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By Brian Terrell

But what of the price of peace?” asked Jesuit priest and war resister Daniel Berrigan, writing from federal prison in 1969, doing time for his part in the destruction of draft records. “I think of the good, decent, peace-loving people I have known by the thousands, and I wonder. How many of them are so afflicted with the wasting disease of normalcy that, even as they declare for the peace, their hands reach out with an instinctive spasm in the direction of their loved ones, in the direction of their comforts, their home, their security, their income, their future, their plans—that 20-year plan of family growth and unity, that 50-year plan of decent life and honorable natural demise.”

What makes this report significant is that it was commissioned by the Pentagon and it was published by the U.S. Army War College.

The report recommends strengthening the U.S. military, already the biggest war machine on Earth, to protect the U.S. empire from the consequences of the environmental chaos. When the U.S. military embarks on a campaign, the result is always devastation and destruction for the poor and oppressed.

The U.S. Army, unlike the U.S. presidency, continues to fight for peace.

COVID-19 and the Wasting Disease of Normalcy

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By Brian Terrell

But what of the price of peace?” asked Jesuit priest and war resister Daniel Berrigan, writing from federal prison in 1969, doing time for his part in the destruction of draft records. “I think of the good, decent, peace-loving people I have known by the thousands, and I wonder. How many of them are so afflicted with the wasting disease of normalcy that, even as they declare for the peace, their hands reach out with an instinctive spasm in the direction of their loved ones, in the direction of their comforts, their home, their security, their income, their future, their plans—that 20-year plan of family growth and unity, that 50-year plan of decent life and honorable natural demise.”

From his prison cell in a year of mass movements to end the war in Vietnam and mobilizations for nuclear disarmament, Daniel Berrigan diagnosed normalcy as a disease and labeled it an obstacle to peace. “Of course, let us have the peace,” we cry, “but at the same time let us have normalcy, let us lose nothing, let our lives stand intact, let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties.” And because we must encompass this and protect that, and because at all costs—at all costs—our hopes must march on schedule, and because it is unheard of that in the name of peace a sword should fall, disjoining that fine and cunning web that our lives have woven … because of this we cry peace, peace, and there is no peace.”

Fifty-one years later, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the very notion of normalcy is being questioned as never before. While Donald Trump is “chomping at the bit” to return the economy to normal very soon based on a metric in his own head, more reflective voices are saying that a return to normal, now or even in the future, is an intolerable threat to be resisted.
Hate Crimes
When I was a child there was a small local airport in a rural, sparsely populated area known as Island Road. It had one dirt landing strip, and summers as I grew up meant spending most days walking or cycling up and down the Bogue Sound. Now that space is dominated by the Philadelphia International Airport. My grandparents lived in a small house within easy walking distance of the airport, as well as the Delaware River, where they raised five children, my father being the last. I spent those summers at that house, having adventures in the surrounding fields. They were dirt poor, surviving on what little income could be provided by my grandfather. He was one of the last bookbinders in Philadelphia, who worked his craft with his hands and the most basic of tools. He had rented and maintained the libraries of religious texts for neighboring synagogues, and they managed to get through the Great Depression.

One kid I knew, Joe, who was older and bigger than me, caught me out in the field and brought me down. He pinned me on my back with his knees, spit in my face, and gave me my earliest, and scariest experience of not noticing, hence not noticing, a collective transgression of not noticing, a conscious act of racism. It was the racism that powered the racism that accompanied the fact that the state had killed white students who resembled us, the racism that was because of the perceived horror of students that had occurred earlier that year (May 5, 1970) at Kent State University in Ohio. I was introduced as the young Marine who had gotten discharged as a CO during the month of the killing of the students at Kent State University.

It was years till it dawned on me that I had been discharged on the very day, (May 15, 1970) of another murder of students, that of the two young Black Students at Jackson State.

Since then I have learned that those killings were not, in fact, the first killings of students at Jackson, Miss., of young Black people.

May 15, 1970, two Jackson (Mississippi) State University students were murdered (and 12 were wounded) by police authorities at Jackson State. We learned of this tragedy when we were walking back from Marine Corps Air Station El Toro a free man, having been awarded an honorable discharge as a conscientious objector. I spent the next three days hitchhiking back to Blue Ridge, Texas, and my grandfather’s farm for the next several months I spent wandering the countryside, waking up “with the chickens” and hearing no news of any kind, certainly absolutely nothing about resistance to the war or about the murderous mayhem at Jackson State. I did not know that those Black students had died on the precise day that I regained my own personal (white-privileged) liberty.

In September that year I left the farm for college. At the University of Texas campus, I became known as the Marine Corps conscientious objector. Although I knew next to nothing about the American War against the Viet Namese against which I had objected, I was handed a microphone and was asked to speak. Flattered, I did so.

What did I have to say? Only what I had heard mentioned on the campus among virtually all white antiwar activists who spoke about the unconscionable murders of students that had occurred earlier that year (May 5, 1970) at Kent State University in Ohio. I was introduced as the young Marine who had gotten discharged as a CO during the month of the killing of the students at Kent State University.

It was years till it dawned on me that I had been discharged on the very day, (May 15, 1970) of another murder of students, that of the two young Black Students at Jackson State.

Since then I have learned that those killings were not, in fact, the first killings of students at Jackson, Miss., of young Black people.

My emphasis on Kent State was not because of the state killing children. Rather, it was because of the perceived horror accompanying the fact that the state had killed white students who resembled us, the antiracist activists.

My and our not knowing was an unconscious act of racism. It was the racism of not noticing, a collective transgression against those Jackson State youngsters, a transgression of not noticing, hence not knowing. May 15, 1970, was the day that Jackson State tragedy ... and of my freedom from state-sanctioned war.

—Stan Levin, San Diego VFP, Navy, Korean War

From Our Readers

From the Editors

Rewriting the Menu

We are walking through what the author Arundhati Roy calls a “portal” (page 18): the year 2020 with its plagues, wars, and civil strife offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. The year 2020 with its plagues, wars, and civil strife offers us a chance to emerge either dragging all the old militaristic, neoliberal baggage, or joining with citizens demanding a fresh, more sustainable future.

Depending upon perspective, Arundhati Roy can seem Pollyannish, or profoundly prescient. If her invitation for change is discounted by corrupt politicians and greedy corporatists, then we should prepare ourselves for the same old, same old in spades—political parties quibbling over morsels tossed their way by their multinational corporate masters while we wait like beggars for crumbs to fall to the floor. The old saying that “if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” is very much in play. But how about if we get off the floor, set the table, and write the menu, for a change? What would our world look like if we accept the challenge to work across generational borders, across racial divides, across gender lines that the powers-that-be keep throwing at us? Listen to Zapista women talk (page 14) about grassroots resistance for women. In his essay “Either Socialism Will Defeat the Louse or the Louse will Defeat Socialism,” Vijay Prashad counsels, “This darkness too will pass away. The light that welcomes us will not be, as Ngugi writes, the old light, but a new dawn.”

Former Vietnam combat Marine Scott Camil unequivocally states in our centerfold interview, “The main duty of a citizen in a democracy is to control their government.” Our government is out of control, and it’s the duty of the citizens to do something about it.”

Peace & Planet News is committed to offering readers narratives of world citizens unwilling to accept an unjust status quo. We want to emerge from this portal into a world where the U.S. military budget does not control our lives. We want to live in a world where our tax dollars are used to build ecologically sound infrastructure designed to save lives, not take them. We want to join forces with peace

continued on page 5 …
A New Way to Fight Climate Change

A Yurok Tribe resolution allows cases to be brought on behalf of the Klamath River as a person in tribal court.

By Anna V. Smith

This summer, the Yurok Tribe declared rights of personhood for the Klamath River—likely the first to do so for a river in North America. A concept previously restricted to humans (and corporations), “rights of personhood” means, most simply, that an individual or entity has rights, and they’re now being extended to nonhumans. The Yurok resolution, adopted by the tribal council last May, comes during another difficult season for the Klamath; over the past few years, low-water flows have caused high rates of disease in salmon and cancelled fishing seasons.

With the declaration, the Yurok Tribe joins other Indigenous communities in a growing Rights of Nature movement aimed at protecting the environment. Last year, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe adopted the Rights of Manoomin to protect wild rice—manoomin—and the freshwater sources it needs to survive in Minnesota. And in 2017, the New Zealand government adopted the Rights of the Whanganui River, stemming from a treaty process with Māori iwi, or tribes, that gives the river its own legal standing in court. “By granting the rights of personhood to the Klamath River, not only does it create laws and legal advocacy routes, but it’s also an expression of Yurok values,” says Geneva Thompson, associate general counsel for the tribe and citizen of the Cherokee Nation, who worked on the resolution. “The idea is that the laws of a nation are an expression of the nation’s values.”

The Yurok resolution draws inspiration from the Rights of Manoomin, as well as the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which enshrines the right of Indigenous people to conserve and protect their lands and resources. Legal personhood provides a different framework for dealing with problems like pollution, drought, and climate change, though no case has yet been brought to put the Whanganui, Manoomin, or Klamath rights to the test in court. The crucial aspect to establishing these legal frameworks, Indigenous lawyers say, involves shifting relationships and codifying Indigenous knowledge—in other words, recognizing non-human entities not as resources, but as rights-holders.

“From New Zealand to Colombia, the powerful idea that nature has rights is taking root in legal systems,” says David Boyd, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, of the Yurok Tribe’s resolution. “We must no longer view the natural world as a mere warehouse of commodities for humans to exploit, but rather a remarkable community to which we belong and to whom we owe responsibilities.”

In essence, the Yurok resolution means that if the river is harmed, a case can be made in Yurok tribal court to remedy the problem. Currently, says Yurok Tribe General Counsel Amy Cordalis, laws like the Clean Water Act or Endangered Species acts can be used to protect rivers by addressing symptoms of problems like diseased fish or pollution. But the Yurok resolution seeks to address the river’s problems directly and holistically, including the impacts of climate change. “You’re working towards making the river whole again,” Cordalis says.

In December 2018, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe and the 1855 Treaty Authority, an organization that upholds treaty rights for Chippewa bands, established legal personhood for wild rice. The resolution draws from the Rights of Nature—an international concept that argues that nature should have the same rights as humans—and is the first law to recognize legal rights of plant species. The rights spell out that within White Earth and other Chippewa ceded territories, wild rice has “inherent rights to restoration, recovery, and preservation,” including “the right to pure water and freshwater habitat,” the right to a healthy climate, and “a natural environment free from human-caused global warming.”

By Anna V. Smith

This story was originally published by High Country News.

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Howard Zinn on Memorial Day

Howard Zinn was invited by the Boston Globe to pen a biweekly op-ed column for the paper. He did that for about year and a half. The op-ed below appeared June 2, 1976, in connection with that year’s Memorial Day. After this appeared, Zinn’s column was cancelled.

By Howard Zinn

Memorial Day will be celebrated as usual, by high-speed collisions of automobiles and bodies strewn on highways and the sound of ambulance sirens throughout the land.

It will also be celebrated by the display of flags, the sound of bugles and drums, by parades and speeches and unthinking applause.

It will be celebrated by giant corporations, which make guns, bombs, fighter planes, air craft carriers and an endless assortment of military junk and which await the $100 billion in contracts to be approved soon by Congress and the President.

There was a young woman in New Hampshire who refused to allow her husband, killed in Vietnam, to be given a military burial. She rejected the hollow ceremony ordered by those who sent him and 50,000 others to their deaths. Her courage should be cherished on Memorial Day. There were the B2 pilots who refused to fly those last vicious raids of Nixon and Kissinger’s war. Have any of the great universities, so quick to give honorary degrees to God-knows-whom, thought to honor those men at this commencement time, on this Memorial Day?

No politician who voted funds for the war, no business contractor for the military, no general who ordered young men into battle, no FBI man who spied on antwar activities, should be invited to public ceremonies on this sacred day. Let the dead of past wars be honored. Let those who live pledge themselves never to embark on mass slaughter again.

American Dream with its limitless potential was spread before us. Play the game, and you have been marked. But it was a game, a “scheduling” was an implied promise that in 1969 looked like a sure thing, for us young white North Americans, anyway. A few years later, I abandoned normal life, dropped out after a year of college and joined the Catholic Worker movement, where I can understand at this commencement time, on this Memorial Day?

No politician who voted funds for the war, no business contractor for the military, no general who ordered young men into battle, no FBI man who spied on antwar activities, should be invited to public ceremonies on this sacred day. Let the dead of past wars be honored. Let those who live pledge themselves never to embark on mass slaughter again.

We are facing an epidemic, the Australian journalist John Pilger reminded the world of the baseline normal that COVID-19 exacerbates: “A pandemic has been declared, but not for the 24,600 who die every day from preventable starvation, and not for the 10,000 children who die every day from preventable malaria, and not for the 10,000 people who die every day because they are denied publicly funded healthcare, and not for the hundreds of Venezuelans and Iranians who die every day because America’s blockade denies them life-saving medicines, and not for the hundreds of mostly children bombeed or starved to death every day in Yemen, in a war supplied and kept going, profitably, by America and Britain. Before you panic, consider them.”

I was starting high school when Daniel Berrigan asked his question and at the time, while there obviously were wars and injustices in the world, it seemed as though if we did not take them too seriously or protest too strenuously, the present situation. “Today I believe we have to slow down our rate of production and consumption and to learn to understand and contemplate the natural world. This is the opportunity for conversion. Yes, I see early signs of an economy that is less liquid, more human. But let us not lose our memory once all this is past, let us not file it away and go back to where it was before as if all was normal. There needs to be a resurrection of our common life, a new, normal, something that links to the old but is different and more beautiful.”

In these perilous times, it is necessary to use the best social practices and to wisely apply science and technology to survive the present COVID-19 pandemic. The wasting disease of normalcy, though, is the far greater existential threat, and our survival requires that we meet it with at least the same courage, generosity, and ingenuity.

Brian Terrell, brian@vcnv.org, is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Non-violence and is quarantined on a Catholic Worker farm in Maloy, Iowa.
I am a registered nurse at Cook County Hospital, the safety-net hospital in Chicago and the busiest hospital in the state. The people who come to this hospital are some of the most underserved patients, mainly people of color, immigrants—many undocumented, the uninsured and underinsured, the homeless, and the incarcerated. Our emergency room denies no one care and about 300 people per day come there for treatment. We have yet to become a COVID-19 “hot spot” but my coworkers all know it’s coming. Nurses know our patients will be some of the hardest hit.

Already my hospital has changed drastically. We now have a whole section of the emergency room for COVID-19 patients, with isolation rooms. The critical care areas (for the severely ill) and the medical surgical units (for the less ill), where I work, also have COVID-19-only areas.

Nurses and other hospital staff are being exposed, showing symptoms, being tested, and being quarantined. The hospital says at least a dozen have been quarantined but my union, National Nurses United, estimates a number of COVID-19 patient had come into our emergency room. The patient needed to be intubated, but there was a problem.

There were no N95 masks readily available for the nurses and other workers helping this patient. They were locked up with the hospital’s new policy management had implemented to ration masks. This was despite stewards repeatedly demanding that upper management should make N95s easily accessible in our locked electronic medication cabinets (Pyxis) or on a PPE cart.

If PPE had been placed in either of these locations, steps away from where COVID-19 patients were being treated—the workers helping this patient would not have been exposed.

But it’s nearly impossible to intubate a person who is struggling to breathe and page a manager to obtain an N95 mask at the same time. Nurses, doctors, and other health care workers were exposed that day in my ER. It was criminal.

My chief steward wrote afterward, “I challenge management to prove that you can lead through this time, show concern for your employees, recognize and acknowledge the things that need to be improved, be willing to take the suggestions of those who are actually caring for these patients—the RNs—and place masks in the Pyxis. … The ball is in your court.”

The mismanagement of this exposure in the ER was turned into news for the following days, as an increasing number of COVID-19 patients came through the hospital doors. To ensure it didn’t happen again, groups of nurses began to organize small collective actions to demand that N95 masks be readily available.

The first instance was led by my chief steward, Con- suelo Vargas, who had been at work when the ER exposed to COVID-19 patient had come into our emergency room, the “hot spot” for our hospital.

Several days after the nurses were exposed, Vargas was assigned to the negative pressure room area for COVID-19 patients and again only found the nurses a PPE cart but handed Vargas a whole box of N95 masks.

The following week Vargas was assigned to the negative pressure room area for COVID-19 patients and again there were no N95 masks readily available. A group of nurses again went to the ER break room, saying they would come out once masks were provided.

The coordinator asked the nurses if they were hav- ing “another temper tantrum”—something management would say only to nurses, who are 80% to 90% female. But again she gave them a whole box of N95 masks.

Rank-and-file leaders discussed the steps it would take to duplicate these actions if needed throughout my hos- pital. We said we should have “temper tantrums” whenever and wherever we needed to, in order to get N95 masks.

There is a line to be careful not to cross. We don’t want to be seen as refusing to care for patients or lose our li- censes or jobs, but we also need to protect ourselves and not get sick. It is critical for us to recognize we have power right now, even with the massive toll the pan- demic is taking on us as frontline workers.

We know best how to get through this pandemic and take care of each other. Those who run the hospital know they need us.

Originally published by Labor Notes. Elizabeth Lalasz is a registered nurse in Chicago and a steward in National Nurses United.

Rewriting the Menu

...continued from page 2

…activities all over the world to re-set the table. We want to write a menu without ingredients of greed, violence and war.

Let’s consider nonviolence. There is much written to- day about the threat of armed gangs sweeping through our neighborhoods—we are being encouraged to fear our skinhead wannabe Nazis or agents of the federal govern- ment, depending on your political inclinations and who you listen to for the news. What to do? Buy a shotgun? Lay out claymores? We prefer nonviolent activism. Some folks equate nonviolence with passivity—they might think that if you’re not armed, you are vulnerable to a threat, you are offering yourself up passively for sacrifice. But that’s not the way it has to be. Nonviolent direct action requires courage, discipline, commitment, and creativity. It in- volves going toward the malefactor, not turning aside. It is the only force that will, in the end, effectively countermand militarism and all of its offspring.

Lastly, let’s include compassion. Not cheap pity for the suffering of others, not saccharine hand-wringer- and faux-Christian platitudes that serve to distance us from the suffering of our neighbors but real compassion.
Will the VA Be There for Future Veterans?

By Essam Attia

In the years after my military service in Iraq, I have walked the few blocks from my apartment to the Manhattan Veterans Affairs Medical Center hundreds of times to see my healthcare providers. The hospital, built in the wake of World War II for returning veterans, has provided me with excellent care for every physical and emergency room visit and primary care to specialist visits in dermatology and otolaryngology.

As I shelter-in-place in the American epicenter of the world’s worst pandemic in 100 years, I am, however, worried the VA will be unable to fulfill its missions to care for our generations of veterans or serve civilian sector patients in a national emergency.

The VA is lurching toward privatization, and quality of care is diminishing as a result.

That’s because Congress has steadily weakened the Veterans Health Administration, the nation’s largest healthcare system. First came the passage of the VA Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, then the VA MISSION Act of 2018. Both the Choice and MISSION Acts were supposed to offer veterans more “choice” by liberating us from the clutches of a big government bureaucracy. If I encountered a wait at the Manhattan VA, I would be sent to a private-sector doctor. The process was supposed to be both hassle-free and free of charge and I was supposed to get high-quality care in the private sector.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie assured veterans that the VA wouldn’t be privatized and I’d still be able to get the same quality of care I’d received for the past 12 years.

That’s not quite how it worked out. Until about two years ago, when I would visit the VA, I rarely had to wait more than 15 minutes for appointments in any department. Doctors, nurses, and other staff were attentive and engaged. Most important, they understood my specific military-related health problems and the way military culture has shaped my life.

Private sector doctors, as one RAND Corporation study of New York State providers documented, don’t really understand military culture or veterans’ specific healthcare problems. If an Iraq veteran like myself complains of respiratory problems, they don’t think of burn pits, they think of run-of-the-mill asthma. If a female veteran is having nightmares, they may not ask about military combat trauma.

In all my years of getting VA care, I’ve paid a very minimal co-pay. When I’ve paid a very minimal co-pay. When I recently visited a gastrointestinal specialist, I experienced the results of this staffing shortage. The waiting room was so full that patients were sitting on the floor and spilling out into the hallways. Some were waiting up to five hours for their appointments. The doctors and nurses were clearly overwhelmed and had to turn patients away to return at a later date. Now, the VA in Manhattan is being asked to admit civilian patients because private hospitals are even more overwhelmed.

When I worked in the Army’s geographic intelligence service, we mobilized a vast array of geographic data to provide detailed and accurate imagery of military operations. In Iraq to ensure the safety of my fellow service members and women during combat, rescue, and humanitarian missions. It doesn’t require a background in military geourbanistics to see the cliff we are hurtling towards.

By Jillian Primiano

The media has been saying that healthcare workers are on the “front lines” of the battle against COVID-19, but at work I’ve often felt like we are the final line, battling the enemy as it climbs over the walls of the fortress.

The essential workers at the grocery stores, the delivery companies, the factories, the distribution centers—those are the true front lines of this pandemic, the soldiers in the war movies who run into battle on foot as horsemen with spears charge their defenseless bodies.

Since stay-at-home orders proliferated across the country, many Americans are home with their Lysol spray and Zoom meetings while essential workers are exposed every day to the virus, often in unsafe, unsanitary, and cramped working conditions, contracting the virus and then spreading it to their families and other people in the community.

Rates of infection in areas around meat packing plants, for example, are 75% higher than other American counties.

Protecting the safety of those workers exposed in the communities is more effective than what we can accomplish at the hospital.

We can fight the virus with high-flow oxygen ventilators, and the most evidence-based medications possible for a months-old disease, but our efforts are often in vain. New data from Northwell Health shows that 88% of those placed on ventilators in New York have died (not including patients that remain hospitalized).

While Governor Cuomo refuses to cancel rent in New York and healthcare continues to be entangled with employment, essential workers are being put in the position of choosing between their lives and the roof over their heads, or their health and their health insurance. In the Midwest, President Trump has ordered meatpacking plants to remain open using the Defense Production Act (which nurses have been imploring him to use to produce more N95 masks) without providing any stipulations for increased safety measures. Meanwhile, if an essential worker quits, they cannot collect unemployment, which for many “essential” workers would reap more income than their labor.

It is clear that the government will not protect the working class. Instead, essential workers are forced to protect themselves, and in turn they are protecting everyone.

When Amazon workers demand that their facility be shut down for sanitation, they become healthcare workers.

When Instacart workers walked off the job to secure rights to face masks and hand sanitizer, they became healthcare workers.

When Walmart workers, reeling from news that two have died at one Chicago location, launched a worker-led system to track cases of the virus among employees and anonymously report working conditions, they became healthcare workers.

When MTA workers risked punishment to place duct-taped barriers between themselves and subway riders early in the pandemic, they became healthcare workers.

When Whole Foods workers call out sick en masse to demand sick time for self-isolation and the closures of stores with positive cases, they are healthcare workers.

When workers at a Smithfield pork plant where physical distancing is nearly impossible walk out to protest Trump’s executive order that their plant remain open, they are healthcare workers.

An essential worker who demands good working conditions could save my life. I stand by them so I don’t have to save theirs.
Want to Stop the Next Pandemic?
Start Protecting Wildlife Habitats

By Eric Roston

There are four critical facets of pandemic prevention, according to Lee Hannah, senior scientist at Conservation International. Three of them make immediate sense against the backdrop of our current emergency: stockpile masks and respirators, have testing infrastructure ready, and ban the global wildlife trade, including the open animal markets where COVID-19 may have first infected people.

His fourth recommendation is more grandiose: “Take care of nature.”

The assault on ecosystems that allowed COVID-19 to jump from animals to humans went far beyond markets and selling rare wildlife. Biodiversity—that is, the health of the entire ecosystem—can restrain pathogens before they ever leave the wild. “We need to tell people right now that there is a series of things we need to do once we’re out of this mess to make sure it never happens again,” Hannah says.

The role of biodiversity in disease prevention has received increased attention of late. In a 2015 “state of knowledge review” of biodiversity and human health by the United Nations, scientists wrote that “an ecological approach to disease, rather than a simplistic ‘one gem, one disease’ approach, will provide a richer understanding of disease-related outcomes.” Recent research has given more support to the idea that biodiversity protection in one part of the world can prevent novel diseases from emerging and leaping into another.

It’s already a game, in part. Not all species in a community are equally susceptible to a given disease, nor are they all equally efficient transmitters. In diverse ecosystems well separated from human habitations, viruses ebb and flow without ever having a chance to make it to the big time.

And as people move in, those protections begin to break down. Disrupted ecosystems tend to lose their biggest predators first, and what they leave behind are smaller critters that live fast, reproduce in large numbers, and have immune systems more capable of carrying disease without succumbing to it. When there are only a few species left, they’re good at carrying disease, and they thrive near people, there may be nothing between a deadly pathogen and all of humanity.

“Virus spillover risk” from wildlife to people rises as contact increases between them, according to research published in April by a team of researchers led by Christine Kreuder Johnson of the One Health Institute at University of California, Davis. Almost half of the new diseases that jumped from animals to humans (called zoonotic pathogens) after 1940 can be traced to changes in land use, agriculture, or wildlife hunting. SARS, Ebola, West Nile, Lyme, MERS, and others all fit the profile. There may be 10,000 mammalian viruses potentially dangerous to people.

“We are messing with natural systems in certain ways that can make them much more dangerous than they would otherwise be,” says Richard Ostfeld, a disease ecologist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. “And biodiversity loss is one of those. Climate change is another.”

A longer-term strategy can help nations see the benefits of rethinking resource use. “The revenue from clearing new forest is extremely high—briefly,” says William Karesh, executive vice president at EcoHealth Alliance, a research nonprofit. “But the cost to the public-health system also goes up because you get very common diseases like malaria.” And as we’re now seeing, new zoonotic pathogens can be even more expensive to deal with.

Despite years of creative and resource-intensive work by governments and nonprofits, companies’ actions to mitigate habitat loss aren’t adding up. Many large companies have pledged to halt deforestation, the largest driver of biodiversity loss, through initiatives like the Consumer Goods Forum, the Banking Environment Initiative and their Soft Commodities Compact. “All have missed the mark,” according to a new report by the Rainforest Action Network. Liam Karesh, executive vice president at Conservation International, is working to make sure that the reasons to promote biodiversity, including its pathogen-dulling potential, align with the other endangered elephant in the room: climate change.

In February, Hannah and colleagues announced findings on what the effects of achieving climate and conservation targets might be. Using data on 290,000 species, they were able to squint into the future and see where ecosystems might be saved from mass extinction if nations preserve 30% of natural habitats and meet U.N. limits for global warming. All told, meeting the goals would cut biodiversity losses in half.

The international community is positioned to make some progress. The Convention on Biological Diversity is a 196-nation effort to protect the richness of living things, tap natural resources sustainably, and share the benefits of the environment’s naturally occurring genetic innovations. (The United States and the Vatican are non-members.) The next phase of the biodiversity treaty, currently in draft form, proposes that at least 30% of land and ocean be conserved, up from 17% in the previous round. If governments agree to that goal, then nations and conservation scientists must take on the complicated step of figuring out which 30% is most important to protect and how to do it.

The way those areas are drawn today rarely reflects the scientific ideal of how to guard biodiversity. Looking at the existing protected lands, a paper in Nature this year found that 90% of conservation space fails to give bird, amphibian, and mammal species the full range of environmental conditions across their existing habitats. “We could be doing a much better job of getting things in the right places,” says Hannah. “There’s going to be right places for disease control and they may largely overlap the right places for biodiversity.”

Eric Roston is an award-winning journalist who has spent more than 15 years covering climate change in all its incarnations—from science, to technology, finance, business, and government.
Capitalism

...continued from page 1
dent, knows that climate change is real, and that the con-
sequences may be catastrophic.

Climate change is the most extreme example of the cri-
sis, but it is not the only one. Earth system scientists have
identified nine planetary boundaries—global environ-
mental conditions that define “a safe operating space for
humanity.” Crossing any one of those thresholds could
have deleterious or even disastrous consequences for civ-
ilization. Seven of the nine critical planetary boundaries
are close to or already in the danger zone.

Such research leads irresistibly to the conclusion that
modest reforms and policy shifts are not enough. We
confront not individual problems that can be tackled sep-
arately, but an interlocked set of disruptions of Earth’s
life support systems. Fundamental natural processes that
have evolved over millions of years are being shattered
in just a few decades.

Radical remedies are obviously required, but we won’t
find a cure unless we identify the underlying cause, the
systemic disease that is attacking our planet.

Why Growth?

Corporate executives, economists, bureaucrats, and
politicians all agree that growth is good and non-growth
is bad. Unending material expansion is a deliberate pol-
icy promoted by ideologues of every political stripe,
from social democrats to conservatives. When the G20
met in Toronto they unanimously agreed that their high-
est priority was to “lay the foundation for strong, sus-
tainable, and balanced growth.” The word growth ap-
peared 29 times in their final declaration.

Why, in the face of massive evidence that expanded
production and resource extraction is killing us, do gov-
ernments and corporations keep shoveling coal for the
runaway growth train?

Some accounts present the drive for growth as a choice
that politicians and investors make, under the influ-
ence of a bizarre obsession. British Marxist Fawzi Ibrahim
says, this “must be the first time in history that a neces-
sity has been described as a fetish. You might as well de-
scribe fish having a fetish for water as capitalism having
a fetish for growth. Growth is as essential to capitalism
as is water to fish. As fish would die without water, so
would capitalism drown without growth.”

Growth ideology doesn’t cause perpetual accumula-
tion—it justifies it. Uncontrolled growth is not the root
cause of the global crisis—it is the inevitable result of the
profit system, of capitalism’s inherent drive to accumu-
late ever more capital.

As individuals, the people who run the giant polluters un-
doubtedly want their children and grandchildren to live in a
clean, environmentally sustainable world. But as major
shareholders and executives and top managers they act, in
Marx’s wonderful phrase, as “personifications of capital.”

Regardless of how they behave at home or with their chil-
dren, at work they are capital in human form, and the im-
peratives of capital take precedence over all other needs
and values. When it comes to a choice between protecting
humanity’s future and maximizing profit, they choose profit.

In 2009, regulators in Europe and North America in-
trduced strict limits on automobile nitrogen oxide emis-
sions. All automakers had to submit their cars for testing.
That was a big problem for the world’s second largest au-
tomobile company, Volkswagen, because much of their
profit came from vehicles with diesel engines that did not
meet the new standards.

But, as we are often told, capitalism encourages inno-
vation. Just in time, VW announced that its engineers had
solved the problem. They had invented technology that
fully met or exceeded the new standards. They promoted
it very heavily under the slogan “Clean Diesel,” and it was
hugely successful. Between 2009 and 2016 Volkswa-
gen sold over 11 million Clean Diesel cars worldwide.

Here was a giant corporation doing well by doing good,
making huge profits while protecting the environ-
ment and human health.

Or so it seemed.

In 2016, thanks to investigations by some dedicated en-
gineers, we learned that Clean Diesel was a hoax. Volkswa-
gen had not invented new emissions technology. Volks-

[Capitalism has caused unprecedented changes in the entire biosphere, Earth’s lands, forests, water, and air. In its endless search for profits, it is massively disrupting and destroying Earth’s life support systems—the natural processes and cycles that make life itself possible.

In the mid-1800s, the German scientist Justus von Liebig showed that in its natural state, soil provides the essential nutrients that allows plants to grow and replen-
ish nutrients from plant and animal waste. But when crops are produced for distant markets, as they increas-
ingly were in 19th-century England, soil fertility suf-
f ered because food waste and excrement do not return to
the soil. Liebig called this a robbery system, because nu-
trients were being stolen from the soil and not returned.

Marx studied Liebig’s work carefully. He seized upon
the then-new scientific concept of metabolism, of biolog-
ical and physical cycles essential to life, and made it cen-
tral to his analysis of the relationship between humanity
and nature.

Marx integrated Liebig’s explanation of the soil ex-
haustion crisis into his analysis of capitalism, conclud-
ing that “a rational agriculture is incompatible with the
capitalist system,” because the imperatives of capitalist
growth inevitably conflict with the laws of nature.

Marx’s analysis of 19th-century British agriculture
continued on next page…]
Capitalism

… continued from previous page

provides the theoretical starting point for what is now known as metabolic rift theory, which is used by many radical ecologists to analyze and understand modern environmental crises.

The concept of metabolic rift expresses society’s simultaneous dependence on and separation from the rest of nature. Like an auto-immune disease that attacks the body, capitalism is both part of the natural world and at war with it. It simultaneously depends upon and undermines the Earth’s life support systems.

Capital’s ecologically destructive impacts are driven not just by its need to grow, but by its need to grow faster. The circuit from investment to profit to reinvestment requires time to complete, and the longer it takes, the less total return investors receive. Competition for investment produces constant pressure to speed up the cycle, to go from investment to production to sale ever more quickly.

That’s why it took 16 weeks to raise a two-and-a-half pound chicken in 1925, while today chickens twice that big are raised in six weeks. Selective breeding, hormones, and chemical feed have enabled factory farms to produce not just more meat, but more meat faster. The suffering of animals and quality of the food are secondary concerns, if they are considered at all.

But most natural processes cannot be manipulated that way. Nature’s cycles operate at speeds that have evolved over many millennia—forcing them in any way inevitably destabilizes the cycle and produces unpleasant results.

Fertile land is destroyed, forests are clear-cut, and fish populations collapse. There is an insuperable conflict between nature’s time and capital’s time—between cyclical processes that have developed over hundreds of millions of years, and capital’s need for rapid production, sale, and profit.

The metabolic rifts that Liebig and Marx knew of and worked about were initially local or regional, but they have grown along with capitalism. Colonialism extended the damage by transporting products and nutrients from distant places.

Ireland was the first victim of the global robbery system. Describing how England imported food from poverty-stricken Ireland, Marx wrote: “England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil.”

Since the middle of the 20th century, capitalism has caused unprecedented changes in the entire biosphere, Earth’s lands, forests, water, and air. In its endless search for profits, it is massively disrupting and destroying Earth’s life support systems—the natural processes and cycles that make life itself possible. Metabolic rifts have become metabolic chasms.

That’s why the environmental crisis can’t be just a talking point for socialists—it’s a planetary emergency that we must treat as a top priority. We need to initiate and join struggles for immediate environmental aims. We need to participate, not as sideline critics, but as activists, builders, and leaders. And, at the same time, we need to find the best ways to patiently explain how those struggles relate to the larger fight to save the world from capitalist ecocide.

In Too Many People?, Simon Butler and I wrote that “in every country, we need governments that break with the existing order, that are answerable only to working people, farmers, the poor, indigenous communities, and immigrants—in a word, to the victims of ecocidal capitalism, not its beneficiaries and representatives.”

Such a profound transformation will not just happen. In fact, it will not happen at all unless ecology has a central place in socialist theory, in the socialist program, and in the activity of the socialist movement.

Twenty-first-century socialists and greens must be ecosocialists, and humanity needs an ecosocialist revolution.

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Remembering the Future

Seven years ago
I studied with wonder
the cover of Popular Science
with its intricately detailed drawing
of a personal helicopter rising
above a lawn-drenched suburb
poised to sail off in a swarm
of other commuting ‘copters
for a skyline of gleaming towers.

Inside pages promised everyone
miraculous machines; the ultimate
in labor-saving convenience
for washing and drying clothes and dishes,
managing sheets and shirts, toasting waffles,
automatically closing garage doors;
the gear shift was about to disappear,
along with hand signals.

Hopeful materialism masked
the human tragedy of a war just concluded
and all those to come,
as I eagerly imagined
my own flying machine
taking me to a job I liked,
whatever that would be,
taking me home again
to the woman I truly loved,
whoever that might be.

Yes, I now have a woman I love,
have had several jobs,
some liked some not,
but no helicopter in my garage.

While I lived my hedonistic dreams,
machines proliferated at frightful cost
when spasms of obsolescence
created mountains of rust,
convenient wrappings over-filled dumps,
plastics leaked from every civilized seam
to acidifying oceans already
choking on carbon emitted
from fossil-fueled factories and power plants
poisoning entire food chains,
creating a new very different
future to remember.

—Woody Powell
President Donald Trump has claimed he was being sarcastic and testing the media when he raised the idea that injecting disinfectant or irradiating the body with ultraviolet light might kill coronavirus.

Over more than two centuries, the United States has stirred a very wide range of feelings in the rest of the world: love and hatred, fear and hope, envy and contempt, awe and anger. But there is one emotion that has never been directed toward the United States until now: pity. However bad things are for most other rich democracies, it is hard not to feel sorry for Americans. Most of them did not vote for Donald Trump in 2016. Yet they are locked down with a malignant narcissist who, instead of protecting his people openly inciting people (some of them armed) to take to the streets to oppose the lockdowns, has amplified its lethality. The country Trump promised to make great again has never in its history seemed so pitiful.

Will American prestige ever recover from this shameful episode? The United States went into the coronavirus crisis with the highest national capacity and most of the world's leading scientific research. It was able to take stock of the available international protection, the world's best concentration of medical talent, and its military complex with stunning logistical capacity, and calibrate its response to what it knew about a deadly virus. Trump, his party, and Rupert Murdoch's Fox News became vectors of this mind-set, but he did not invent it. The U.S. response to the coronavirus crisis has been paralyzed by a contradiction that the Republicans have inserted into the heart of U.S. democracy. On the one hand, they want to control all the levers of governmental power. On the other they have created a political dynamic playing on the notion that government is innately evil and must not be trusted.

The contradiction was made manifest in two of Trump's statements on the pandemic: on the one hand that he has “total authority,” and on the other that “I don’t want to control all the levers of government.” The contradiction between authoritarian and anarchic impulses, is incapable of coherence.

But this is not just Donald Trump. The crisis has shown definitively that Trump's presidency is not an aberration. It has grown on soil long prepared to receive it. The monstrous howls of mistrust have structure and purpose and strategy behind it.

There are very powerful interests who demand “freedom” in order to do as they like with the environment, society, and the economy. They have infused a very large part of American culture with the belief that “freedom” is literally more important than life. My freedom to feed tribal hatreds but that this be- continued on next page …
I t feels a lot like being a fly on the wall, watching this crisis unfold while living in a comfortable home with a big garden, healthy, with a great partner, both of us retired, the kids and grandkids and extended family doing well on all accounts, all financially secure. Outside, people are sick and dying, lonely in their apartments or homeless, in shock at losing their businesses, jobs, and incomes, not knowing where their next meal is. The dissonance, when I allow myself to feel it, is disorienting. But today this fly finally saw how our side, that of collective morality and rationality, will win.

The ruling oligarchy is splitting between the rational corporate ruling class, which understands that the stakes are survival, and the irrational crazed profiteers and gangsters, the vulture capitalists of the healthcare and the military production matrix, the petrochemical industries that denied global climate change, all united under the banners of the mindless ideologues of the far-right whose only program is more of the same free-market economics instructor, antiwar activist, and counterculture icon best known for his involvement with the Weather Underground.

By Mark Rudd

They told him that the turning point for them personally was when they realized that the antiwar movement was sitting with them at the breakfast table every morning.

The Trump Disease

...continued from previous page

haviour has become normalized. When the freak show is live on TV every evening, and the star is boasting about his ratings, it is not really a freak show any more. For a very large and solid bloc of Americans, it is reality. And this will get worse before it gets better. Trump has at least eight more months in power. In his inaugural address in 2017, he evoked “American carnage” and promised to make it stop. He has been the lifeblood of American politics.

They told him that the antiwar movement never set as a specific goal to split all the ruling-class families. But that’s what happened, because our opposition to the war made total sense, even to their children and wives. (The other power prong of the movement, much more intentional, was the existence of an enormous antiwar movement within the military itself. This made the army, especially, unreliable and unusable in Vietnam. See the brilliant 2003 documentary, Sir, No Sir!) The antiwar movement never attained political power in the sense of electing a true antiwar Congress and certainly never a President. But we won anyway. By splitting the ruling class, we were analyzing all this within the context of the miraculous feat of endurance of the Vietnamese people and military in surviving the American industrial-military onslaught. Recognize, though, that the Vietnamese themselves have always thanked the international and the American antiwar and solidarity movement.

Back to this historical moment. Finally, after realizing the hard-core individualism of the Reagan/Bush/Trump years (which created the neoliberal Democratic Party, I should add) is dying a sudden and painful death, acceptable to the Times. Only collective social and governmental solutions like the New Deal will get us out of this crisis by building a stable, fair society. We can beat not only the pandemic, but also solve the crisis of global warming by sharing the wealth of society.

How important is this shift? Only that it holds the key to our eventual victory. These are our allies now.

Consider the historical analogy of how the antiwar movement helped end the Vietnam War. Back in the nineties, a brilliant young sociologist, Tom Wells, was a student of Todd Gitlin, whom I admire a lot, at University of California, Berkeley. Wells set for himself the dissertation question “How did the antiwar movement win?” He went and interviewed a bunch of the top war managers, McNamara, Rusk, et al. They told him the turning point for them personally was when they realized that the antiwar movement was sitting with them at the breakfast table every morning. That dissertation became The War Within, an absolutely essential book to understand the anti-Vietnam War peace movement, the power of mass protest.

I assure you the antiwar movement never set as a specific goal to split all the ruling-class families. But that’s what happened, because our opposition to the war made total sense, even to their children and wives. (The other
They Almost Killed Him

Veteran who came home safe from Vietnam almost loses his life to U.S. government agents

Scott Camil served two tours of duty in Vietnam as a forward observer for the Marines. His activism against the war began once he was out of the military. He began coordinating demonstrations and rallies, which eventually caught the attention of federal authorities including the FBI.

Matthew Breems: Scott, you volunteered to serve in Vietnam. Can you explain what your mindset was when you signed up to join this war that you knew was going to be dangerous?

Scott Camil: I grew up in a time there was a draft. My father was a member of the John Birch Society. We were a right-wing, anti-communist family. I was taught that it was my duty when I graduated high school to serve in the military. When the recruiters came to my high school, they said, “All you guys are going to get drafted and sent to Vietnam as soon as you graduate. But if you join up now, you have more benefits.” So, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. I thought that the Marine Corps was the best branch of service, and in high school we were required in order to graduate. In my career paper, I wrote that I was going to be a Marine, and in my mind I thought I could start off a private, and if I do really good, I’ll end up a general. I didn’t know that the breakup was really workers and management, and enlisted people were the workers, and the officers were the management, and I was always going to be a worker.

I went to Parris Island, and got there on a bus in the middle of the night. I got off the bus, walked up to the little red line, stepped on the line, and then somebody started yelling and screaming at me.

We were taught that the job of a Marine is to destroy the will of the enemy to resist the authority of the United States of America, and you do that by making the cost that they have to pay for resistance to the United States more than they’re willing to do. And in order to do that, they have to make you into a Marine.

After my initial bootcamp training, I went to infantry training, then I went to California for guerrilla warfare school at Camp Pendleton, mountain climbing, escape and evasion and demolition school. Then to Okinawa for the same stuff. And then I was sent to Vietnam. 

MB: So, you arrive in Vietnam after all of your training. Describe your early experiences over there.

SC: My unit was called Alpha Battery, First Battalion, 11th Marines. It was an artillery unit, and I was a new guy in the unit, and I was assigned to guard duty. I got to the company area the night of April 18, 1966, around 1:30 in the morning, a trip flare went off to my left front, and as soon as this trip flare went off, all of these people stood up, and they had weapons, and they were already inside the wire.

In a fraction of a second, everything I telling you now happened. All of a sudden, all of these people stood up, they were charging, they were shooting. We started receiving rocket fire. Three of the four posts were blown up. My post was the only one that survived. They were Viet Congappers. They entered the base from three sides. They destroyed the six 105 Howitzers. They destroyed the fuel dump, they destroyed the ammo dump, and they ran through the entire sleeping area.

MB: So that was three weeks in, give or take, into your experience in Vietnam.

SC: That was my first battle. I had met a guy named Maine, he was from Jacksonville and I was from Hialeah. We were friends. The dead Marines were brought to a bunker and laid with ponchos covering them. I went and I pulled the ponchos off the face of the Marines, and I saw Maine, and when I saw him, everything changed for me. When I saw him, I realized that it was people’s job to kill me. That was their job and that’s what they were allowed to do. And that if I didn’t pay attention, I was going to end up dead.

That day, I decided that I hated all of the Vietnamese, that I was going to get them back for what they did to us. I couldn’t tell which Vietnamese liked us and which Vietnamese didn’t like us. And all I knew is that if they were dead, they couldn’t hurt us. So that day I decided I would have no empathy. I would kill every Vietnamese I came in contact with. I’m going to err on the side of safety, and the life of one Marine is more valuable than the lives of all of the Vietnamese, both North and South. That’s what I believed and from that point on I was ruthless. I had no empathy and I just wanted to kill them and get them back for what they did to us.

MB: You’ve had this sea change in your attitude after this battle experience, or really as like a protection mechanism almost, you had to just get rid of any empathy. What did the next phase of your combat time over there look like?

SC: The next night, I was sent to that same bunker on guard duty, and as soon as it got dark, I started shaking, and I couldn’t stop shaking till the next day. During a battle, I was fine. When waiting for the battle to start, I would be shaking. Once the battle started, I was cool. Once it was over, I’d be shaking again.

I get sent to this post and it’s dark, and I’m shaking, and I’m waiting for them to come and waiting for them to come. And it was terrible thinking that I would rather have the job of hunting for them than sitting in the bunker waiting for them to attack me. So I volunteered to be a forward observer, and I got sent out in the field attached to the infantry. Being a forward observer is the best job that I could have had.

I had a great relationship with the infantry commanders, because they needed somebody who could read a map and a compass. The first time I was wounded was on February 18, 1967. I had climbed over a dyke. I turned my back on the village, and I reached my hand down and grabbed my radio operator, and was pulling him up over the dyke, and all of a sudden, I heard an explosion. It seemed really close to me. I could smell the explosion, and then I noticed that the ground was coming up. And then I woke up.

They patched me up. I didn’t need a medevac. I stayed with the unit. I don’t think that I could convey to a civilian the psycho-
thought it would be cowardice I did not have the courage to say,
on that time, when that time was
maraderie you can imagine.
combat is unlike any kind of ca-
to run away. Even if we're out-
not leave another friend in the
duty.
so early on in your first tour of
Explain why you decided to sign
The Winter Soldier
three days. There's a documentary
wounds were
psychological pressure. On Oc-
continue on, and each step you
and blow up. And you have to
ple in front of you and the people
logical pressure of always being
had been through enough, and
I had been through enough, and
so I walked me to stay. He told me that
low me to stay. He told me that
called cowards; they're being
called people who aren't willing
to serve their country. When the Viet-
can't say that you're a coward, that you don't
what you're talking about, or
and you're not willing to serve your
country.

In my mind, it was a job that I
inherently because I was qualified
do this job, and it was a job that
had to be done. And I helped
organize Winter Soldier inves-
tigations all over Florida, Ala-
ma, and Georgia. All of a sud-
den, I started getting arrested,
and got to understand what
what was happening.
I learned much later the full
story from the Freedom of Infor-
men that I was targeted by
FBI as a threat to national se-
curity. J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo
to the FBI calling for my neutral-
ization as a threat to national se-
curity, and authorizing pretest op-
erations and counter-intelligence
techniques. A pretext operation,
well, they bust you. They put a
bullet in you. They stick some
drugs in your pocket. They say that you
for two and a half days. And the
purpose of our demonstration was
to inconvenience the pub-
ic in order to make them think
about the war in Vietnam.
The main duty of a citizen in
a democracy is to control their
government. Our government
is out of control, and it's the
duty of the citizens to do something
about it. And when the police
are trying to stop us from doing
that, we're going to resist them.
And we basically used the mini-
mum amount of force necessary
to protect our rights.

MB: You had been identified
as a ring leader of these protests,
and that got the attention of fed-
eral authorities, then?

SC: There was no way that I
had been identified
as a ring leader of these protests,
and that got the attention of fed-
eral authorities, then?

MB: What activities were you
doing that caused such fear
in the FBI and in federal authorities
that they wanted to arrest you?

SC: I was being a Marine, ex-
cercising my constitutional rights,
and basically—we started hav-
ing demonstrations. They started
to arrest us for those demonstrations,
and we fought back with vio-
ence. And I felt that I'm defending
my constitutional rights, and
it doesn't matter to me whether it's
the fucking FBI or the com-
munists that are trying to take
away my rights. If the rights
are worth defending halfway
around the world, why wouldn't they
be worth defending right here?

I'm defending my constitutional rights,
and it doesn't matter to me whether it's
the fucking FBI or the communists
that are trying to take away my rights.
If the rights are worth defending halfway
around the world, why wouldn't they be
worth defending right here?

logical pressure of always being
in mindfields and seeing the peo-
ple in front of you and the people
in back of you step on something
to blow up. And you have to
continue on, and each step you
could take could be your last
step, a tremendous amount of
psychological pressure. On Oc-
tober 2, 1967, I got hit a second
time, and it was from a grenade
that was my belief that a friend does
not leave another friend in the
duty.

It was my belief that a friend does
not leave another friend in the

country.

So, I was returned to Vietnam
and the Pentagon Papers, and I'm reading
all of this stuff, and starting
to feel like I was used and wasn't
told the truth. I left Vietnam
Then Jane Fonda came to speak,
and said that “in order for a de-
mocracy to function, people have
to have access to the truth. The
government is lying about Viet-
am, and it's the duty of Vietnam
veterans, patriotic Vietnam
veterans, to tell the public the truth
about what's being done in their
name with their money.”

I thought, I'm a patriotic Viet-
nam veteran. I understand duty, I
believe in democracy. I think the
public has the right to know. So, I
told all of my story.
All of a sudden, I was in contact
with a group called Vietnam Vet-
ers Against the War. I went to
Detroit, Michigan, to testify at the
Winter Soldier Investigation and
there, we talked about what we
did in Vietnam, what our orders were. It lasted
for three days. There's a documentary
out called The Winter Soldier. I
highly recommend it.

On that film is where my con-
version takes place from being
a Vietnam veteran who knows
things about Vietnam, to being
a Vietnam veteran who realizes that
the war is wrong, that the
government is lying about it,
and that I have a duty as a veteran
to the public to tell them the truth.

When civilians are telling
them that the war is wrong,
they're being called commu-
nist sympathizers; they're being
Can Women’s Grassroots Resistance Stop the Rise in Violence Against Women?

By Laura Carlsen

When 4,000 women from 49 countries met in a Zapatista community in March to find ways to end violence against women, we knew what we were up against. Many, if not most, of the women brought with them the scars of gender violence.

The second “Gathering of Women Who Struggle” faced two big questions: How do we take personal pain and forge it into collective action, and what do we need to do differently to reduce a form of violence that has proved not only intransigent, but resurgent?

There was no program or set of issues defined beforehand, which made for a loose-knit and sometimes chaotic situation. The first day scores of women stood up at a mike on a wooden platform to describe the abuse they’ve suffered, and the paths they built, collectively, to get out of abusive situations, heal themselves and help others. Their stories demonstrated the degree to which violence against girls and women permeates society and how it has been normalized through socially acceptable practices that isolate the victim and her pain. Each woman who spoke was met with a cry of “You are not alone!”

The second day participants broke into groups to discuss strategies to deal with the frustrating truth that after decades of identifying, legislating, institutionalizing protection mechanisms and organizing around violence against women, we are no closer to eradicating it. In most of our countries, femicides—murders of women for being women—have gone up.

In El Salvador, murders of women more than doubled between 2013 and 2017, with Honduras and Guatemala close behind. Mexico faces an epidemic in violence against women. The United Nations reports that nine women are killed every day, and the Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography found that 44% of women have suffered violence from a partner and 66% have experienced some form of violence.

The statistics don’t reflect the full extent of the problem, since many cases aren’t reported. Most of the women who told their stories at the Zapatista meeting described a process of years, if not decades, to dare to speak out about the attacks. In many legal systems, women who suffered abuse as young girls can’t report abuse due to statutes of limitations. The stories of the abuse of women as little girls were the hardest to listen to.

The testimonies also bore out the fact that discrimination, racism, homophobia, and poverty compound the risk. Native American women in the United States face a murder rate more than 10 times the national average. Undocumented migrant women are increasingly afraid to report violence for fear of deportation, putting them at far greater risk and allowing situations of domestic violence to escalate.

An estimated 60% of migrant women who pass through Mexico are raped. Attacks against members of the LGBTQ community have become particularly common and vicious, and women workers face systematic violence that often includes economic blackmail.

At the same time, feminist movements have made great strides in raising the issue. From the #MeToo movements that publicly denounce sexual abuse and harassment, to the Chilean women’s viral performance of “A rapist in your path,” to demonstrations throughout the world, including the current wave of student strikes and occupations against gender violence in Mexico, a new generation of feminists is spearheading organizing to reclaim the right to live without fear, injecting a new anger and urgency in women’s movements, as well as new tensions and challenges.

The opening speech of Zapatista Comandante Amada reflected the frustration of living in societies where there’s more awareness of women’s rights, but also more violence. “They say that women are now taken into account, but they continue to kill us. They say there are now more laws that protect women, but they continue to kill us," Amada told the crowd. She criticized apparent prog-ress on women’s issues—toward equal pay, presence in the media, men in the movement, and, as in Mexico’s government, equal representation in government—ending every advance listed with the dictum: “but they continue to kill us.”

The Zapatistas announced that in 2019 not a single woman was murdered or disappeared in their communities, located in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. As always, they emphasized that theirs is not a model to be applied elsewhere, but a call to organize, in different ways, in different places, toward the goal of eliminating violence against women. Their success reminds us that the fundamental demand to live without the reality-based fear of attack by men is not impossible.

Comandanta Amada emphasized three issues that constitute major challenges for modern feminists: the development of an anti-capitalist analysis and practice, the analysis and political feminism. Although the gap that exists between a critique of capitalism and feminism is not only in political feminism, but especially in practice. It’s no accident that the anthem of the contemporary feminist movement, “A rapist in your path,” emerged in the context of the massive movement against neoliberal policies in Chile. A vision of women’s liberation that does not confront the economic model ends up including only women with privilege, and even for them is ultimately doomed to fail.

Second, the Zapatistas issued an explicit call to “wickedness” to “women of judgment, that is, of age.” The reference spoke to a widening gap between younger feminists and older generations that has opened up in the context of recent mobilizations. Unfortunately, it’s not just a gap, it’s a wedge, with misunderstandings on both sides and few spaces for open discussion about the differences. Comandanta Amada ended with an admonishment that must be taken to heart: “If we don’t let geographies divide us, then let’s not let calendars divide us either.”

Third, during the discussions and in the speeches almost no one emphasized the government’s role in ending violence against women, except to say that it has failed. Violence against women continues to rise and most of the attackers continue to face no consequences.

Even governmental programs that seem to have worked move to be vulnerable and too often ephemeral. The 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in the United States has been credited with reducing domestic violence by 60% and yet it was allowed to expire and renewal is currently stalled in Congress.

“It seems like our violent deaths, our disappearances, our pain—they all profit the capitalist system. Because the system only allows that which brings it profit. That’s why we say that the capitalist system is patriarchal.”

Among the thousands of women at the gathering from all kinds of organizations and collectives, some include anticapitalism as a central tenet of their work, some do not, and many, probably the majority, seem to consider the capitalist system an abstraction that isn’t particularly relevant to their cultural, social, and political feminism. Although the gap that exists between a critique of capitalism and feminism is not only in political feminism, but especially in practice.
Women

Scott Camil

Organizing Among Us

While women practiced self-defense training on the community soccer field, others discussed their work in accompanying women who have to take dangerous routes to and from work, creating “safe spaces,” publicly denouncing abusers, forming brigades to search for women who have been forcibly disappeared, adopting security protocols in their organizations, creating victims’ support groups, developing popular education programs, providing translators for indigenous women, defending migrant women en route, setting up counseling services and all kinds of creative healing therapies, visiting women in prison and providing re-entry services, campaigns for women tourists to prevent abuse and protect their own fucking turfs. And that would allow us to lower the bridges and evacuate the people whose rights were being violated.

So yes, our plans called for using weapons, explosives, and actually fighting them. But every sentence said, “This will be done for defensive reasons only.” At the Gainesville Eight trial, the jury got to read the plans that I wrote, all of these things that I just told you. The jury read all of that stuff. The jury ruled that it was defensive and found us not guilty.

All of a sudden, the guy in the back seat grabbed me around the neck, and pinned my head to the headrest, and started beating me in the head with a gun.

After I was found not guilty on that case, and before there was the J. Edgar Hoover move—the J. Edgar Hoover case, and I was found not guilty in all of those cases. Then there was the J. Edgar Hoover move—a J. Edgar Hoover case, and I was found not guilty, and the federal jury recommended that the agents be indicted for attempted murder. So then, after I was found not guilty, I was really tired of going to jail, being arrested, getting bond, going to jail, being arrested, getting bond, going to court. I was really tired of it. I always had to keep a file. I decided that I wanted to get married and have a family.

My activism now is more local. I’m in Veterans For Peace, and Veterans For Peace is against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and I support all of that kind of stuff. But I feel that I have more power in local politics. I’m the political chair of the Sierra Club. And as political chair, I’ve gotten to know many representatives by name. I’m able to meet with them, to lobby them. They all come before us for our endorsement. So I have some clout with our elected leaders here in Alachua County, and I’m able to get a tremendous amount accomplished locally, and that’s what I do. I manage elections, and I lobby our elected officials mostly on environmental issues.

I’ve been an antiracist for about 49 years, and in those 49 years, things have gotten worse. So I’m not quite sure that I have the answer as far as, “If you do A, you’ll get the result B.” We have to try to hold our government’s feet to the fire. You have to be active, and you can’t be afraid to speak out, and most important, the idea that you should have the right to write the law—that’s an anti-democratic idea. And when the government is not being responsive to you, it’s incumbent upon you to go and get in their face. Don’t let the government or other people tell you how to think. Do your own research. Find the facts and think for yourself.

Matthew Breen creates podcasts of interviews with Vietnam veterans that are published by courageoteresist.org and vietnamfulldisclosure.org.
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says that the Great Lockdown, which has no end date, could very well lead to a loss of $9 trillion to global Gross Domestic Product over the entirety of 2020 and 2021; this number is greater than the combined economies of Japan and Germany. This scenario, the fund’s managing director Kristalina Georgieva admits, “may actually be a more optimistic picture than reality produces.”

There are calls within Europe for the modification of debt, there are calls on the global stage for debt moratoriums, and there are calls for the IMF to issue trillions of dollars of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). But old habits do not die. Germany and the Netherlands do not want to bail out the southern European economies, while the U.S. Treasury and the creditors are not keen on debt relief for the catastrophic pandemic, the U.S. government has decided to withhold its financial contribution to the World Health Organization (WHO). There are now over 5 million people infected by SARS-CoV-2 across the world, with deaths increasing, a general sense of gloom falling like heavy winter snow on our human capacity for optimism.

But then there are sparks of hope, mainly coming from parts of the world committed to socialism. At the end of January, when most of the world was cavalier about the news from Wuhan (China), Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc assembled a team and began to create measures to tackle the spread of the virus. “Fighting the epidemic is fighting the enemy,” he said at that time. Vietnam’s government began to trace those who might be infected, test their contacts, quarantine anyone who interacted with them, and bring in the entire medical establishment—including retired doctors and nurses—to deal with the emergency. Vietnam’s Military Medical Academy and Viet A Corporation developed a low-cost test kit based on WHO guidelines, which allowed the country to begin testing people with symptoms. Crucially, the government repeatedly cautioned the population against xenophobia.

Until now, there have been no deaths from COVID-19 in Vietnam. Last week, Vietnam shipped 450,000 protective suits to the United States and 750,000 masks to France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Within living memory, the United States, with assistance from its European allies, dropped seven and a half million tons of explosives, including chemical weapons (napalm and Agent Orange), which devastated Vietnam’s society and poisoned its agricultural land for generations; this is 100 times greater than the power of the atom bombs that the United States dropped on Japan. Yet, it is Vietnam whose government and people have used science and public action to tackle the virus and who sent—in solidarity—equipment to the United States, where the absence of science and public actions has paralyzed society.

A hundred years ago, in 1918–19, an influenza pandemic swept the world, traveling on ships carrying troops to and from the battlefields of Europe in the throes of World War I. At least 50 million people were felled by what was erroneously called the Spanish Flu (the virus was first detected in Kansas in March 1918). This influenza followed another pandemic—in 1889–90—whose swift diffusion has been blamed on the rapid movement of humans by steam transportation by sea and land. While the 1889–90 influenza mainly killed children and the elderly, the influenza of 1918–19 also killed young adults for reasons that are still not fully explained.

Troops, who, in the words of the poet Isaac Rosenberg, “Drained the wild honey of their youth” in the mud, lice, and mustard gas of the ghastly trenches now had to confront the infectious flu at home. As the war ended, the belligerent countries set up the League of Nations, which created the Typhus Commission, quickly renamed the Epidemics Commission. Disease was the close cousin of war, with a volt of diseases—such as typhus, typhoid, dysentery, smallpox, cholera, and influenza—atma amongst the demobilized soldiers. The Epidemics Commission visited Poland, where it recommended the establishment of a cordon sanitaire to prevent the diseases from spreading further and worked with the government to create emergency hospitals and clinics. It was this commission that would be folded into the Health Organization of the League, and—after World War II—the World Health Organization (WHO).

The young Soviet Union, established after the October Revolution of 1917, faced the wrath of what was known as ispanskaya bolezny, or the “Spanish Disease.” By late 1918, the Soviets saw 150 cases per week, although it was not as much of a problem as typhus, which brought 1,000 cases per week to the hospitals. It was because of typhus—caused by lice—that Lenin said, “Either socialism will defeat the louse, or the louse will defeat socialism.” The Soviet Union inherited a broken medical system and a population in poverty and ill health; civil war, disease, and famine threatened the total collapse of society. It was in light of this that the Soviets hastily acted in several key ways:

• Create a commissariat for public health. On July 21, 1918, the USSR centralized the various health agencies and put Nikolai Semashko in charge; this was the first such institution in the world (by comparison, the United States did not create a Department of Health until 1953). The commissariat was charged with ensuring that health care was a right and not a privilege; therefore, medical care had to be free.

• Expand and democratize the health sector. The USSR hastily built hospitals and polyclinics, trained doctors and public health experts, and expanded medical schools and bacteriological institutes. Dr. E. P. Per- vukhin, commissar of Public Health of the Petrograd Commune, said in 1920, “New factories for medicines have been erected, and great stocks have been confiscated from the speculators in medicines.” The profit motive was removed from the medical sector.

• Mobilize the population. Health care could not be left in the hands of the doctors and nurses alone; Semashko made the case for the mobilization of workers and peasants into the struggle to build a healthy society. The Workers’ Committees to Combat Epidemics were established in 1918 in both cities and villages; the representatives of these committees—workers and peasants themselves—communicated scientific information about health and sanitation, ensured that the public baths (banyas) were clean, and monitored their communities to ensure that any sign of disease would lead to professional medical care. In 1920, Semashko wrote, “We may say without exaggeration that the epidemics of typhus and cholera were stopped chiefly by the assistance of the workers’ and peasants’ committees.” Public action was an integral part of Soviet health care.

• Strengthen preventive measures. The Soviet public health officials believed that more resources had to go toward prevention, whether toward public health instruction or toward improving the living conditions of the workers and the peasants. Dr. Pervukhin told a Norwegian journalist in 1920 that in the Soviet Union, “all dwellings are nationalized, so no one any longer lives in the surroundings so dangerous to health which many had to put up with under the old regime. Under the means of our grain monopoly, foodstuffs are guaranteed first of all to the sick and weak.” Better living conditions and more frequent medical attention would be able to stop the spread of disease.

Lashed to the Mast of Profit

No wonder, then, as Dr. Pervukhin said, that “we overcame the Spanish influenza better than the Western world did.” Reading these texts shines a familiar light on the way that Vietnam and Kerala, China, and Cuba are tackling the coronavirus pandemic today; it underlines the gap between the socialist order and the capitalist order, one with a disposition to put people before profit and the other lashed to the mast of profit. Reading Jessica Luschenop’s magnificent story about how the Smithfield pork plant in South Dakota refused to shut down when multiple cases of COVID-19 broke out along their production line, instead pressuring workers who had little choice but to keep coming to work, tells you something about the compulsions of the capitalist order in the face of a pandemic. Tim, one of the Smithfield workers, said he had to keep working because “I got four kids to take continued on page 18 …
Lives Lost

... continued from page 24

Jews were forced from their homes and neighborhoods into the ghettos, everything they had was taken, but not all musical instruments. The Germans enjoyed music but also enjoyed tormenting the Jews by forcing them to play for the pleasure of the tormenters. They played in the ghettos and they played in the death camps. When a trainload of new prisoners arrived, they were greeted by a symphonic sound. For the prisoners in the orchestra, they played their instruments to stay alive.

One violin was brought to the shop of Amnon Weinstein’s father Moshe, who began the luthier business in Tel Aviv, had emigrated from Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1938. None of the relatives Moshe left behind survived the Nazis. Moshe once showed his son Amnon a photo of an empty field near Vilnius and said, “Look at that. That is your family.”

After all this, I come back to the football coach. Maybe after the COVID-19 virus passes, the coach could do his sensitivity training at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park in Atlanta in the company of people whose lives have been unjustly distorted by the horrors a noose brings to mind.

Denny Riley is an Air Force veteran of our war in Vietnam, a writer, and a member of San Francisco Veterans For Peace Chapter 69.

Across the planet, citizens are helping out their neighbours, from buying groceries to cooking meals for those in need: In Naples, Italy, people have been leaving ‘solidarity baskets’ for those who are struggling. The note reads: ‘Put in if you can. Take out if you can’t.’

Excerpts from Arundhati Roy’s Essay

‘The Pandemic Is a Portal’

Who can use the term “gone viral” now without shuddering a little? Who can look at anything any more—a door handle, a cardboard carton, a bag of vegetables—without imagining it swirling with those unseizable, undead, unlivining dots dotted with suction pads waiting to fasten themselves on to our lungs?

Who can think of kissing a stranger, jumping on to a bus or sending their child to school without feeling real fear? Who can think of ordinary pleasure and not assess its risk? Who among us is not a quack epidemiologist, virologist, statistician, and prophet? Which scientist or doctor is not secretly praying for a miracle? Which priest is not—secretly, at least—submitting to science?

And even while the virus proliferates, who could not be thrilled by the swell of birdsong in cities, peacocks dancing at traffic crossings, and the silence in the skies?

The number of cases worldwide this week crept over a million. More than 50,000 people have died already. Projections suggest that number will swell to hundreds of thousands, perhaps more. The virus has moved freely along the pathways of trade and international capital, and the terrible illness it has brought in its wake has locked humans down in their countries, their cities, and their homes.

But unlike the flow of capital, this virus seeks proliferation, not profit, and has, therefore, inadvertently, to some extent, reversed the direction of the flow. It has mocked immigration controls, biometrics, digital surveillance, and every other kind of data analytics, and struck hardest—thus far—in the richest, most powerful nations of the world, bringing the engine of capitalism to a judder.

Peace and Planet News Summer 2020
Love in a Dangerous Time

By Mike Ferner

“T
ake this once-in-a-century opportunity
spared by fate from the above, it will
determine our government’s behavior in the
will feel just a portion of the suffering and
grief our government has caused around

Fortunately, we’re also witnessing an
abundance of human compassion that as-

I’ve heard some of the same con-

The differences between red and blue
don’t seem as acute on the runways of the

Three times as many of our fellow citi-

Nature and nurture locked in a green

In the light of the Darkness and the
dawn. The light that weaves us together

This darkness too will pass away

We shall meet again and again

And talk about Darkness and Dawn

Celebrating every pulsation of a
common being

Rediscovered and cherished for real

We shall meet again and again

The neighborhood we take for granted

So much that we often beat our breasts

Crowning about rugged individualism,

Disdaining nature, pissing poison on it
even, while

Claiming that property has all the legal

rights of personhood

Murmuring gratitude for our shares in

the gods of capital.

Oh, how now I wish I could write poetry
in English,

Or any and every language you speak

So, I can share with you, words that

Wanjikũ, my Gĩkũyũ mother, used to
tell me:

Gūtĩrũ ũtukũ ũtakĩa:

Wanjikũ, my Gĩkũyũ mother, used to
I know, I know,
It threatens the common gestures of
human bonding
The handshake,
The hug
The shoulders we give each other to
cry on
The neighborhood we take for granted
So much that we often beat our breasts
Crowning about rugged individualism,
Disdaining nature, pissing poison on it
even, while
Claiming that property has all the legal
rights of personhood
Murmuring gratitude for our shares in
the gods of capital.
Oh, how now I wish I could write poetry
in English,
Or any and every language you speak
So, I can share with you, words that
Wanjikũ, my Gĩkũyũ mother, used to
tell me:
Gūtĩrũ ũtukũ ũtakĩa:
No night is so dark that,
It will not end in Dawn,
Or simply put,
Every night ends with dawn.
Gūtĩrũ ũtukũ ũtakĩa.

By Mike Ferner

For those who do, here is some raw ma-
terial for the imagination.
When the U.S. invasion of Iraq was in
only its third year, a Johns Hopkins Uni-
versity study concluded that 655,000 peo-
ple had already been killed in that war.
Prior to that, the United Nations esti-
mated that prewar sanctions enforced on
Iraq at the behest of the United States had
killed over 500,000 children under the
age of five.
Based on the Johns Hopkins estimate
of Iraqis killed, a conservative estimate of
the wounded from that same period was
2.6 million people. Additionally, the
United Nations estimated between 1.5
million and 2 million Iraqis were “in-
ternally displaced” by the fighting and
roughly the same number had fled their
country, among them disproportionate
numbers of doctors.
Take a moment to let that sink in …
Now, conjure your most empathetic
vision and imagine what those numbers
would look like if “we” applied them com-
parably to our own population. As hard as
it is to believe, here’s what our dear nation
would look like.
• In the former cities of Atlanta, Den-
ver, Boston, Seattle, Milwaukee, Fort
Worth, Baltimore, San Francisco, Dal-
las, Chicago, and Philadelphia every single per-
son is dead.
• In Vermont, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho,
Nebraska, Nevada, Kansas, Missis-
sippi, Iowa, Oregon, South Carolina,
and Colorado every single person is
wounded.
• The entire populations of Ohio and New
Jersey are homeless, surviving with
friends and relatives or under bridges
as they can.
• The entire populations of Michigan, In-
diana, and Kentucky have fled to Can-
da or Mexico.
• One in four U.S. doctors has left the
country. Last year, 3,000 doctors were
kidnapped and 800 killed.
• Only the well-off can afford bottled wa-
ter. What comes out of the tap is guar-
anteed to at least make you sick and
very frequently kill your children.
• On a good day we have three or four
hours of electricity to preserve food or
cool the heat … all summer … in Ari-
 zona, Florida, and the other 48 states.
• Three times as many of our fellow citi-
zens are out of work as during the Great
Depression.
• In every major city, hospitals are seri-
ously degraded by years of sanctions or
outright destroyed by bombing.
• Roads are at best a time-consuming
hazard.
• Trying to care for the sick and wounded
in these conditions consumes an ever-
larger portion of our personal time
and national resources, debilitating the
economy even further.
• Anxiety, depression, and suicide rates
increase dramatically.

It begins to sink in that nobody “out
there” is coming to save us. We are in
hell. Alone.
If you’ve not yet stop reading this article
in disgust or horror, open your heart fur-
ther to understand that the above compari-
sions are based on one nation’s reality but
our taxes have provided the Pentagon and
CIA the wherewithal to make life equally
damnable for our fellow humans in Iran,
Libya, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua,
Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Re-
public of the Congo, and who knows how
many places. Much of the world calls it
war crimes. We passively accept it as for-
Rags of personhood
Murmuring gratitude for our shares in
the gods of capital.
Oh, how now I wish I could write poetry
in English,
Or any and every language you speak
So, I can share with you, words that
Wanjikũ, my Gĩkũyũ mother, used to
tell me:
Gũtĩrũ ũtukũ ũtakĩa:
No night is so dark that,
It will not end in Dawn,
Or simply put,
Every night ends with dawn.
Gũtĩrũ ũtukũ ũtakĩa.

This darkness too will pass away
We shall meet again and again
And talk about Darkness and Dawn
Sing and laugh maybe even hug
Nature and nurture locked in a green
embrace
Celebrating every pulsation of a
common being
Rediscovered and cherished for real
In the light of the Darkness and the
dawn.

This darkness too will pass away
The light that welcomes us will not be,
as Ngũgũ writes, the old light, but a new
dawn.

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和平与地球新闻2020年第4期
Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death.

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall; I hear the clatter on the barn floor. He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans, many calls to make this morning. But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth. And he may mount by himself: I will not give him a leg up. Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him which way the fox ran. With his boot on my breast, I will not tell him where the black boy hides in the swamp. I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death; I am not on his payroll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends nor of my enemies either. Though he promise me much, I will not map him the route to any man’s door. Am I a spy in the land of the living, that I should deliver men to Death? Brother, the password and the plans of our city are safe with me; never through me shall you be overcome.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

An American poet and playwright, Millay received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923, the third woman to win the award for poetry, and was also known for her feminist activism.

To Those Lost in the Vietnam War

One of the many benefits of the teaching profession is being given the opportunity to listen to the voices of younger generations. In the Peace Studies course I teach at the University of Maine, we examine the history of nonviolence in America. One of the writing assignments I offer my students is to write a letter to the Vietnam Memorial Wall if they are so moved. I realize that this is akin to asking me, as a first-year student in 1964, to write a letter to a WWI monument. It’s not for everyone, but when this assignment takes hold in some students’ minds, the fruits of their labors invariably cause me to rekindle a degree of hope for the future. This is an essay written by Riley Ferrigan. What I appreciate so much is her conversation with soldiers from decades ago—young men and women who died when they were not much older than she is now. Her wonderful series of questions is generated not from some abstract notion of war, but, rather, genuinely rises up from concern for her 19-year-old friend, Adam, who is being deployed to Afghanistan. Listen to her voice. She is the future.

Adam is 19 years old; a boy who finds comfort in fishing, long aimless drives with country tunes, sunsets on the lake and one of my only friends left with a childish spark in them. Adam was my first boy friend, and the first boy I ever loved. Adam is the type to grab your hand and slow dance with you in the living room. He is a boy of few words, and when he does speak, his words can carry the weight of a lifetime toward a solution.

I am not the first to ask you questions, to send you a letter. I have visited your walls once before and saw your names etched on smooth dark stone. I visited with Adam and the rest of our class. A girl in my class said, “I just don’t want to have to tell my mom.” I held back any tears I had and let him talk to me. Now, I am not here to tell you what you already know; I could never fathom what you all experienced. I am, however, here to ask some questions. How do I support my friend without supporting the system that needlessly sacrifices innocent lives? How do I help him when he comes home? Should I send him letters like I am sending to you today? What helped you when those terrible days came and what gives you solace now? I hope that looking back in time and reading pieces written by your brothers and sisters will answer these daunting questions, and I want to share this exploration with you.

I have gotten a little lost. How can I show respect without acknowledgement? I have worked for our military. This is where I was thanking them for. I know for a fact that I have learned what war really is, I struggle to find a way to share this with him. I think of telling him of his fallen brothers and sisters and how they were used as pawns in a sadistic game. Would that help him, or should he learn from his own experiences? Do I continue to support him endlessly and without criticism? I know that I will continue to try my best and support him no matter what, because that’s what friends do.

I will listen to his experiences without judgment, always. Politics should not come between relationships.

My professor says he and his friends prefer not to be thanked for their service in this most atrocious war. Therefore, I would like to thank you for your guidance and presence. Your stories and experiences have been documented; they help me learn from our country’s mistakes. I wish to take this newfound knowledge and use it. I will use it to help Adam as much as I can. I will show it to others and pass your stories along, so that our country can learn from this war that most hoped would be our last. I think we can still learn from the Vietnam War and change our country’s ways. I hope this brings peace to you, to know your lives were not lost for nothing. We should be spreading the stories of your lives, too early interrupted and the stories of the survivors who walk through each day crippled by the scars they hide. I will do my best to make sure our next generation does not face the same fate. And, if I may ask one more thing of you all, please look after those men and women that are owned by the United States. Please look after Adam.

Thank you,

Riley Ferrigan
Bringing the Enemy’s War Home

The Mountains Sing
By Nguyen Phan Que Mai
Workman Publishing, 2020, 352 pages, $26.95
By Matthew Hoh

I was born near New York City in 1973, the year the United States officially ended its war in Vietnam and brought home the last of its combat troops. The Vietnam War, known to the Vietnamese as The American War, was always something removed from me, even as I read history after history, watched documentaries and, as a Marine Corps officer, researched copies of wartime Marine Corps manuals. Although the war waged for another couple of years after my birth for the Vietnamese people, the peoples of Cambodia and Laos suffered mass killings and atrocities while I was a boy, and to this day, both Vietnamese and American families, in the United States because of the war and disability from Agent Orange and the unexplained remnants of millions of tons of U.S. bombs, the war had little personal effect on me.

Even with my connection now to many Vietnam veterans and my experience meeting scores of people who have lost husbands, fathers and brothers to Agent Orange and the war, the connection between the war in Vietnam and my own life and experiences at war in Afghanistan and Iraq has been simply academic or theoretical.

The year I was born Nguyen Phan Que Mai was born in the north of Vietnam. Like all Vietnamese, Que Mai would experience The American War, its distant genesis, its rancid execution and its omnipresent aftermath, in entirely personal terms. For Que Mai the war would be directly and indirectly at the root of all things, nothing could be composed or expressed without some substance of the war attending. The war in all things was true for all Vietnamese, but for Americans was true only for those sent to kill and be killed on the battlefield of latent colonialism and Cold War hysteria and for their families. Que Mai would work to survive as a farmer and street vendor for many years until a scholarship program sent her to Australia to study. From Australia she would begin a career in development work to improve the lives of people not just in Vietnam, but throughout Asia. Que Mai would also begin a process of writing that would contribute equally to the healing and recovery from war and to the development work she took part in and led.

The Mountains Sing is Que Mai’s ninth book and her first in English. It is a novel of one family attempting to survive in the north of Vietnam from the Second World War through the years following the defeat of the South Vietnamese government by the North. It has received rave reviews from a wide variety of critics such as The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, and BookPage, and has 4.5 and 4.9 scores on Goodreads and Amazon, so my comments will not reflect the intense and beautiful qualities of Que Mai’s prose that I have come to anticipate from her haunting and compelling storytelling. Rather, I simply want to say people in the United States should read this book to understand what we in the United States have done to so many outside the United States.

For many years now, when asked what books should be read in order to understand the current U.S. wars in the Muslim world, I have recommended two books, both about Vietnam: David Halberstam’s The Best and the Brightest and Neil Sheehan’s A Bright Shining Lie. Read those books, I say to people, and you’ll understand why the United States is in these wars and why these wars won’t end. However, those books tell little about the people of the wars: their experiences, sufferings, triumphs, and existence. As Halberstam and Sheehan do for understanding the United States in these wars, so Que Mai does for understanding the people who have been killed, exploited, struck down, and shaped by them.

There were several occasions while reading The Mountains Sing that I thought of stopping. The book induced nausea and feverish panic in me as I read Que Mai’s words about her family (although it is a novel, it can be understood to have been taken in large part from her family’s own history). The book aroused the memories of the many Iraqis and Afghans I have known, many still in their home countries, most of them still living and surviving through continued war or perhaps one of its pauses. Guilt over the wars, what I took part in, and what we as a nation did to cause millions of innocents, drives my suicidal ideation, as it does for many other U.S. veterans, and as maybe it should be …

What The Mountains Sing details and explains about war—not just the details of the grief, horror, futility, trials and mistakes of the war but also of its lasting effects across generations, of its constant requirements for sacrifice, and of its breeding of political, cultural, and societal extremism—is not limited to the Vietnamese experience, but extends to all touched by the force and whims of war. Sure there are differences and aspects of The Mountains Sing that are specific to the Vietnamese experience, just as there are elements and aspects to the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen that are unique to each country. Yet even in that difference, there is a sameness, as the cause of it all, the reason for such things, is us, the United States.

Que Mai has written a timeless book of sadness and loss, and of gain and victory. Whether consciously or not, Que Mai has spoken for generations outside of Vietnam, millions upon millions of people who have been changed by it, of its lasting effects to flee and desperate to live; people who are crazy yet lucid in their desire not just to escape and survive but to ultimately outlast and supersede the U.S. war machine. It’s a book for Americans too. Not a mirror for us by any means, but a window into what we have done and continue to do to so many all over the world, from before I was born through now as I age. Originally published by Counterpunch.

Matthew Hoh is a member of the advisory boards of Expose Facts, Veterans For Peace, and World Beyond War. In 2009 he resigned his position with the State Department in Afghanistan to protest the escalation of the Afghanistan War by the Obama Administration. He previously had been in Iraq with a State Department team and with the U.S. Marines. He is a Senior Fellow with the Center for International Policy.

Please Don’t Shoot The Orphans
for Barbara Dudley

"... by day I rode a motor scooter out to U.S. Military Assistance Command Headquarters at Long Binh, about 30 minutes on an empty road that had been the site of fire fights the night before. Every morning I passed a beautiful if dilapidated French villa set back off the road which had been converted into an orphanage. The hand painted sign in front of the villa read in English, "Please don’t shoot the orphans."—Barbara Dudley

Imagine if every city in our land of the free welcomed travelers in with billboards reading: "Please don’t shoot the orphans" plastered on placards their drivers stumbling out of their seats onto the median strips crisscrossing this land of the mobile and free to question if not just for a minute how their own busy lives can possibly be intertwined with the lives of orphans their hearts in their mouths when they realize the hands on their steering wheels the fingers dancing across their radio dials

Hold the answer to those questions
—Doug Rawlings
A Journey of Remembrance

Glenna Goodacre’s Vietnam Women’s Memorial Sculpture

By Denise Kusel

Almost every aspect of the war in Vietnam tugged with opposition. A battle to convince the powers that be in Washington, D.C., that women deserved to be honored for their own work in that theatre of war was no exception.

The idea was a simple one: something to honor the approximately 11,000 American military women, nearly all volunteers, who were stationed in Vietnam during the war and put their own lives on the line. But then nothing about the Vietnam conflict was simple. That idea turned into a 10-year crusade first waged by Diane Carlson Evans, a former captain in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) who was 21 when she was deployed to the war zone in August 1968.

“I thought this wouldn’t be difficult. Who would be against these women and all that they did? They fought among themselves, too. Women were found out differently. There was this huge pushback, vicious and mean-spirited,” Evans says from her home in Helena, Montana.

“What followed was a journey of unexpected bureaucratic obstacles, wrought with deep-seated sexism. But we didn’t give up. We just brought along a 24-inch muquete, a clay likeness of four figures she had envisioned the final project would portray.

“Glenna was the kind of person you immediately love,” says Evans, who was serving in Vietnam when the statue was dedicated on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and other public gathering spots. She chose her work to make their idea a reality.

“Glenna Goodacre was a young mother raising two kids,” explains Dan Anthony, who was her studio assistant and manager for 33 years. “She was shocked and surprised by how moved the women were by the statue. They were just kids, volunteers who were put in charge of these lives. She wanted to show all the emotion, sadness, and drama in the statue. We had Vietnam vets who dropped by the studio, and they would tell stories, and some would push a wad of clay onto the sculpture as they talked.”

The Santa Fe resident says that after the statue was loaded onto the truck, “a bunch of American Indian vets from different tribes, including a couple of Navajo code talkers, showed up. A number headed out into the street, eventually walking from Santa Fe to Washington. They were there when the sculpture was dedicated on the National Mall on Nov. 11, 1993.”

MISSION Act... continued from page 6

VA, not the other way around. In one of the great ironies of this pandemic, civilian patients are finding the VA, not the private sector, is in some cases, their only choice for emergency or hospital care. In New York City, they say things are slowly getting better. Many families will, however, persist even after we have a vaccine and/or effective treatments for COVID-19. Nor will COVID-19 be the last threat we encounter. The VA will once again be called upon for help. Will the VA be able to care for the thousands, perhaps millions of veterans who have lost their jobs and their health insurance due to this pandemic and who find that the VA is their only reliable healthcare provider? This should lead Congress to challenge the wisdom of efforts to privatize the VA rather than strengthen and improve it. It is incumbent on President Trump and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie to do everything in their power to save American lives—veteran and civilian alike—by making sure the VA is fully funded and staffed. Revitalizing the VA through a repeal of much of the MISSION Act and other deleterious legislation should be a top priority for lawmakers moving forward. We need to use all the resources at our disposal to prepare for the next epidemic and the VA is a central element of that response. Originally published by The Indypendent, indypendent.org.

Essam Attia is a U.S. Army veteran who served in the Iraq War. He is a visual artist who lives in Manhattan and is active in Veterans For Peace’s Save Our VA campaign and Common Defense.

Peace and Planet News Summer 2020
Trump Following Hitler’s Playbook

By Tarak Kauff

I was born in 1942 but I remember the war. It made a deep impression on me. When I was two years old, I shocked my parents by screaming so loudly that I got us thrown out of our apartment. My parents were terrified of me. They had been through the war and knew what it was like.

Hitler was responsible for the killing of Jewish, Roma, and many other children. Never again, it’s been often said, but hateful white nationalism and racist parallels to Nazi Germany are still alive today right here in the U.S.A.

Trump’s first wife, Ivana, told her lawyer, that from time to time her husband read from a book of Hitler’s collected speeches. That may or may not be true, but Trump, possibly only semi-consciously, is following almost step by step, Hitler’s playbook.

Decades ago, especially after eyes were opened by the criminality of the American war in Viet Nam, many saw a new kind of disguised totalitarian fascism coming here to America. Actually, for many oppressed people, it was already here.

But now even progressives say that’s being rash; we are not anything like Hitler and the Nazis. They say it’s a bad comparison, it turns people off. If you even use the word fascist, they debate that. After all, we don’t have gas chambers, we haven’t yet tried to exterminate an entire people like the Germans did to the Jews. People don’t say “Heil!” with their arms held stiff in the fascist salute. Or do they?

Was Hitler unique, was the Third Reich unique in its evil? Did nobody suffer like the Jews? Was the Holocaust unique?

Not in the view of Native Americans, a people and culture that has been terrorized and almost exterminated, not just for decades but for centuries by white Americans and our government—an ongoing genocide well before Hitler’s Holocaust. There were an estimated 5 million to 15 million indigenous people living in North America when Columbus arrived in 1492. By the end of the Indian wars in North America, there were fewer than 238,000 left.

“A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers, but when I go up to the river I see camps of soldiers on its banks. These soldiers cut down my timber, they kill my buffalo and when I see that, my heart feels like bursting.”—Santa, Kiowa Chief

The Nazis got many of their ideas from our so-called democracy. Many of Hitler’s propaganda ideas came directly from American advertising. Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda under Hitler, learned from Edward Bernays’ books, Crystallizing Public Opinion and Propaganda, both published in America, how to convince Germans that the Jews were the source of their misery and misfortune. Bernays wrote, “If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, it is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will.

Native Americans, black people, and now migrants at our border have had their children and culture violently taken from them. It was and is genocidal.

Trump mouths absurd nonsense about making America great again, but Hitler actually did make Germany great again (for a while). He gave the people their pride back, he gave them jobs, re-built and paid their way well, built roads, loved dogs, and built factories—and eventually brought unthinkable devastation and destruction to Germany. Trump is following that playbook but skipped, except in his own mind, making the country great again. America is in serious decline.

In 1992, the Berlin Wall came down to an end, Henry Wallace wrote about American fascism. He said, “The dangerous American fascist is the man who wants to do in the United States in an American way what Hitler did in Germany in a Prussian way.” Wallace continued, “They clench to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution.”

If we look deeper and past our own prejudices, we will see the same monsters, only wearing different clothing.

Of the Ondodaga, Cayuga, and Seneca and for “the total destruction and devastation of [the Indian] settlements and capture [of] many prisoners as possible.”

Hitler’s ideas about concentration camps, eugenics, and gas chambers came from studying American history. In the 1920s U.S. border police at the Santa Fe Bridge deputized and sprayed the clothes of Mexicans crossing into the United States with cyanide-based Zyklon B. This was done in a building that officials called, ominously enough, “the gas chambers.”

The practicality of genocide owed much to Hitler’s studies of English and U.S. history. He admired America’s system of reservations, starvation, and uneven combat—genocide of the “red savages who could not be tamed by captivity.”

Now these same ideas are recirculating as Trump’s America and much of the world turns viciously to the extreme right.
The Unspoken Spread of Fascism

By Fred Nagel

It is difficult for most Americans to judge just how dangerous Donald Trump might be. It is not that the clues are missing; there is a daily list of lies, racist comments, misogynist ramblings, and outrageous self-dealing. But most citizens just don’t have the right vocabulary to put his actions into some sort of context, even in these pandemic times.

The left has been more confident about where Trump fits in the general run of very bad presidents. He is simply a fascist, whose behavior is very similar to other calamitous dictators we have seen in the 20th century. This seems to have been the only believable view of his behavior when Trump talks about a confrontation that could happen if he doesn’t get his way. “I can tell you I have the support of the police, the support of the military, the support of the Bikers for Trump—I have the tough people, but they don’t play it tough—until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very bad.”

Yet the term fascist rarely gets used in polite company. The New York Times is especially careful not to offend mainstream sensibilities. When the word fascist is used in print, it always refers to supposed foreign enemies of the state. The term is never used to refer to American officials in high office, no matter how egregious or brutal their crimes have been.

Getting past this simplistic use of the term for enemy leaders, there are some aspects of fascism that fit Trump quite exactly. Comparing Trump’s behavior to the behavior of other leaders can help us recognize the nature of fascism. Trump is not talking about the workings of a democracy, or the endlessly touted separation of powers between the Congress, the Executive, and the Judiciary. Bikers for Trump is simply a Brownshirt organization, waiting for their leader’s call to violence.

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Eco describes fascist leaders as using “selective populism” to manipulate economic discontent into political power, becoming in effect the interpreter of the popular will. Trump’s efforts to kill environmental regulations, close the Mexican border, and end abortion rights are his analysis of what the population wants. In this way, economic anger is redirected toward goals that don’t present a challenge to the rule of the rich elite.

Finally, Eco refers to “newspeak,” the language of Oceania, George Orwell’s fictional totalitarian state. In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the ruling class controls thought by limiting language. Vocabulary is diminished, ideas are grossly simplified, and any discussion of morality reduced to black and white. Or to put it in “Trump Speak,” all people and events are either “tremendous” or “very bad.”

Jacobo Timerman in Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number adds nuance to this concept of diminished language and simplified ideas. The fascist authorities in Argentina during Timerman’s incarceration feared and hated complexity. Editors like himself were suspect, but so too were psychoanalysts and academicians. Multi-faceted concepts and theories were considered subversive in themselves and writing about them often resulted in prison and torture. Similarly, “Making America Great Again” never involves more thought than watching Fox News or chanting racist slogans. News is either real or fake. Prospective immigrants are from either great or “shithole” countries.

One characteristic of fascism, missing from more recent descriptions, can be traced all the way back to Mussolini’s minister of education, Giovanni Gentile, who wrote about what he called “corporatism.” The word itself has a long history in political theory, but to Gentile it meant an enforced harmony between social classes: workers, employers, and the state. Harmony, of course, with one person at the top making most of the decisions. It was an attractive concept for the ruling class, since corporatism would eliminate labor demands and leftist ideologies. “And above all,” wrote Mussolini in 1932, “Fascism denies that class-war can be the preponderant force in the transformation of society.”

On the surface, Mussolini’s rise to power in the early 1920s had little to do with corporatism. It was based on squads of Blackshirts that murdered thousands of socialists and unionists all across the country. Hitler employed very similar tactics starting in the late 1920s, using his Brownshirts to beat, torture, and assassinate anyone who opposed his Nazi agenda.

Less recognized, however, is the fact that both terrorist organizations had elite corporate sponsorships. For Mussolini, that support started as early as 1922 and remained consistent until the end of WWII. For Hitler, corporate money came later, in 1928 after he had purged the socialist elements of his party.

While Gentile’s definition of corporatism did not include payoffs by the rich elite to Mussolini, the support of this class proved to be a critical piece in his ascent to power. The same is true for Hitler. Before 1928, his lack of funding was a constant problem to achieving complete control. After that date, the major corporations saw Hitler as a way to destroy unions, end socialist resistance, and ensure profits.

Is this same phenomenon at work today in paving the way for Trump’s rise to power? An interesting Market Watch study conducted two years into Trump’s presidency found that despite his reckless behavior and contempt for the democratic process, the nation’s top CEOs were giving almost three times as much to Republicans as Democrats. And that just scratches the surface, since most donations to the major parties come from companies and dark money, controlled in large part by this same CEO class.

The 1920s were similar to the last decade in several ways. Industrialized coun-tries saw the rich elite prosper greatly during the Great Depression; the very rich used more money to influence their political systems. At the same time, economic discontent became more overt as the majority of workers became unable to support their families. Rage at the system became a distinct threat to the very wealthy.

Have the CEOs and the very rich in our time reacted in the same way as they did in the 1920s? Are they in fact funding authoritarian leaders who will protect corporate profits, using racism and nationalism to turn anger at the system into anger at immigrants, minorities, and anyone who disagrees with the big corporate plan?

By avoiding the use of the word fascist, mainstream media analysis fails our democracy in two ways. First, we as citizens can’t look at Trump and judge him by historical standards. His actions may be outrageous and deplorable, but we remain of “Trump Speak,” all people and events are either “tremendous” or “very bad.”

The second way that the media fails is to limit how fascism is described. It is always a person rather than a national movement; a Netanyahu rather than the Israeli people, or a Hitler rather than all Germans. Fascism may be encouraged by some combination of charisma and viciousness, but in the end it becomes a social illness that moves whole populations toward war and genocide. Perhaps fascism is the madness that comes from true corporatism, or from its most recent manifestation, neoliberalism. It is the deadly mix of greed at the top, misdirected rage at the bottom, and a fascist leader who can turn it all into an engine of mindless destruction.

Fred Nagel is a Vietnam-era veteran and political activist whose articles have appeared in CounterPunch, Global Exchange, World Change, War Crimes Times, and Z Magazine. He also hosts a show on Vassar College Radio, WVKR (classwars.org).

Hitler’s Playbook … continued from previous page

… than something softer, like necon, neo-liberal or neo-fascist—not because we are literally exactly the same as Hitler’s Nazis, there are differences, but to directly describe Trump and the American reality. We are a deadly mix of greed at the top, the historical parallels and the extent of the massive damage and exploitation of the earth and humanity already done by America. Since there does seem to be a clear historical pattern, we can have an idea of what lies ahead.

Tarah Kauff was a U.S. Army paratrooper from 1959 to 1962. He is the editor-in-chief of Peace & Planet News.

Peace and Planet News Summer 2020 23
By Denny Riley

In April a college football coach re-posted a photo of an old lady knitting a noose. Because of this he has been ordered to attend sensitivity training. I saw the offending photo. It was the last frame in a series of jokes about shelter-in-place, implying that whoever the old lady is holed up with has driven her to the brink. It’s cute, yet you want to let her know she’s fortunate to have a shelter-in-place partner.

That’s not the point here, though. The point is the football coach appeared unaware the noose is a symbol of racial hatred, something a frat boy might ignorantly think is humorous, but any adult should understand bears no humor, as neither do smallpox-infected blankets or gas chambers. Nothing to joke about, no matter what the tag line is, particularly if you are of Northern European extraction. I mean white.

White people should stay away from any joke that does not benevolently include everyone. I’m one of those white people but somewhere along the way I was lucky enough to take a turn that let me see the absurdity in a bumper sticker that barks “White lives matter too!” I don’t claim to know what it’s like to be anything other than a white guy with all the accompanying benefits, but I’ve heard stories of what my grandparents endured during their rise to assimilation. Many of us white people know similar family stories and we’re apt to tell them when it’s suggested we have it too good.

I’m Irish so my stories are about the Irish, who were not warmly welcomed on these shores even though they were one of the few emigrant groups to arrive speaking English. We spoke English, though, because our homeland had been overrun by the English who dominated and suppressed Gaelic, our native tongue. That’s similar to a part of the Native American story and similar to a part of the African-American story in that a heritage is stolen. Yet different, because if you don’t know my name, you’re not going to know I’m Irish.

By my generation we are simply American, so I garner all privileges that accompany being a white American male. Those privileges are so seductive that while I enjoy them, I could easily forget my colored brothers and sisters. I can begin to think I earned them, but as I said, I’m lucky enough to see absurdities.

Three times I was in on one of the most obvious absurdities (obvious if you’re not white.) Three times I was hired for jobs where afterward I discovered only a white guy would have been hired. It probably happened to me more times than three but of three I am sure. The lesson I should have learned was if I think I’ve earned my living obliged to visit a civil rights museum. Mild punishment, even milder if you consider he likely won’t go there alone to ponder the truth, to stop and take in a photo, read the accompanying text then read it again. No, he’ll be followed by his retinue of assistants and a gaggle of reporters. He’ll come out the exit door and say he learned a great deal about himself from the experience. He’s a new man. Thank you.

On Wednesdays I’m the docent in the Veterans Gallery in San Francisco. The docent’s job is to answer questions about the exhibit and to lead visitors through it. The best way for me to be that person is to arrive early and study the exhibit alone. Do that a few times undistracted and you will know more about the exhibit than four-fifths of the people who come in.

The Veterans Gallery exhibits are usually up for a month and a half. Some don’t draw much of a crowd and that’s one reason I’ve been able to commit to every Wednesday. When it’s quiet, the gallery is my personal reading and writing room, with an exhibit to wander through over and over, so when visitors do come in I’ve found a few facts that I think should be brought to everyone’s attention.

The exhibit on the United States’ involvement in WWI, which ran at the time of the 100th anniversary of the Armistice, covered the Sedition Act. I pointed out to visitors that even though 50 congressmen voted against entering the war, President Wilson and the bankers wanted a united front, so criticism of the war effort in a bar or bank line could land a person in jail. Eugene Debs, the noted Social- ist and perennial presidential candidate, was swept up by the Act for speaking out against the war. He was given 10 years in jail. He served two and a half.

The Bertram Clarke exhibit on the History of African Americans in our military gave light to the fact that Pershing, after telling the French that American soldiers would only answer to American officers, gave a collection of African-American soldiers to the French. These men fought so heroically that the entire 369th Infantry Regiment was awarded the French Croix de Guerre. Young black men who’d been anxious to get into uniform and into the fight because they believed it was their place to fight because it was their duty, found their returned home did not find that welcome. Instead at least 10 of these war heroes were lynched, some while still in uniform.

In February and March of this year we hosted Violins of Hope. On the face of it, Violins of Hope seemed the dullest, simplest exhibit I’d seen in the gallery. Twenty old violins that once belonged to prisoners were brought to everyone’s attention. For reposting the photo of the old lady knitting a noose, the football coach is being obliged to visit a civil rights museum. Mild punishment, even milder if you consider he likely won’t go there alone to ponder the truth, to stop and take in a photo, read the accompanying text then read it again. No, he’ll be followed by his retinue of assistants and a gaggle of reporters. He’ll come out the exit door and say he learned a great deal about himself from the experience. He’s a new man. Thank you.

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They played in the ghettos and they played in the death camps. When a trainload of new prisoners arrived, they were greeted by a symphonic sound. For the prisoners in the orchestra, they played their instruments to stay alive.