more conflictive and more competitive relationships with others". In other words, not only were they miserable bastards, they made everyone around them miserable too.

Other studies show that the most important determinant of happiness is social relationships, including those with family and friends. It is just such relationships that are under threat from the continuing escalation of the consumer society. It starts with throw-away products (look in your shed, your attic) and ends with throw-away people (look at the Family Court, nursing homes, the park bench). There is a line in an old song, isn't there, about putting up a parking lot, not realising what you've

got till it's gone? Just like social capital.

The shopping religion aggrandises the individual at the expense of easy friendship and involvement with a community. Through Jim Bowie, John Wayne, Ayn Rand, Marilyn Monroe, Sylvester Stallone, Bill Gates and Britney Spears, the underlying U.S. narrative is the triumph of the gifted, willful loner. Fine as far as it goes, the power of one and all that, and yet it is counter to an ethos of mateship; the preference for the front of the cab over the back of a stretch limo.

In the last media flurry of wartime reminiscences, I was struck by the observations of a British officer – a prisoner of Singapore's Changi jail, if I recall – who found that under duress the character traits of a nation were magnified. British POW's concentrated on keeping up the divisions of class. The Australians banded together in a spirit of mutual aid. The Americans used their entrepreneurial skills to fleece each other.

Researcher Rod Cameron reports the rise of selfishness in Australia, one that crosses gender and occupation, the credo of looking after number one. While mateship fell into disrepute because of its sexism and incipient xenophobia, a revised version can move beyond coded blokeyness to honour both sexes and a multitude of cultures. A kind of mateship lies at the core of good relationships, which in turn provides the mortar of community. Instead, we are heading in a direction

where families are as transient as rock-clips.

Even so, guess what fast companies are discovering? Relationships. There's a flurry of corporate seminars on "relationship marketing", the new buzz word. If you can't be with the one you love, then learn to love your customers... or suppliers, or colleagues. The accelerating pace of change demands innovation. The less time you have to develop a product, the faster you need to collaborate. The faster you need to collaborate, the more you need interpersonal skills, such as tolerance of criticism, openness to learning, emotional intelligence. They don't teach empathy at business school.

AS THE IDEALISM of the 1960s faded away, supplanted by a tougher, more business-like focus, the journey towards deeper intimacy stalled. We were back at the shopping trolley, alone and angst ridden, dressed for success – a success measured by external goals: wealth, glory, power, beauty and brand-names. In this climate it was cooler to network than to befriend; we exchanged business cards instead of messy emotions or bodily fluids.

Now we are entering another phase, the revival of community. Neighbourhood centres are starting to buzz, housefuls of bring-a-plate chatterers throb with plots against the government, the nuclear industry, the local council. The glue of community is relationships, whether with friends, lovers, neighbours or the old

codger who lives near the town dump with a pack of Rottweilers.

At the heart of most relationships, for better or worse, is coupledom, a dirty word. It evokes exclusion, a retreat to the suburban fortress, an oppressive mortgage, a timid politics. But if a sense of community is to be reinvigorated, then we need to take a closer look at coupledom and its discontents, perhaps giving it a make-over for this new millennium.

Domestic utopia lives more in our imaginings than behind the neighbour's picket fence. On the other hand, there is a certain stability and security provided by a "good enough" workable marriage. We are entering a new era, an intoxicated global economy haunted by disparities, where the major ailment of the middle class is depression. The consumption pattern of the individual is the major focus, rather than well being of the group. We may need the rock of relationship, even with its sharp, painful edges, more than ever.

And yet this rock is withering away. Why? What is it that shrinks the capacity of postmodern lovers to spend a large chunk of their lives with each other? Anyway, what's to be gained by sticking it out? Easy divorces add to the pressure, as do the biological fruits of abundance and antibiotics. We are living longer and boring each other to tears. Maybe bonding was never meant to last this long and to withstand so many tempting alternatives.

In an accelerated age, how can we cultivate a meaningful one-to-one relationship? If we're in such a coupling, and it gets murky, do we succumb to the norms of a consumer society: chuck it out and get a new one? How often have you seen two people of goodwill fall into a relationship, share a house, kids, cats and plenty of laughs and then, when the emotional weather is turbulent, jump ship? A thousand times. So much so, it's a nonevent. What was once the shock-horror, musical-chair version of marriage, played out in the private lives of Hollywood heart-throbs, has now become the marriage next door. In Britain, divorces have trebled, weddings have halved and the proportion of children born outside marriage has quadrupled in the space of a generation. In Australia, in the decade from 1987 to 1997, the rate of eligible people who embarked on marriage slumped dramatically: down 25 percent for men and 27 percent for women. In the same period, the number of registered divorces jumped from 39,725 to 51,300. The 2001 census revealed that lone parent families represent more than 15 percent of family units. Four out of 10 marriages end in divorce, and one of these four, according to a radio newflash, founders on the mighty issue of who does the dishes.

No one expects relationships to last, least of all the couple themselves. "DITCH YOUR LOSER WITH A FREE DIVORCE", offers the British magazine *Chat*, with

a £500 prize for the juiciest breakdown revelation. “Divorce should be celebrated”, says the editor. Families in flux are the norm. We have created a culture in which dads are prone to drop out when it suits them, leaving single mothers to do a job that was designed for two plus an extended family. A teenage friend remarks, “Anyone’s parents who still live together must have something wrong with them”.

As a fledging social commentator, I once railed against the horrors of marriage and the bleak suffocation of family life. In a stagnant and strait-jacketed 1950s Australia, I saw the sexual revolution as a stupendous liberation. And it was.

Thirty years down the track, the speed and scope of change is dizzying. At the World Economic Forum at Davos, according to a *Herald* report, “alarmed” world leaders had admitted that the pace of change outstripped the ability of governments to manage it. And what of individuals? As currencies and share markets oscillate, our capacity for commitment crumbles. In such a world, the long-term partnership is a radical act. Not that couples should endure lifelong misery for the sake of appearances, or even their offspring. As the product of incompatible parents, I am aware of the pain of growing up in a combat zone.

For the compilers of forthcoming text books, I offer these observations:



Sooner or later, just about every relationship reaches a moment of truth, when a partner turns out to be not quite the person imagined. This can hit hard. Tears, rage, separation. Do you really need to clear the slate and start all over again? Pain and fury can serve as a pathway to a new level of involvement. As a friend remarked: "I feel sorry for people who don't experience the exhilaration of fixing up a crappy marriage." In his book *Soul Mates*, Thomas Moore says relationship blues can be "an initiation into intimacy". In this age of telecommunications – the word actually means "distant connections" – we are in danger of connecting to the whole world, while disconnecting from each other. Moore proposes a range of "technologies of the soul" which tend to be simple and slow, addressed to the heart and which are likely, in this speedy age, to fall on deaf ears.

Don't be in a rush to find a partner, he warns, or use the relationship to "find yourself". It is prior to coupledom, that a person needs to have evolved a "unique way of being creative in the world". The relationship is a process of forging a "vessel in which soul making can be accomplished". Don't be sentimental. Relish the grittiness of a partnership. Move beyond the pragmatic with rituals that mine the unconscious. Break down the barrier between work and family, so modern, so isolating, so catastrophic.

No matter how hot the sex is on the first date, sooner

or later couples reach a state when sleep is a preferable option. This comes as a shock to a generation demanding the right of peak experiences in every endeavour, from a night at the movies, to a week in Bangkok, to a day at the footie.

Love flickers and flares and needs, for its full flowering, to be nurtured over a long duration. Sometimes it's like love has vanished, such are the wayward fluctuations of human emotions, and our culture of impatience makes a bad weekend seem like eternity. Today's time is net time, so the seven year itch begins to bite after about seven months. Social acceleration has even "modified the very definition of love", according to the aforementioned Stephen Bertman, "people expect life to express deliver the love they need, and they grow restive when it does not". For Bertman, marriage is an affirmation of constancy in an increasingly inconstant world.

Can we "go with the future", and break down the cubicles of our confining mind-sets, just as the cubicles are breaking down in the workplace, and everywhere else. Entering the Future Zone can mean entering into a more fluid understanding of who you really are, a catacomb of chat rooms. No single label or occupation can be the primary definer anymore, like colonel or accountant or art critic, and perhaps we need to nourish a rich diversity of selves. The next trick is to take this multiplicity into the bedroom, into the longer term rela-

tionship and move it beyond the point of panic, disappointment, retreat and abandonment.

“You expect your partner to enhance you in ways that take you beyond who you are”, notes Janis Abrahams Spring in her book, *After the Affair*, “making you feel wiser, more loving, more competent, but never inferior. You want your partner to merge with you, be you... but never to bore you.” Of course not, boredom is our biggest taboo. The fear of it drives the multimedia tourist entertainment theme park industry, and much else besides, while no one has ever got rich by defending the right to be bored. Boredom is a wellspring of creativity, in art, in life and in relationships, the equivalent of a free pick and shovel, with note attached: don’t run away, dig a bit deeper. Boredom is god’s gift to the middle class, who are not actually required to slog around the clock, yet they squander it on ride-on mowers, workaholia and netporn.

Coupledodom doesn’t really take-off until the point is passed where a partner is merely a projected fantasy of what you think you deserve, or what you think you want. Ultimately, a partner should emerge as someone you can’t control. In bumper sticker lingo, a relationship is a journey, not a destination, and the time this takes is immaterial. The antidote to a culture of impatience is an alternative sense of time, a sense of time that honours what’s left of life beyond shopping. Holistic time. In the

drama of relationships, holistic time means an occasional drift into the slow lane and to accept that spells of mutual antipathy are inevitable, even therapeutic.

The reclaiming of time is part of a wider goal of rescuing the future, and of transcending the rituals of consumerism. Restructuring the rhythm of relationships will pay a role in revitalising the kind of partnerships that most people seem to have given up for dead.

ONE OF THE great mysteries of today is the swift cooption of intellectuals and one-time radicals under the great imperial banner of McEntertainment, as it forges a planetary taste. Pop scholars have convinced themselves that churning out ads is a supreme art form, that spectator sports are a vital mythic expression of citizen empowerment, and that Hollywood movies, Oscar nights, shock jocks, Telstra shares, Disneyland, waterfront views and saying “fuck” a lot are at the heart of what it means to be human. Whereas it’s so much simpler – merely to get on with each other.

Through thick and thin. It requires attention. We notice a thousand ads a week, and rarely hear our partner’s dreams; we can name the bit players in 1940s movies, but couldn’t spot the stages and layers in a relationship – it’s as though the values of consumerland have crept upon us by stealth, until they have begun to colonise our deeper selves. In the timeless words of

William Blake: “The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.”

This is not a plea to stay together till death do we part, it’s about realising – regardless of how often partners are changed – that social relationships are the key to the future, the bedrock on which to build a psychological bridge to the 22nd century.

## **Richard's Inbox** *an email sunshower*



Interesting that you referred to Socrates in your opening. Apparently one of the questions he pondered was how does one “live well”. His answer was that living well is a process with no beginning and no end, not a goal, not a reward, but simply a daily and sometimes disheartening attempt to ignore the material and seek the spiritual.



The most important point that I think you made was on how little importance we place on our psychological situation, and how much we place on that of technology. I'm only 19. However, I do see the damaging effect on people my age [when] our changing society [means] we are forced to place too much emphasis on technology and its advancements, instead of looking at ways to communicate better and improve ourselves on the inside. It is a “soft” subject and people are seen as weak if they care about such things.



I am far better educated than most of the women of my parents' or even my older sister's generation (she is 48). Many of my friends and peers are the same. We are well educated, attractive, hard working and sincere, and we are completely bewildered by the fact that so few of us manage to form long-term relationships. Life seems to be an incessant struggle to find confirmation that we are worth anything at all. What seems to matter most is how much money we earn, and whether we fit a

social stereotype engaged in a life of endless socialising and travel. All this only makes us tired, demoralised, depressed and defensive. How does one manage to combat the prodigious onslaught from a world which constantly reaffirms that the only thing that matters is the most superficial? Who values individuality, thoughtfulness, wisdom, patience, goodness and character anymore?



The problem of a lack of quality and substance in our lives is far worse than your article argues. Why? because to a large extent our schools, both secondary and tertiary, are market driven and churning out little consumers whose only gratification in life will be to become conspicuous consumers. This is particularly sad when a school, like the one I teach at which has 125 years of tradition in quality education, in the truest sense of the word, allows itself to become drawn into the “bums on seats” scenario to placate and attract students from countries where business comes first, quality of life and the environment a distant second.



Some 15 years ago I formed a company with a guy that went really well until we called in the strategic planner/accounting-type people three years ago as the company was getting bigger. Suddenly I found myself discarded WITH ABSOLUTELY NO WARNING, NO DISCUSSION. And so what I regarded as one of the most wonderful growing and liberating experiences of my life was soured and I have been suspicious/wary about all relationships ever since. I don't want to die a sour old man but I see more often that the mindless surgical approach destroys so many people and their relationships... mine workers, meat workers and thousands of others.



When I found out I was pregnant nine months ago, I left my well-paid, prestigious job for a quieter way of life. It took me many months to adjust to this slower pace and to come to terms with

who I was without my “career”, my “achievements”, my own financial independence and without a daily “agenda.” Nine months later, I am a changed person. My purse may be the poorer, but my life is the richer for having found my place.



For all of the glorious frenzy and fetishisation of the internet in recent months, and for all the miraculous potential of advanced communications systems as a tool for bringing people “together” – a greater isolation emerges. This is not qualitatively different to the silent suburbs in which so many people spend so much time cocooned in that televisual ecstasy of network television and its fantasies. Still, I have studied a lot of different things in psychology and philosophy, technology and systems theory – in the long run the net will probably become a little more “background” than it is now – which is not to say that it won’t still be as major change to human communications/social systems as was Gutenberg’s mechanical revelation, just that it will not be the vast fetish it is now.

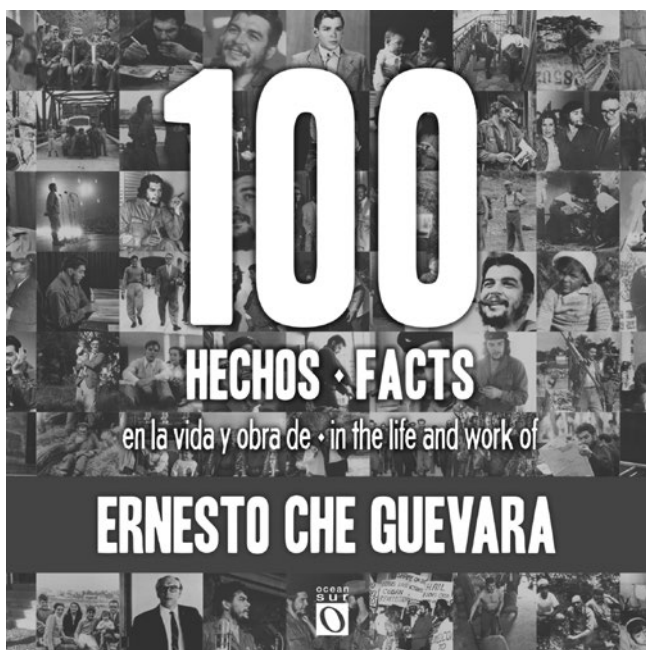


I am a 30-year-old director of TV commercials and this puts me in the privileged position of watching large corporations at work, having plenty of free time to let my mind wander, and ample opportunity to go out and observe the world, as I am fortunately spared the punishment of being chained to a desk (or locked in a veal-fattening pen as Douglas Coupland refers to office cubicles). Probably the single most obvious lacking relationship in a lot of the people I meet through work is a relationship with themselves. The absence of this primary relationship is, I believe, often at the core of the voracious desire to consume and the source of much modern mental disease. Companies can only wish that advertising was half as effective in moving products, however, if there is a lack in someone’s relationship with self then advertising will quickly rush in to fill that space and provide a surrogate image of how “I” should be.





For the past 15 years I have worked at the front line of welfare with many thousands of the throw-away people you describe. These people may not be the movers and shakers of change, but they very quickly don the hand-me-downs of those who are. The attitudes you describe have certainly impacted on their lives. Without a doubt I would say that at the core of their dysfunction [are] unresolved issues of rejection. I have often argued that the real poverty in our country is not economic but spiritual. Not that people are spiritually dead. Quite the opposite. Consistently they see happiness as, "Something to do. Some one to love. Something to hope for" to quote Kant. They emphasise honesty as the character trait they value most in themselves or in others. We are too busy to be at peace with ourselves and with each other.



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# **PART FIVE**

**FROM THE CAVE TO K-MART**

## **FROM THE CAVE TO K-MART**

DOCTORS IN BRITAIN have diagnosed a new disease afflicting ageing baby boomers, those who took LSD in the 1960s and now live sedentary, respectable lives. It's called spontaneous acid flashback. Sufferers are overcome with psychedelic hallucinations, sweeping them back to a past of strawberry fields and marmalade skies. The world becomes surreal.

Flying home from a conference, I was gazing through the plane window at Sydney's gleaming skyline, when I felt the first twinge of strangeness. Sure, I still called Australia home, but in my imagination, the country's trademark grin was edging into a snarl. As the

plane-load was herded into a transit pen for frisking by drug dogs, police videos whirring, (no permission sought), the symptoms intensified and I felt the sensation of being dragged back to a world dismantled long ago. Back to a time when U.S. troops rained poison and death on villages in Vietnam, as did our own misled conscripts; back to military bands and teary, repetitive speeches about the Anzac spirit; back to state censorship and cloddish attorney generals. Back to a timid media and a whipped-up fear of the yellow peril on the high seas, poised to steal our jobs, rape our daughters and beat our kids in the exams. It was back to the drooling veneration of sport by otherwise sensible beings; back to a beefed-up secret police, random surveillance, a compromised public service; back to bubblegum pop, cowed academics, a fossilised labor party and the incessant glorification of greed.

About the time I landed in Sydney, Australia's prime minister, John Howard, opened his mouth, sounding exactly like George W. Bush: "It is not in our interest to ratify the Kyoto protocol", Howard said, "which would cost us jobs and damage our industry". Like ignoring the needs of our dying mother because we are preoccupied with feeding her cat. The new federal budget claimed \$243 million as additional expenditure on the "environment", which turned out to be for the maritime surveillance of asylum seekers. Similarly, "aid for developing

nations”, was for the funding of immigrant detention camps in the Pacific. Who cooked the books? Our public servants, or Arthur Anderson?

I survived the airport drug swoop and made it home to catch the news on ABC TV. The minister of foreign affairs, Alexander Downer, was chiding the “bourgeois left-wing anti-American pseudo-intellectuals” who urged him to stand up for the rights of two Australians kidnapped in Afghanistan and transported to Camp X-ray, where they remained in cruel and unusual imprisonment under 24-hour floodlights, in contravention of the Geneva Convention, deprived of exercise and legal aid. If this is how we treat suspects held under the world’s spotlight, what happens in the dead of night to those kept far from scrutiny? A clue can be found in the July 2002 refusal of Australia and the United States to ratify the UN protocol against torture.

The leadership of these two great Western nations has never been in worse hands. Far from fighting a war to “save civilisation”, Australia and the United States are in retreat from civilisation.

Good leadership is not about constructing the new Bastille, it is about reaching for the moon. John F. Kennedy’s Apollo projects ignited both the age of information and the first glimmerings of Western eco-awareness. That startling sight of a blue green planet floating in a vast black void was an early warning of the

vulnerability of Earth.

The biggest issues being played out in public life today result from the clashing of paradigms: that of an imperial past built on hierarchies, versus the paradigm of a globalising world built on networks. Our attitude to nature is shifting from one of Biblical dominion to urgent trusteeship, from exploitation to sustainability. On a psychological level we are striving to shed our self-centredness and to achieve a shared sense of purpose and equity, a journey from self-indulgence to self-discovery.

In Darwinian terms, competitors are the enemy, the world is a jungle, the game is to win. In an age of fairness, competitors are our benchmark, the game is perpetual innovation, and it's not a jungle out there, it's a community... and all of us are stakeholders.

Up to this point in history, the human drama could be broken down into three acts: conquest, colonisation and consumption, a journey from the cave to K-Mart. This kind of evolution is reaching a dead end. Are we in the throes of its climax, as we shop like there's no tomorrow, drip fed from oil wells protected by gunships, a collective orgasm of sweet surfeit?

Such a limited, linear view of evolution, suggests the European futurist Ervin Laszlo, fosters such outmoded reactions as "my country right or wrong", closed borders and the belief that poverty is best alleviated by the rich getting richer, so that wealth "trickles down".

Is there another kind of evolution within our grasp, one that is vertical, psychological and sustainable? An evolution which takes us from separation to wholeness, shifting our reliance from outer sources of authority to a deeper way of knowing and enriching our capacity for creative self-organisation. An evolution focussed on connection, collaboration, community and consciousness. One day we might welcome the role of the spiritual (as opposed to the religious) in health, business and public life. Politicians could realise that the integrity of our borders is of far less import than the integrity of our actions and the quality of our desires.

The above-mentioned Ervin Laszlo, president of the Club of Budapest, an informal network of “spiritual and artistic” change agents, seeks a liberated future in the accelerating innovations of super-tech. “The new scientific world picture”, Laszlo argues, “could provide a socially sanctioned basis for the perennial vision of oneness between one human being and another, and between all human beings and nature”. Hold on – more than two billion people on Earth are malnourished, without sanitation, access to electricity or the means to make a phone call – this won’t happen overnight.

All the same, farmers in developing nations are wielding cell phones to connect directly to customers, bypassing middlemen. The internet is an unruly salon, providing the kind of intellectual sustenance once



reserved for scholars, monks and revolutionaries. Could inner-space expand into cyberspace, embellished by the accelerating innovations of science – info-tech, bio-tech, robo-tech, nano-tech – sparking the prospect of cheap, renewable sources of energy? Star Trek meets the kitchen sink.

Pinning the future on the wonders of hi-tech can be dangerous, as discovered by a previous generation of futurists. The First Futurist Manifesto, published in *Le Figaro* in 1909, revered the automobile:

We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed.

A racing car whose hood is adorned by great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to run on shrapnel – is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.

Five years later the shrapnel of World War I wiped out the rev heads who supported such fantasies, the adulators of “multicoloured billboards and enormous turbines that destroy the old sickly cooing sensitivity of Earth...” Almost 100 years later, the Pentagon heaps mountains of shrapnel, chemicals and warheads onto the sickly, cooing sensitivity of Earth and many of its occupants.

IN DECEMBER 2001, the newly installed defence minister of Afghanistan, Mohammed Fahim, announced it was time for the United States to stop dropping bombs on his country. A ministry colleague added that any al-Qaeda remaining in the land were few in number and of little threat, even “demanding” that the Pentagon pull back. The response of General Tommy Franks, emanating from the Texas ranch of President Bush, was worthy of Attila the Hun: “We will not be pressed into doing something that does not represent our national objectives, and we will take as long as it takes.” So much for the notion of an independent Kabul. (As we go to press the Pentagon is still dropping bombs.)

Is it just me, or do you also get the feeling that many Americans are obsessed with instruments of destruction? When I happened across the live footage of events in Waco, Texas, in February 1993, as federal agents stormed the Branch Davidian compound, guns blazing, it became blindingly obvious that some very sick people were running the country. The pretext was that children were being abused, yet the FBI attack started a fire which killed 76 people, many children among them. This is a land where it is an honour to head the CIA, and where arms dealers hob nob with presidents. One day, those who invent sophisticated methods of mass slaughter will be considered criminals, not entrepreneurial role models. The American way of life is partly built on

an industry of death. Global arms sales reap around \$US25 billion, led by the United States, mostly flogged to developing nations, after first being tested on them. The mentality of Waco infests the globe. The violence of U.S. culture is so endemic it explodes from almost every movie Hollywood makes, perpetuating the cycle of bloodshed. The source of this violence is surely greed.

Immanuel Kant argued that time and space were not things found in the world but were concocted by the brain to help humans organise impressions, “irremovable goggles” to give our thoughts structure. In our era, these goggles have been embellished with another lens, the lens of avarice, functioning as a distorting measure of worth – the worth of nations, objects and each other. The goal of life drummed into our heads without us even being aware of it is to get as much as we can as fast as we can. Rarely discussed are the ethics of enough.

Wealth need not be expressed as money. The Tibetans, the Aztecs and the Balinese possessed rich and elaborate cultures without a monetary system – until the heroes of the West arrived. Socrates was penniless, Diogenes lived in a tub, and one of the most intelligent men in the world, Ludwig Wittgenstein inherited two fortunes and gave them both away. The artist, writer and anthropologist, Tobias Schneebaum, confessed to a documentary maker that he had lived “hand to mouth” for 50 years and loved it, “I wouldn’t have it any other way”.

One of TV's most radical confessions.

This book is not only about the war in the Afghanistan, it is about the war for the soul of the future. As we move through this millennium, we need to evolve a global ethic, and to ask – is it reasonable for the super rich to increase their wealth without limit, without putting a chunk back into the service of the globe, from which it was extracted? After the first \$50 million, say, how about the rest going into a global kitty for the underfed? The controversial Indian philosopher, P.R. Sarkar, puts it well: “When the whole property of this universe has been inherited by all creatures, how can there be any justification for the system in which someone gets a flow of huge excess while others die for a handful of grain?”

It is argued that wealth trickles down, but piles of research shows that the opposite is true. Prosperity bubbles up. “Growth in national income does not necessarily lead to improvement in well being”, the United Nations found in a 1995 study and later concluded, “nearly 90 countries are worse off economically than they were 10 years ago”. Available indicators in the United States for the years from 1998 to 2000 point towards a further jump in incomes at the top. The wealthiest one percent in the last two decades have *doubled* their share of national household wealth, from 20 percent to close to 40 percent. In February 2002, the

*Financial Review* reported that the gap between rich and poor in Australia is widening, a disparity that offers bleak outcomes for health, crime and education. On the whole, Australians feel trapped in a paradox of needing less, and acquiring more; seeking simplicity and finding complexity, owning shares and out of a job. The myth of endless material progress has hit a brick wall.

I don't claim to possess the answers. I feel a dread, however, that the megalomania of high rollers and Western power brokers is driving us to the brink. An example: In June 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that Uncle Sam's emissions of toxic gases – already exuding a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide – will have risen 43 percent by 2020. In face of this, George Bush wants to build dykes and encourage business to adopt "voluntary measures". Is he mad? How can the world's most powerful politician owe his primary allegiance to a single nation, at the expense of the whole of Earth. The age of unconditional sovereignty is surely receding.

Meanwhile, the journey to a whole Earth healing inches ahead, regardless of Uncle Sam and his adolescent delusions – Kyoto, the World Court, arms reductions, the rights of children, and one day, maybe, a global tax, a wealth cap, a commission on currency transactions, the cancellation of Third World debt. A proposed Earth Charter calls for the creation of a

People's Assembly at the United Nations, one open to "systematic input from nonprofits and corporates", and for the bounty of bio-tech to be pursued on behalf of the Third World, for micro-credit to be made available to the poor and that all new weapons of mass destruction be criminalised. In the wings, no doubt, is a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic.

This is not the time to give up. It is not the moment to slink back into our shells, muttering that people are brutes, that we never change. Such worldly disdain faced those who set out to abolish slavery, bear baiting and public executions. History resonates with success. Ethics evolve. The philosopher, Friedreich Hegel, hardly a hippie, regarded the dialectical sweep of history as humanity's path to self-discovery.

Some feel we are irredeemably shaped by hidden forces, victims of our genes, our upbringing, propaganda, tempting us to surrender our innermost being, to the "herd", to "them", to public opinion, like today's so-called leaders, timidly tiptoeing backwards in the shadow of the polls. Instead of protecting our cherished borders, whether of the nation state or our self-belief, we should expand them, to live in full pursuit of the edge of our freedom, our responsibility and our capacity to love. The world is our workshop, and the future is up for grabs. But who will do the grabbing? Sooner or later we in the West will be confronted with a damning

choice. Can we bear to have a bit less, so that others can have a bit more?

Or will it be business as usual, winner takes all? So far, the official future seems to be a projection of the hopes and aspirations of the West. Scholars associated with the space industry have already unveiled a proposal for the U.S. Lunar Economic Authority, to oversee the “development and exploitation of extra-terrestrial resources”, including mining, manufacturing, power generation, tourism, real estate and other “macroprojects on the moon”, which could – wait for it – “employ three to 12 percent of the U.S. population in new jobs”. Here we go again. Who wants the gold mines? Who wants Pizza Hut? Who’ll get the casino?

And you thought the moon belonged to everyone.

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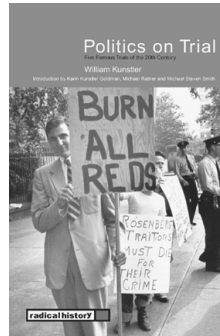
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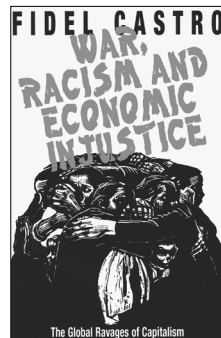
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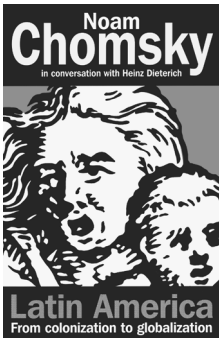
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