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SLOBODAN DIMITROV



“Occupy Long Beach”

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by Slobodan Dimitrov

Slobodan Dimitrov is a photographer based in the Long Beach/Los Angeles Harbors. His 20 year long project on the Piledrivers can currently be seen in the lobby of Local 2375, Wilmington CA. He was selected for the Los Angeles Public Library Neighborhood Project to document the community of San Pedro for the public archives in 2000. The San Pedro photographic documentary exhibited at the Central Library in October 2001. In 2008 he received another commission from the Los Angeles Public Library to document industrial Los Angeles in the Port of LA. In July 2010, the Artist Portrait series was exhibited at Angels Gate Cultural Center. To date he has had over 130 exhibits, nationally and internationally.

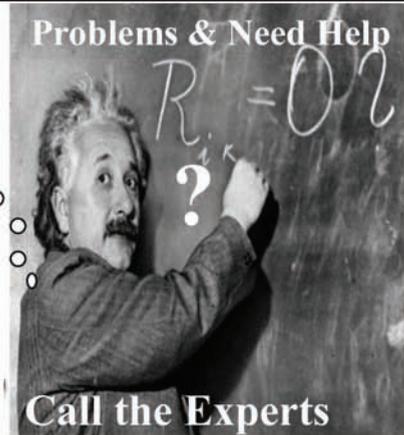
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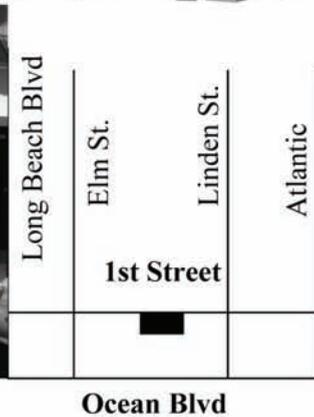
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BANG AND WHIMPER

JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER

There's a lot to be nervous about, even if you don't subscribe to the undercooked Mayan apocalypse lore moving through the gut of the Internet like a Staphylococcus-infected tamale. The casual observer might say that nothing seemed to give on the world scene in 2011 despite the Fukushima meltdown, the Arab Spring uproars, the train wreck of European finance, the disappearing act at MF Global, and the assorted injuries done to the Kardashian brand by the giant walking dildo Kris Humphries.

I demur. On close examination, the industrial world underwent complete zombification in 2011. Its member states and their institutions are now lurching across the stage of history like so many walking dead. Whole European nations are dead, their citizens squirming around the ruined bones of failed speculative condo projects, housing estates, and luxury hotels like botfly larvae. The USA lies in complete moral ruin despite the exertions of ten thousand evangelical preachers in dusty back-road tilt-up chapels from Texas to Carolina, several new museums of Creation Science, and the shining example of former Senator Rick Santorum. Just look at how we behave, from the cloakrooms of Congress to the piercing parlors of West Hollywood to the 7-Elevens of suburban Maryland: a nation of thieves, racketeers, reality TV sluts, wannabe road warriors, light-fingered gangsta-boyz, and crybabies living in an anomie-drenched

decrepitating demolition derby landscape of failure. When everybody is a zombie, whose brains are left to eat? Echo answers....On to the predictions for 2012 then.

The biggest political shock awaiting us is the massive disruption of the major party nominating conventions next summer, when thousands of angry citizens descend on Tampa and Charlotte demanding a reality test. The parties will attempt to go about their ritual business, ignoring the mischief outside the convention centers, and

both parties will make the mistake of siccing the cops on the protestors. The result will be a much bigger mess than the one I personally witnessed on the streets of Chicago, 1968, when the party hacks anointed the grinning sell-out Hubert Humphrey to run against Ole Debbil Nixie. Just before getting tear-gassed on Michigan Avenue that night, I saw some kid hoisting a sign that depicted the nominee with a Hitler mustache over the epithet: Mein Humph! It made my night, despite the subsequent retching in the gutter.

The two major parties are completely bankrupt zombie organizations and this election may be their last stand--if they even survive the conventions. Neither of them can come to grips with the reality-based issues of the day: epochal financial and economic contraction, peak energy (and many other resources), climate change, the absence of the rule of law in banking, and generational grievance--or, perhaps more to the point, the manifestations of

these giant trends as presented in unemployment, debt slavery, foreclosure, bankruptcy, homelessness, hunger, and X-million family tragedies. Both parties can only promise the return to a bygone status quo that is largely mythical.

President Obama, the putative "progressive"--spokesman of the Ivy League, Silicon Valley, Lower Manhattan, and all the other precincts where "folks" imagine themselves to be advanced thinkers--can't even wrap his mind around the simple fact that we will never be "energy independent" if we think that means running 260 million cars and trucks, no matter how many algae farms we pretend to invest in. Here is the man who ought to

A lot of voters projected on Mr. Obama some notion of supernatural brilliance--our Hollywood fantasies are rife with wishes to be saved, and therefore redeemed, by our former victims--but he turned out to have a pedestrian mind.

-- James Howard Kunstler

know better and either doesn't, or is lying about it. He has other failures to answer for, too. Why, following the *Citizens United* decision in the Supreme Court, did Mr. Obama not prompt his party to sponsor federal legislation (or a constitutional amendment) that would redefine a corporation as not identical in "personhood" to a human being? Why does he still employ an Attorney General who has not started one prosecution for financial misconduct amid a panorama of arrant swindling and fraud? (Ditto:

heads of the SEC, CFTC, etc.) And why did he not object loudly to the provision in the latest defense appropriations bill that allows for the capricious arrests and indefinite detention of anyone in the USA on suspicion of "terrorism?" Does this graduate of Harvard Law remember what *habeas corpus* means?

A lot of voters projected on Mr. Obama some notion of supernatural brilliance--our Hollywood fantasies are rife with wishes to be saved, and therefore redeemed, by our former victims--but he turned out to have a pedestrian mind. Could he possibly believe we have "a hundred years of natural gas" in the ground? Or that we're in a position to ramp up another cycle of industrial economic "growth?" Or that we can continue the web of cruel rackets that passes for medical care in this country? When the Democratic Party re-nominates Obama, it will be sealing its death warrant, and it will be on its way to the same cosmic vacuum where the memory of the Whigs lingers on.

Meanwhile, the Republicans labor to convert themselves into the party of corn-pone Nazism with all their unconcealed lust to push everybody around under the plastic eagle rubrics of "Freedom" and "Liberty." Look at the dismal lineup of morons, hypocrites, and religious fanatics arrayed for the Iowa caucus: a doctor who is also a creationist!? A leveraged buyout artist! A grifter fresh from K Street! A lady Christian theocrat wholly owned by the "dominionist" New Apostolic Reformation cult! A George W. Bush imitator showing symptoms of early onset senility! The whole posse is preoccupied with things supernatural. And being so dedicated to things unreal,

they're the prime representatives of the suburban clusterfuck, who will do anything to keep that obsolete machine running, even if it means national suicide, because they lack the brains to understand where history is taking us and what the mandates of reality are shouting at us about the urgent need to reorganize American life. They are also the vassals of corporate despotism--where the Democrats are mere footservants. They masquerade as "job creators," but they promote the off-shoring of every activity that corporate America can shed in its quest for ever-greater executive compensation. The lip-service they pay to "freedom" is belied by their intent to control everybody's personal life, commoditize the public interest, and sell out their grandchildren's future for a few extra rounds of golf.

I think this gang, too, will be sent packing by the mobs of 2012. I have a nagging intimation that some third party candidate will emerge. The two personalities I keep seeing in that role are Howard Dean and Michael Bloomberg. Both of them are imperfect, but both of them are clear-headed and action-oriented, and I have a feeling that both of them are stewing in the background over the spectacle of idiocy, inertia, and dithering they see at every political compass point. Maybe somebody else will crawl out of the woodwork. I've said before that conditions could deteriorate so badly that a Pentagon general might have to step into national leadership just to keep the grocery stores supplied with basic rations--but that is an outcome in my personal asteroid belt of probabilities.

Whatever party ends up running things, and whomever fronts it, is going to be in for a helluva wild



ride. The USA is diving into an economic depression that will make the 1930s look like a Busby Berkeley production number. Compressive contraction will have its way with us, whatever Ben Bernanke thinks. There will simply be less activity of the kinds we're used to--Big Box shopping sprees, hamburger sales, theme park visits, house closings, you name it--than our hypertrophic system requires to keep its own destructive momentum going. Instead, the whole thing will just topple over, inert, like a 99-cent gyroscope giving into the forces of entropy. There will be a lot of bewildered, angry, dispossessed people from sea to shining sea. Not a few of them will "act out," that is, start breaking things, stealing things, targeting easy prey, hurting bystanders, and even tangling with police. Personally, I don't believe in the internment camp meme so popular among the doomer paranoiacs, but surely a lot of people will be cooling their heels in some slammer--while many other miscreants will just get away with crimes against persons and property.

The global banking system was on death-watch all through 2011. Somehow the various doctors in the central banks and finance ministries were able to muster enough accounting legerdemain to give the appearance of a system still showing a pulse. But in a compressive debt deflation, there are only so many accounting tricks you can pull off as money (and wealth) literally disappears down a cosmic worm-hole. In Europe, the process has moved from the margins toward the center. The people of Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Belgium will have

less income, fewer government services, lost wages and pensions, less comfort than they have had for a couple of generations. Meanwhile, France is drowning in bad paper and the German banks are choking on it. There is really only one plausible outcome and that is default. The reckoning of the bondholders is at hand. Everybody will get poorer simultaneously--and if not, there will be not just regime change but civil war and revolution. The fantasy of a fiscal union in Europe is impossible because it means two things: that Germany will have to issue orders to everybody else; and that Germany would have to pick up the tab for everybody else while telling them what to do. Both are intolerable and implausible. Let's just think of the Euro experiment as an interesting side effect of the peak energy era...now drawing to a close.

These professional economists with their jabber about QEs and "financial repression" and bond-term "twists" and debt-to-GDP ratios are missing the point. The advanced industrial nations will not be re-jiggered onto any "growth" runway. Rather, we're entering the rutted wagon-road of de-industrializing and un-advancing. What awaits us in a "time-out" from hyperbolic technological progress. Forget about Ray Kurzweil's nanobot nirvana. That is not in the cards. Instead, wrap your mind around life in an economy organized around farming, with a much sparser distribution of big urban centers, and far fewer people overall. Don't imagine for a moment that your grandchildren will be zinging across the landscape in electric cars sampling one theme park after another while

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“networking” with “friends” on cyborg social networks implanted in their brain jellies. Think of them grooming their mules in the summer twilight. Anyway, you get the picture: everything that the finance ministries and treasuries and central banks are affecting to do is mere shadow theater performed in support of wishful thinking.

The question, then, is what kind of hardship and disorder will attend our journey out of the industrial era into post-technological age we are entering. Will we just turn the world into a Michael Bay movie and blow everything up? Or will we make some graceful descent and retain what is really best about the human spirit?

2012 will be the year of internal strife in these “advanced” nations, of people fighting over the table scraps of modernity among their own, in their own backyards, a desperate sorting out of the remnants. I don’t think we’ll see fighting between the European nations until the internal conflicts are resolved and that will take a few years.

The hot-spots for 2012 are very likely to be in the Middle East. You already know that. What could be more obvious than the tinderbox character of that region? Islamic extremism is poised to take over governments (and armies) in Egypt, Syria, Libya, possibly Algeria, and probably Pakistan. Iran lost its mind decades ago and seems determined to dominate the region by means of a strategy that can only get it into trouble (and perhaps the whole world if it goes really badly). Saber-rattling is one thing; making an actual move something else. Block the Straits of Hormuz? Not if you don’t want Teheran to turn into an ashtray. That may happen anyway if Iran rattles a nuclear saber. Germany, France, Britain, and Italy, all struggling with terrible problems at home, would breathe a sigh of relief if the mullahs were chastened. The chatter around the Web about an Israeli preemptive attack never ceases. But it is a possibility.

Oh, and don’t forget Turkey. Formerly the “sick man” of Europe, Turkey has become strangely resurgent, prompting some recollections that the Ottoman Empire actually administered over much of the Middle East until 1914, and not with complete incompetence, either. They just sort of imploded from empire fatigue, which is not the worst way to go down, if history is taking you there anyway. But empires come back, too, and what passes for Turkey today is a polity that in one incarnation or another has been around since the ancient Greek days, and was, for quite a long while, Rome Release 2.0.

Don’t be surprised if some hostilities break out between Turkey and Iran, since a battleground named Iraq lies between them. Iraq is a basket-case despite an immense reserve of oil under its sands, and having had the US military babysit it for eight years. The last American combat units left Iraq this fall, but there are still plenty of US soldiers there, maintaining our garrisons and keeping an eye on things. The question is: can they control what the Kurds do in the north, and whatever meddling Iran engages in around the Basra oil region in the South? These American support troops remaining in Iraq could find themselves looking like a ham-and-cheese sandwich between a lot of crusty mischief north-and-south. The Turks

have already had a dustup or two with Syria lately--Syria occupies a big wedge between Turkey, Iraq and the Mediterranean Sea--and Turkey will take a dim view of that nation falling into the hands of Islamic extremists if Assad gets booted.

All bets are off in Egypt. Anything can happen there.

The dangerous position of Israel vis-à-vis all these quarreling players is probably as bad as it has been in two generations. An attack by a neighbor or getting caught in a crossfire between neighbors would stimulate a lusty response, and perhaps World War Three. As if the world needed this added aggravation. It makes my kishkas ache just to think about it. Sometimes I wonder why the whole Israeli nation doesn’t just pack up and move to Nebraska.

2012 is the year that China proves to be a mortal nation and rolls over with a very bad case of the vapors. Their banking system is a sham. Their property bubble is a fiasco. Their government has no formal legitimacy and will install a new leadership group this year, while exports crash and mass factory layoffs happen. There will be a lot of pissed off people in China, and they may express themselves politically in ways that have seemed unthinkable for decades. The aura of social control looms large in China, but an aura is a light garment not recommended for stormy political weather. 2012 could be the year that China begins its journey into a “Balkanized” collection of smaller autonomous parts, which is the big fat trendline for all the nations of the world, including the USA.

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It is hard to think about the bizarre case of India, a nation with one foot in the modern age and the other in a colorful hallucinatory dreamtime. Their climate-change related problems are doing heavy damage to the food supply. Their groundwater is almost gone. The troubles of the wobbling global economy will take a lot of pep out of their burgeoning tech and manufacturing sectors. It wouldn't be surprising if these travails prompted distracting hostilities with its failed-state neighbor, Pakistan. Pakistan, with its inexhaustible supply of Islamic maniacs could easily start a rumble with some crazy caper like the Mumbai hotel assault of two years ago, but this time India would answer with a heavy cudgel, perhaps even a nuclear sortie designed to neutralize Pakistan's dangerous toys at a stroke. And that would be that. Like cleaning out an annoying neighborhood crack house. It's not a very appetizing scenario, but what else can you do about failed states with nuclear bombs?

Turning to Japan...That sore beset kingdom is suffering all the blowback of modern times at once: the Godzilla syndrome up in Fukushima; a demographic collapse; an imminent bond crisis; the collapse of export market partners; and a long, agonizing death spiral of its banks. I stick by a prediction I tendered back in March, after the deadly tsunami: Japan will decisively opt for a return to pre-industrial civilization. Why not? The rest of the world will be dragged kicking and screaming to the same place. Let Japan get there first and enjoy the advantage of the early adapter--back to an economy of local, hand-made stuff, rigid social hierarchy, folkloric hijinks in whispering bamboo groves, silk robes, and frequent time outs for the tea ceremony.

Russia? The big bear might have just sat out another decade and enjoyed its remaining fossil fuel supply, but the temptation to project power is a demanding habit, so they make all sorts of noises about watching Iran's back--though mutual hatred abounds--and generally rushing into the power vacuum occupied by a US with dwindling mojo. There were stirrings of political discontent just a few weeks ago, after the rigged early rounds of national elections, and who knows where that will lead. Vlad Putin has held things together there impressively after the meltdown of the 1990s, but apparently the tranquil veneer is thin. Except for two big cities, the sprawling nation is

broke and decrepitating, with little to offer the world but oil and gas--not an inconsiderable offering, but one with certain limits especially as they drain their oil fields for export cash. The rule of law is also pretty sketchy there. The government, as ever, is a kind of gangster affair, only this time one that allows some people to get really rich, not just connected. Their 70-year experiment with Marxian dogma has probably put them off ideology for a few centuries to come, which means less money spent on prisons for people with independent thoughts and more for call girls and home furnishings. I imagine that Putin will maintain his grip through the year. The Russians will appreciate relative order more when they see a few other countries devolve into internal conflict.

I don't see much action around South America this year. Some Americans are already fleeing to Argentina. Perhaps they'll enjoy it, but there is always the menace of property confiscation, and worse. Brazil will continue to appear vibrant while it grows more population, shoving it toward eventual ruin. They will see setbacks in the development of their deep-sea oil due to an international shortage of investment capital.

Mexico's fortunes depend on its oil industry, Pemex, which faces remorseless depletion. Revenue from oil production and (dwindling) exports can't hope to keep up with continuing population growth (and ever more poverty). These trends suggest a continued loss of control for the central government and more territorial fighting among the drug gangs and other criminal mafias. As long as all those loose heads roll on the south side of the Rio Grande the US will just tut-tut off to the side. But if the gangs get bold and start venturing cross border to make mischief we will make like Woodrow Wilson did and send the regular army down to spank them. It would be a satisfying diversion for that portion of the US demographic that enjoys Ultimate Fighting on TV, though it won't get them their job back at the Pontiac plant.

The global oil picture is not so reassuring. The fragility of our supply is simply unnoticed by commuters enjoying Lady Gaga on their iPods. Meanwhile, our politicians retail fantasies of endless domestic reserves, which is total horse shit. Global exports are in remorseless decline, apart from geopolitical fissures and strains that could just paralyze allocation cold. If a hot war breaks out



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in the Middle East, you'll see the American supermarket shelves empty in three days. Won't that be fun. Note: the manias over shale oil and shale gas will reveal themselves as just more bubbles in a long cavalcade of bubbles, and both will begin to founder on a shortage of investment capital. The shale plays will prove to have been a national self-esteem-building program, not any part of an energy policy.

The abiding question as we turn the corner into the New Year is: how come Jon Corzine is still at large? (Not to mention Angelo Mozilo, plus the entire executive floor of Goldman Sachs, and about 5000 other assorted Wall Street grifters still on the loose.) There is plenty of dire talk that the collapse of MF Global, and the shenanigans around its demise involving the evaporation of segregated accounts, has gravely and permanently damaged the entire investment industry, but especially the commodities funds, who can no longer depend on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange to honestly clear trades and regulate behavior. The whole affair, and the thundering silence from the oval office, makes Barack Obama seem not just inept but somehow complicit in the looting of America. As if he needs another mark of discredit in his record of consistent fumbling. There are signs that a lot of people who still have something resembling money invested in various funds will go to cash in the weeks ahead, including under-the-mattress style. The distrust and paranoia is palpable now, with the frenzies of Yuletide bygone for another year.

After all, why trust banks, especially the TBTF monsters. Such a mass move could take the starch even out of highly manipulated equity markets.

Nemesis may have her day, though. Jamie Dimon might have just gone a swindle too far for the fates to ignore him another year. JP Morgan looks to be in a peck of trouble for its role in the confiscation of MF Global accounts, not to mention its hijinks in the precious metals markets. The impudence of these rascals! In a nation when all sorts of people are murdered every day for little more reason than being in the wrong place at the wrong time, is it not a wonder that some poor swindled Grampa with nothing left to live for has not tossed a Molotov cocktail through the window of a Wall Street watering hole known to be frequented by banking poobahs? Perhaps this sort of action awaits us in 2012.

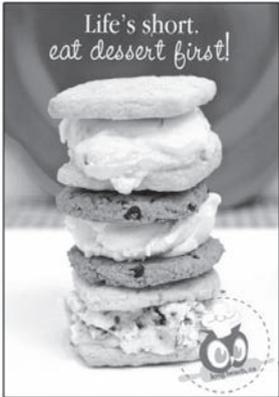
My longtime readers know how much I love predicting the Dow Jones Industrial Average to crash down to 4000 every year. I never disappoint--though I am often disappointed. In 2011, the SP index managed the delightful trick of finishing a fraction below its previous January kickoff. The stock markets have churned in range-bound purgatory for a decade while the price of a jar of pickles has multiplied four-fold. Applying the calculus, and given the pickle-DOW differential, I'd say my call was actually pretty good. In any case, this year I change the tune slightly: I predict the DJIA will go to 4000, with the catch that the number is only a way-station to 1000, which it will hit



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in 2014. We may be short of snow here in the Northeastern US--thanks to La Nina--yet not short of confidence that the mills of the Gods grind slowly, but grind exceedingly fine.

Finally, look for the publication of my next book round July 2012, a non-fiction work titled *Too Much Magic: Wishful Thinking, Technology and the Fate of the Nation...* from The Atlantic Monthly Press. In a week, I begin work on *World Made By Hand 3*.

Good luck to you in 2012, and report any suspicious characters adorned with ear-plugs, quetzal feathers, and carrying obsidian knives to your nearest office of Homeland Security.



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OBAMA'S TWISTED VERSION OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

J A S O N L E O P O L D

President Barack Obama would like the world to know that the US can do whatever it damn well pleases, thank you very much.

Obama also wants the whole, wide world to get this through its thick skull: only rogue governments that implement a policy of rendition, torture, indefinite detention and extrajudicial assassination are guilty of human rights abuses and should be held accountable.

That's the clear-cut message Obama articulated late last Friday when he issued a proclamation commemorating the 63rd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"All people should live free from the threat of extrajudicial killing, torture, oppression and discrimination, regardless of gender, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability," Obama's proclamation states.

Apparently, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning president doesn't believe the indefinite detention of detainees at Guantanamo, especially those who have already been cleared for release; or the administration's refusal to allow prisoners detained and tortured by the US government in Afghanistan, rises to the level of human rights abuses as outlined in his stunningly hypocritical proclamation. Nor does the former constitutional law professor believe that the extrajudicial killing of Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and propagandist Samir Kahn, US citizens accused of aiding terrorists who were assassinated without due process by a drone strike Obama personally authorized, is a noteworthy human rights issue.

Obama's proclamation also contained another

embarrassing contradiction: it declared the week of December 10th as Human Rights Week, the same week Congress debated and passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This controversial piece of legislation, signed by Obama into law New Year's Eve, gives the president the power to indefinitely imprison without charge or trial or a court hearing anyone suspected of terrorist activity in the US. His previous threat to veto the bill was withdrawn when Congress made minor changes in the legislation related to the treatment of terrorism suspects.

When the US voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it promised to uphold several ideals, including one that said, "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile." Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, said before Obama signed the bill that he will "go down in history as the president who enshrined indefinite detention without trial in US law."

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-- Jason Leopold

Obama's quagmire of contradictions on human rights is laid bare in a powerful and timely new book written by Juan Méndez, the United Nations Special Rapporteur For Torture, and Marjory Wentworth, a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet, teacher and longtime human rights activist.

In *Taking A Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights*, Méndez and Wentworth interweave Méndez's personal story as a lifelong human rights activist and lawyer into human rights themes.

"Each chapter is [centered] around a particular human rights issue, [Méndez's] role in shaping the dialogue around the issue and ideas for the future," Wentworth said during an online book salon at *Firedoglake* two weeks ago hosted by this reporter.

Since his first days in office, Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have promoted the narrative that the US is a human rights leader. But as former Amnesty International Secretary General Ian Martin notes in his introduction to *Taking A Stand*, that assertion has been severely "undermined by [the US government's] inability to rise above political alliances and increasingly by its own direct violations of human rights."

Obama has severely damaged the US's standing in the world by refusing to investigate and prosecute the widespread human rights abuses that took place during

George W. Bush's tenure in office, Méndez said. And he has invited "other nations to follow the U.S. example of impunity for torture" and has provided "rogue regimes with a ready-made excuse for rejecting international community concerns about their own abuses," Méndez and Wentworth write in a chapter devoted to accountability.

Méndez described Obama's attitude, during the *Firedoglake* book salon, as a "twisted version of US exceptionalism," where the "rules" only apply to "others." Here's a fresh example of that type of "twisted exceptionalism." On Wednesday, the State Department announced that the US government had implemented sanctions against two Iranian officials for committing "serious human rights abuses," including the indefinite detention of Iranian citizens, in connection with massive protests that took place in the country in 2009 over the disputed presidential election.

"This is the fourth time we have designated individuals and entities under human rights sanctioning authority" under a September 2010 executive order signed by Obama, said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, a former top aide to Dick Cheney who misled the media about the extent of the CIA's rendition program and asserted that the Bush administration did not torture detainees [h/t Jeffrey Kaye]

According to a State Department fact sheet issued in 2010, Iranian "protesters were detained without formal charges brought against them and during this detention detainees were subjected to beatings, solitary confinement and a denial of due process rights at the hands of [Iranian]

intelligence officers...."

"In addition, political figures were coerced into making false confessions under unbearable interrogations, which included torture, abuse, blackmail and the threatening of family members," the State Department's fact sheet said.

Sound familiar? Under policies sanctioned by Bush, Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, war-on-terror detainees were imprisoned at secret, black site facilities and at Guantanamo Bay without formal charges brought against them. Those prisoners were also subjected to beatings, solitary confinement and a denial of due process rights and were coerced into making false confessions under unbearable interrogations, which included torture, abuse, blackmail and the threatening of family members.

Need another example of the administration's "twisted version of American exceptionalism?" Last June, the White House issued a statement condemning Hamas for abducting Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit five years ago and holding "him hostage without access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in violation of the standards of basic decency and international humanitarian demands."

"Abduction," also known in US intelligence circles as "extraordinary rendition," and hiding prisoners from the ICRC, sounds familiar as well. Of course it does, the latter was a policy enacted by Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney and other former Bush officials. In fact, a January 2, 2004 memo drafted for military police and interrogators at Abu

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Ghraib prison in Iraq and signed by Col. Marc Warren, the top legal adviser to Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, who was commander of US forces in Iraq, was entitled “New plan to restrict Red Cross access to Abu Ghraib.” The contents of that memo have never been released.

Moreover, in 2004, Rumsfeld admitted that at the request of then-CIA Director George Tenet, he authorized the US military in the fall of 2003 to hide an Iraqi prisoner from the ICRC and other organizations that monitor the treatment of prisoners.

Rumsfeld told reporters at a June 17, 2004 press briefing that Tenet sent him a letter asking the US military to imprison the Iraqi who was believed to be a high-ranking member of Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish terrorist group suspected of links to al-Qaeda. Tenet also told Rumsfeld to be sure the detainee was kept off the prisoner rolls, which he was for six months.

The White House’s decision to weigh in on Shalit, who Hamas has since released, is another example of the Obama administration’s contradictory stance on human rights whenever Israel’s track record is raised.

In their book, Méndez and Wentworth documented Israel’s own human rights abuses, and they were critical that the US condemned a report of a United Nations investigative team led by Richard Goldstone regarding Israel’s treatment of Palestinians in Gaza. Méndez said he cannot explain why “Israel is generally shielded from effective action on human rights by the US,” but he does not believe it’s purely a political decision.

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“I suspect the [US government’s] reasons are complex and not just political expedience,” Méndez said during the book salon. “But complexity is no excuse in this case, especially because the US could use its influence positively and, in general, I don’t think it does. Israel is by no means the worst offender in the region, nor are some forces innocent of abuse on the Palestinian side either. But the human rights issues are real and Israel’s ability to fend them off with support of the US and other Western governments is not only a problem for the victims of abuse; it is also an obstacle to peace.

Overall, Méndez said Obama’s “failure of leadership” and his decision to “look forward, not backwards,” on human rights abuses that took place during the Bush years is “seen [by foreign government leaders] as a decline in [US] influence and moral authority...that hurts other foreign policy interests as well.”

Speaking of “looking forward,” this is perhaps the best example of Obama’s “twisted version of American exceptionalism.” In March of 2010, Obama spoke to an Indonesian television reporter who queried him about whether he was satisfied the Indonesian government was taking proper steps to address past human rights abuses.

Obama said, “We have to acknowledge that those past human rights abuses existed. We can’t go forward without looking backwards.” (Emphasis added)

Méndez and Wentworth understand that Obama will never exercise his responsibility as dictated in the Convention Against Torture, and initiate an investigation

into past human rights abuses that took place during the eight years George Bush occupied the White House.

“Juan and I feel strongly that you pay for it in the end,” Wentworth said in an interview following the book salon. “I think we’re going to pay a price in ways we don’t even know.”

Méndez agreed, but he still remains hopeful.

“None of us can really hold our breath while we wait for the [US government] to live up to its obligation to investigate, prosecute and punish every act of torture committed by its agents,” Méndez said during the book salon. “The lack of delivery on the promise to have a day of reckoning [which Attorney General Eric Holder had said the public was owed] is truly disappointing. But again, experience shows that issues of accountability do not go away. Of course, it is preferable to have accountability in real time. But justice, even if it comes late, will come and be welcome.”

That brings to mind the maxim, “the wheels of justice grind slowly but exceedingly fine,” which would apply to recent court action in Argentina where a dozen former military and police officials, including a Navy officer who earned the nickname “Angel of Death,” were sentenced to life in prison last month for the kidnapping, murder and torture of leftist activists during the height of the country’s military dictatorship in the 1970s. Méndez was one of the activists tortured. There’s a riveting section in *Taking A Stand* where he describes in detail how his torturers used an electric prod on his genitals and other parts of his body until he begged them to kill him. That he survived and went on to shape the modern human rights

movement is nothing short of a miracle.

Méndez’s criticisms of the US government’s human rights record is not limited to its treatment of war-on-terror detainees. He also butted heads with the Obama administration over the military’s treatment of Pfc. Bradley Manning, an Army intelligence analyst who is accused of leaking government secrets to WikiLeaks and faces life in prison. Manning’s pretrial hearing is currently in progress.

Méndez said he became concerned about Manning when he started to hear reports about his abusive treatment, which included being held in solitary confinement for 23-hours a day, during his incarceration at Quantico. Méndez said he had “frank conversation[s] with the [Department of Defense] about the conditions of [Manning’s] incarceration” and requested that he be permitted to visit and speak with the soldier confidentially.

“I was allowed to see him but with no guarantees of confidentiality, terms that I could not accept,” Méndez said during the *Firedoglake* book salon. “I offered to see Manning nonetheless, through his lawyer, if he wanted to see me, but he preferred not to waive his right to a truly private conversation. In the meantime, when he was moved from Quantico to Fort Leavenworth, his conditions changed and since last April he is no longer in solitary confinement. I am still insisting on seeing him. In a few weeks I will release my views on the case, since the exchange of information with the [US government] is essentially over.”

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CONGRESS SIGNS ITS OWN ARREST WARRANTS

NAOMI WOLF

I never thought I would have to write this: but—incredibly—Congress has now passed the National Defense Appropriations Act, with Amendment 1031, which allows for the military detention of American citizens. The amendment is so loosely worded that any American citizen could be held without due process. The language of this bill can be read to assure Americans that they can challenge their detention—but most people do not realize what this means: at Guantanamo and in other military prisons, one's lawyer's calls are monitored, witnesses for one's defense are not allowed to testify, and one can be forced into nudity and isolation. Incredibly, ninety-three Senators voted to support this bill and now most of Congress: a roster of names that will live in infamy in the history of our nation, and never be expunged from the dark column of the history books.

They may have supported this bill because—although it's hard to believe—they think the military will only arrest active members of Al Qaida; or maybe, less naively, they believe that 'at most', low-level dissenting figures, activists, or troublesome protesters might be subjected to military arrest. But they are forgetting something critical: history shows that those who signed this bill will soon be subject to arrest themselves.

Our leaders appear to be supporting this bill thinking that they will always be what they are now, in the fading light of a once-great democracy—those civilian leaders who safely and securely sit in freedom and DIRECT the military. In inhabiting this bubble, which their own

actions are about to destroy, they are cocooned by an arrogance of power, placing their own security in jeopardy by their own hands, and ignoring history and its inevitable laws. The moment this bill becomes law, though Congress is accustomed, in a weak democracy, to being the ones who direct and control the military, the power roles will reverse: Congress will no longer be directing and in charge of the military: rather, the military will be directing and in charge of individual Congressional leaders, as well as in charge of everyone else—as any Parliamentarian in any society who handed this power over to the military can attest.

Perhaps Congress assumes that it will always only be 'they' who are targeted for arrest and military detention: but sadly, Parliamentary leaders are the first to face pressure, threats, arrest and even violence when the military obtains the power to make civilian arrests and hold ci-

I warn that one cannot name a nation that gave the military the power to make civilian arrests and hold citizens in military detention, that did not almost at once turn that power against members of that nation's own political ruling class.

-- Naomi Wolf

vilians in military facilities without due process. There is no exception to this rule. Just as I traveled the country four years ago warning against the introduction of torture and secret prisons—and confidently offering a hundred thousand dollar reward to anyone who could name a nation that allowed torture of the 'other' that did not eventually turn this abuse on its own citizens—(confident because I knew there was no such place)—so today I warn that one cannot name a nation that gave the military the power to make civilian arrests and hold citizens in military detention, that did not almost at once turn that power against members of that nation's own political ruling class. This makes sense—the obverse sense of a democracy, in which power protects you; political power endangers you in a militarized police state: the more powerful a political leader is, the more can be gained in a militarized police state by pressuring,

threatening or even arresting him or her.

Mussolini, who created the modern template for fascism, was a duly elected official when he started to direct paramilitary forces against Italian citizens: yes, he sent the Blackshirts to beat up journalists, editors, and union leaders; but where did these militarized groups appear

most dramatically and terrifyingly, snapping at the fragile hold of Italian democracy? In the halls of the Italian Parliament. Whom did they physically attack and intimidate? Mussolini's former colleagues in Parliament—as they sat, just as our Congress is doing, peacefully deliberating and debating the laws. Whom did Hitler's Brownshirts arrest in the first wave of mass arrests in 1933? Yes, journalists, union leaders and editors; but they also targeted local and regional political leaders and dragged them off to secret prisons and the torture that the rest of society had turned a blind eye to when it had been directed at the 'other'. Who was most at risk from assassination or arrest and torture, after the show trials, in Stalin's Russia? Yes, journalists, editors and dissidents: but also physically endangered, and often arrested by militarized police and tortured or worse, were senior members of the Politburo who had fallen out of favor.

Is this intimidation and arrest by the military a vestige of the past? Hardly. We forget that all over the world there are militarized societies in which shells of democracy are propped up—in which Parliament meets regularly and elections are held, but the generals are really in charge, like what the Egyptian military is proposing with upcoming elections and the Constitution itself. That is exactly what will occur if Congress gives the power of arrest and detention to the military. In those societies if a given political leader does not please the generals, he or she is subjected to physical danger or military arrest.

Whom did John Perkins, author of *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, say he was directed to intimidate and threaten when he worked as a 'jackal', putting pressure on the leadership in authoritarian countries? Latin American parliamentarians who were in the position to decide the laws that affected the well-being of his corporate clients. Who is under house arrest by the military in Myanmar? The political leader of the opposition to the military junta. Malalai Joya is an Afghani parliamentarian who has run afoul of the military and has to sleep in a different venue every night—for her own safety. And on and on. This is what we get in countries with military detention of civilians.

US Congresspeople and Senators may think that their power protects them from the treacherous wording of Amendments 1031 and 1032: but their arrogance is leading them to a blindness that is suicidal. The moment they sign this NDAA into law, history shows that they themselves and their staff are the most physically endangered by it. They will immediately become, not the masters of the great might of the United States military, but its subjects and even, if history is any guide—and unfortunately every single outcome of ramping up police state powers that I have warned against for years has come to pass—sadly but inevitably, its very first targets.

Naomi Wolf is a social critic and political activist. Her book *The End of America* was a *New York Times* bestseller. Her latest book is *Give Me Liberty*. It includes tools for citizens to effectively promote civic engagement and create sustainable democracy.



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CASH CORRUPTED CONGRESS

JEFF SMITH

It's always been about the money. Occupy Wall Street chose to set up its 24-hour outpost of political dissent on the doorstep of the finance industry primarily to underscore the simple fact that money has corrupted our political process so completely that the seat of power in the U.S. isn't even in Washington, D.C. any more. That said, the Capitol continues collecting its cut, as evidenced in the recent double-barreled dispatches, in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, on the exploding wealth gap between our ever-more affluent representatives in Congress and the financially flat-lined citizens they represent.

From its inception, OWS has focused on the concept of legalized bribery, as the continually rising cost of a political campaign—an average of \$1.4 million for a successful House run, up fourfold in real dollars since 1976, and nearly \$10 million for a Senate seat—has been largely subsidized by wealthy donors, corporations and special interests, in return for legislation that favors their interests. It's a form of regulatory capture that most first-world democracies outlaw as corruption, but that Americans know as “the way things are,” along with “ask your doctor” pharmaceutical ads and campaigns pitching products directly to young children. The result is an almost total lack of confidence in our elected officials, as reflected by Congress' almost impossibly low 9 percent approval rating.

Even insider-trading laws don't apply to our lawmakers, despite their regular access to valuable market

information Joe Citizen will never hear, not to mention their power to tilt markets and pick winners and losers by removing a sentence from this piece of legislation, or adding a clause to that one.

The gap between the Beltway and the economic realities of most Americans can be found in the common Washington framing of households with an annual income of \$250,000—a figure achieved by just the top 1.5 percent—as “middle class.” It's understandable, since that's not much more than the \$174,000 base pay pulled in by rank-and-file members of both houses of Congress. That's how rich our representatives have become.

While that salary actually has dipped slightly in inflation-adjusted dollars over recent decades, our representatives have kept getting richer. That's both a reflection of the high cost of campaigns that effectively dissuade would-be candidates without ready money of their own or access to it from running, and the private profits many of our elected officials can and do claim once in office.

The freshman class of 106 members elected last year, including many new Tea-Party-backed Republicans, had a median net worth of \$864,000—an inflation-adjusted increase of 26 percent from the 2004 freshmen. In the wake of a crushing recession, America's politicians actually were richer, in part so they could foot their share of the bill, along with their donors, for the political ads that are expected to be one of the fastest-growing sources of television advertising revenue in 2012, breaking the spending record set in 2008.

A survey this year by the nonpartisan National Bureau of Economic Research found that nearly one in four Americans couldn't come up with even \$2,000 in cash within 30 days if he or

she had to, while another one in five would have to pawn or sell possessions or take out a payday loan. Compare that with our representatives in Washington's median net worth of \$725,000, excluding home equity—up more than 150 percent since 1984 in inflation-adjusted 2009 dollars.

The fact that Congress is moving away from the rest of the public is exactly why Occupy Wall Street has found such a giant hole in the political conversation to step into, and why our national representatives have kept their distance even when polls showed the public responding powerfully to our complaints and slogans.

-- Jeff Smith

Over the same period, the wealth of an American family has declined slightly, with the comparable median figure sliding from \$20,600 to \$20,500, according to the University of Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

Taxation as a remedy to perpetual wealth is as much a part of the American legacy as a representative government, but the last 30 years have seen both taxes and representation recede. We now have a society with limited social mobility, where the advantages of wealth translate into preferred access to healthcare, education, business, and yes, even the political process.

The fact that Congress is moving away from the rest of the public is exactly why Occupy Wall Street has found such a giant hole in the political conversation to step into, and why our national representatives have kept their distance even when polls showed the public responding powerfully to our complaints and slogans. In a true market of political ideas, we'd have been prime targets for coopting. Instead, President Obama works "99 percent" into his speeches, and business as usual continues.

Despite such indifference, Occupy Wall Street resonated where previous protests petered out by creating and holding a physical space where it was impossible to avert one's gaze. Members of the general public came to Occupy encampments all over the country to take in the scene and to participate, despite the disinterest shown by politicians and the glib tone of much of the mainstream press coverage. The occupation became an amplifier for those voices—not unlike the people's mic itself—as the

encampment in Zuccotti Park meant that a like-minded group in another city was now part of a national story that didn't schedule its own ending like a traditional protest, and couldn't easily be ignored. The 99 percent rediscovered the collective power of our voice, and started using it to make a whole lot of noise.

In 2012, expect to hear more of that noise from Occupy the Caucuses and Occupy Congress. Money talks, but we do too.

Jeff Smith, a former advertising professional, is a member of the Occupy Wall Street press team, and writer for the *Daily Beast*.

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D O R E E N L E

When it first surfaced, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) was not taken very seriously, thanks to the mainstream media. It claimed that this movement lacked leadership and a clear perspective about what it was protesting, and therefore was bound to soon disappear. Could it be that these claims were more about the wishes of pundits who spent little time trying to expose and understand what this movement was all about because they are too close to the centers of power the movement is protesting against?

OWS has taken the world by storm to challenge establishment power and ask important questions that the mainstream media can't ask. Why do legislators continue to pass laws that mostly benefit corporations? Why are banks not being held accountable for the fraudulent loan practices that victimized so many hard-working people over the past decade?

Could it be that banks and too-big-to-fail corporations are in bed with the legislators and regulators? Despite all the anti-government rhetoric from media pundits and the conservative right, and especially Tea Party republicans, the dominant economic players get many benefits from government and want to keep it that way. They just want to deny ordinary citizens these benefits, which is why they are passing on the pain from the economic downturn through severe budget cuts. Establishment power is made up of elite players who pass through a revolving door between corporate board rooms and government bureaus. And it's rare for these members to betray one of their own.

These questions and issues are never on the agenda. The mainstream media makes sure they aren't discussed. It traffics in generalities that divert attention from them, assuming for example that capitalism and freedom are naturally linked; or that markets work best and in the interests of everyone when they are "free" of government

regulation; or that lower taxes for the elite will filter down and create jobs for the rest, among others. These notions settle into the minds of citizens like religious doctrine.

This allows the banks and corporations to manage an elaborate hoax, preaching freedom and deregulation while controlling their industries in ways that serve their own economic interests. They know that legitimate indie regulators in the public interest would undermine their power.

This is why our recent decline is nothing new, just more severe. This power leads to one boom-bust cycle after another, as Naomi Klein shows in her book *The Shock Doctrine*. The banks and big corporations inflate the system, create bubbles, and then deflate them. They profit on the way up from rising asset prices, and pick up good deals as they decline and the economy shrinks. They can do this because they have so much more wealth than most and can wait out the downturn.

The banks and big corporations inflate the system, create bubbles, and then deflate them. They profit on the way up from rising asset prices, and pick up good deals as they decline and the economy shrinks.

-- Doreen Le

The 20s, that unregulated decade of rampant speculation, was only the most extreme example. But it had severe consequences and led to the Depression which created too many victims that had nothing to do with these problems. It sacrificed more and more members of the middle class on the altar of "progress" for an economic faith that's out of touch with what America is all about.

Fortunately that led to a saner system under FDR and regulations that let the banking system and the economy work for people. But those have been under attack since the Reagan years and if our leadership doesn't change soon we may be back in the Hoover administra-

tion. We need to expose the bankruptcy of leadership and the clichés of how the economy operates and restore belief in the credibility of the system. No matter how often the mainstream media says the protesters lack focus and leadership, it's the moral outrage over the effects of our economic collapse that unifies them, as Robert Borosage shows in the last issue of *AMASS*.

It seems so obvious to so many that our disparity in wealth is neither functional for the larger society nor moral, and the fact that leaders don't see this shows how blind insiders are to what's happened. What kind of system provides endless tax breaks to individuals and corpo-

rations that don't need them, while ignoring the plight of the victims who had nothing to do with this manufactured crisis?

Perhaps this is why the Occupy movements want to avoid the system and especially elite leaders who can step in and take over the process and set the agenda. Keeping the agenda fluid and setting the example of democratic participation from everyone sends a message that real change can only happen if we work together outside the system, at least for a while. The system seems beyond reform. No wonder the mainstream media doesn't have a clue!

So how does our local franchise of OWS see all of this? On a cold day in December I headed to Lincoln Park, where they have been camped for a couple months, to find out. There were tents, tables with information pamphlets, food and blankets for the taking. Many were standing around discussing Occupy and what it means to them. I was surprised that several of the participants were quite well-informed. And they had a clear sense of what the movement is about, as well as a strong moral purpose.

The area looked and felt like a soup kitchen for the homeless, those who most of us often ignore, and the protesters were giving the occupants blankets and money to buy food, what they really need to survive. They were open to conversations with passersby, treating everyone like a friend, not a cause, and weren't pushy in asking for donations. They resonated peace and seemed to have support from many in the community, including a uniformed police officer who stopped by to drop off a bag of sandwiches and trail mix. Spending time with them was an eye-opener!

AMASS: Why do you think this movement has grown?

OLB: Because people are finally waking up and realizing that they have nothing, their homes, retirement, savings, everything they worked for has been taken by corrupt people who happen to have power. The banks screwed us over first, then the government by protecting them. And people are powerless to fight against it...we're slaves to the system.

AMASS: How do you think we got here in the first place?

OLB: Greed, pure and simple. Greedy banks and corporations don't care about anything but making a profit, no matter who they hurt or how many. And greedy politicians write the laws that benefit them while getting money from lobbyists and campaign donations. And when it falls apart the banks and corporations get bailed out! We saw this happen with our very own eyes in 2008. But we got a glimpse of it back in the Reagan years with the S&L crisis!

AMASS: Why protest? Why not take some other action to make a difference, like working within the system?

OLB: We are trying to do both. We want to do something that is visible to the community. By protesting, by occupying this space, people see us who maybe don't know much about what's going on but want to get involved, learn about what's happening. Maybe someone

will stop and ask questions, and they'll see how we live and treat each other and how it's possible to be free and live in peace. But we also realize that people will only listen if you seriously try to get something done and show that you are willing to work with them and learn to compromise. It's not enough to just lash out in public. We're working on a number of fronts to change the system. Like the media. We need an independent media that can give us more unbiased news and information. Too much of it is owned by big corporations that are only interested in making profits.

AMASS: Don't you run the risk of creating a picture for the public that your occupied space is just an encampment for the homeless and...?

OLB: This look is due to manipulation by the media to make Occupy appear unattractive and only about the down-and-out. But that's really the point. We want people to see the sleeping bags and the tents. In addition to increasing our visibility, the tents are symbolic of what's really happening. People are losing their homes because of the greed, and camping out on the street is the next step for many of them. So seeing all this educates people. But there's also a logistical reason for camping out. Many who support the movement can't come during daylight hours because they're still working. So we need an "indoor" place where we can meet to discuss ideas at night.

AMASS: Do most people see it this way? It seems that many see the movement as disorganized, and lacking leadership.

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OLB: True, but in a way everyone is a leader because they have a voice that deserves to be heard and they can get informed enough to make a difference. Besides protesting against the system we're also protesting the leader-follower structure because it's top-down power and decision making that allows the greedy to keep the system going behind the scenes. It's because of our current leadership system that we're in this mess in the first place. A hierarchical structure is what keeps most people in the dark about what's going on. We believe in a general assembly as opposed to traditional leaders. We have organizers, mentors and facilitators who bring about awareness and teach decision-making by consensus, encouraging members to find common ground.

AMASS: Why Occupy Long Beach? Occupy LA isn't that far from here and you'll be more likely to be heard.

OLB: Occupy LA has large numbers already, and it's important to have as many occupied sites as possible. And we're about responding to our specific community's issues and concerns. This has been an organic movement. No one "planned" to have an Occupy movement in any particular place. These occupations happened because there were enough people in the communities who felt strongly enough about situations to go public and get involved. There has been very effective communication with other Occupy sites. We work with LA, Orange County, San Diego, and Pasadena to coordinate specific actions. And there's a logistical reason why we need to have a site here. The port is here and if you control the ports you can control the economy. The unions are powerful in the port, especially the longshoremen, and they are mostly with us. Stopping the trucks and the trains will block the transfer of goods and shut the port down.

AMASS: What effect do you believe your actions have had on Long Beach?

OLB: They've really brought people together. Small business people are showing up with blankets and food and donations. We feel like we've stimulated the local economy by encouraging people to shop local and avoid the big corporations. People feel solidarity with us and have been expressing their support. There are many signs in the windows of businesses supporting us. It's not capitalism that we're against as such, but the corporate form that mostly represents the elite and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the 1%. It's the small businesses here that have the potential to grow and get people working again and create wealth.

AMASS: Since your protesting is about change, what kind of change do you want to see?

OLB: Because this movement is organic, we're flexible. You can't anticipate what's going to happen because you don't know what the reaction will be to what we're doing. We don't know exactly how the change will occur. In a sense we're just planting the seeds and hoping it will grow on its own and lead to the elimination of the 1% dominance of our society and all the inequality. So we definitely hope that our committed actions will successfully challenge the power of big corporate play-

ers like Wal-Mart. People vote with their spending. Elections only come around once in a while but people have to buy things. So if you spend your money at small local businesses and get your food from a farmer's market, you are voting against big corporate greed and corruption on a daily basis. And we'd like people to move their money from big banks to credit unions which are more likely to loan it to members of the community who can use it to start businesses and hire people. Anything that clips the power of the too-big-to-fail banks.

AMASS: If you had to come up with a list of demands right now, what would it include?

OLB: Reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act, established in FDR's 30s to regulate banks' financial behavior; better regulations on corporations; an overhaul of the tax system that gives too many breaks to the rich and powerful, for a more progressive one; a livable minimum wage; elimination of lobbyists and money in campaigns; better legislative bodies that make laws in the interest of the people and not special interests...

AMASS: What do you think it will take to make your demands a reality?

OLB: At the rate we're going, it'll be really hard to make any major changes. We're protesting, we're bringing about awareness, but awareness and action are two different things. Perhaps the only way to bring about major change is through a major collapse that will allow us to rebuild truly democratic institutions from the bottom up...

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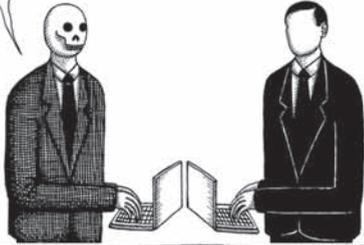
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Sir, they also realized that we with lots of magic pieces of paper in our pockets are the only ones with actual power. Double uh oh.

Sir, they also have developed their own magic weapon called "Equality and Love." Triple scoop deep shit uh oh.



Con: Patchouli and Drum Circles



I avoided "Burning Man" for a reason. If we are the 99%, where are all the normal people?



"Normal" people don't change the world, brother.

Pro: Freedom of Speech

MIC-CHECK!!!

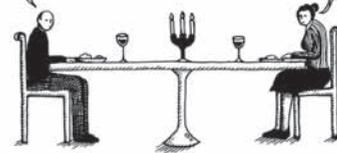


Go to sleep, you sons 'a bitches!

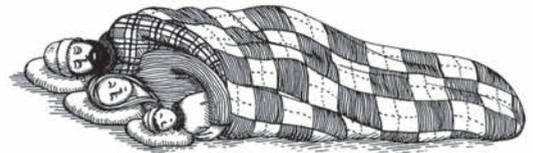


Con: Freedom of Speech

Darling, perhaps this cheapo \$17,000 bottle of orphan blood is getting to me, but it appears our floor is being occupied. Is that baby Jesus, Mary, and Chuck Norris? I'll be damned.



Literally



Pro: The Force is With You

Con: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band



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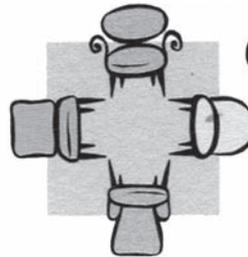
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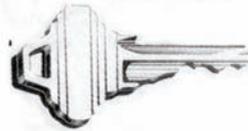


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NOTES FROM ABOVEGROUND

JOHN O'KANE

The quality dropout experience is becoming difficult to achieve and maintain these days. The economic filter-down has slowed to such a trickle that the squeegee artists on Rose may soon be out of work. But creative slumming won't likely go the way of nude sunbathing. Whether they subsist beneath the radar, or coexist above it, our citizens will strive to keep it alive. Their inspired actions will alter our city-state; affirm and preserve its state of mind...

On one of those special early evenings when hazy clouds nearly eclipse the sun, leaving patches of people and objects painted at random, I alter my run path along the ocean. Reaching the breakwater from the north, I cut back across the sand to the Boardwalk near Market, just shy of the Sidewalk Café, a magnet for tourists since it opened in the mid-70s. It offers burger delights out front, and enlightening spirits in the bar behind. Bordering its south wall is Small World Books, a great indie bookstore. It's all owned by the same family, the Goodfaders. I wander in to check my order and head for the saloon.

It hasn't changed all that much since I first dropped in for happy hour in the 80s, adjusting for the inflation of new lifestyles of course. There's actually a gen-Y couple that possibly veered too far from one of the many valeted hangouts that dot the area these days exciting as I enter. But the Sidewalk has held its own in preserving the pedigree of a disappearing Venetian experience, the "real" bar. The Brig, the Circle, the Comeback Inn and many others that have long since passed were lively gathering spots for a diversity of residents who mixed it up on good talk and stimulating social insight. They offered a place for many to share their escape, at least for a few hours on Saturday night, from another day's drudging work for the man; or a space for jobless victims of the warped society to experience downtime.

The real bar can of course get too real at times and encourage the baser instincts. It seems that even in a perfect storm of communal schmoozing, hostility spumes just below the surface. And then there's the long-term collateral damage to the truly committed, the high incidence of liver failure and home-wrecking...

The Sidewalk is not exactly neighborly nirvana. In fact a few tempers are flaring in the back. Two burly bikers are gesturing over a woman playing video games. From the lingo they appear to have slipped into a graying-pony-tailed time warp, mistaking her for a notch of one-night glory on a run back in the day. She seems oblivious to their interchanges, hitting her targets with ease.

"Ruby, it's me, member...went down to teejay, partied all week with Sonny and Dingo, got wasted... where'd you..."

Before he can finish the other one whiffs a pool cue within inches of his head.

"Leave her alone...she's..."

Manny the bartender, already on alert, grabs the cue and graciously snuffs the disturbance. He settles nerves with freebees.

A fifties-something mohawked limey stirs his scotch and water on top of the day's Iraq blurbs, flagging a bloke here and there. Some anxious Monday Night Footballers train for the guzzle shootout with lone pitchers.

-- John O'Kane

"I guess there's good reasons why the first 60s biker film was set in Venice," I say after normality returns.

"What one was that?"

"*The Wild Angels*...Peter Fonda, Bruce Dern, Nancy Sinatra and a few other luminaries...'66 or so."

"Too much of the good ole days for me!"

"There's a bar scene in the film that could've taken place right here!"

"I only go back as far as the first Billy Jack movie...*The Born Losers*?"

"Yeah, a few years later, after Hollywood started crankin out a biker film about every other week!"

Actually fights have declined in the Sidewalk, pacing the overall

drop in direct crime and violence in Venice and LA we owe these more sanitized times.

As I settle in at the bar folks appear to be making some version of the good times roll. Reggie swaggers back to the pool table decked out in bowling shirt, making his usual pit-stop on the way to doing a few lines. A small cluster of Latina moms party it up with their kids.

Alex and pals mix local politics and proud pursuits of the unfairest sex in the focused phase of alcohol-tongue. A few middle-aged couples rendezvous under one of the silent TVs.

Others stroll in who find their roosts and quickly begin to exchange a variety of high-five pleasantries. Shelly, a nurse from the Venice Family Clinic who's mesmerized by the ads between news bytes, sends a greeting to an acquaintance in the corner. A fifties-something mohawked limey stirs his scotch and water on top of the day's Iraq blurbs, flagging a bloke here and there. Some anxious Monday Night Footballers train for the guzzle shootout with lone pitchers.

Here and there are shapes that seem glued to their stools. They sit vertically correct and nearly motionless, fixated on something a few feet straight ahead, like they're riveted to a scene in their favorite movie. A male in his thirties, who's wearing a black bandana on his shaved head, surfaces from the trance with a curious grin, like he might've seen some semblance of the light. He peeks around at what a few others are doing before returning to his movie. A girl in a bikini suddenly materializes and plops down at a table. She spreads her long legs over the top and looks around at everyone wide-eyed, especially the male, like her vision is a movie camera that's caught in a loop panning the bar's every detail. The male remains in a trance as a few customers begin to look back and forth between him and her, like they see another movie in the making.

Two others are not only frozen to their stools, they appear frozen in time, sporting different sartorial versions of 60s "freak." Their clothes seem like originals from that

era. They're silent, but appear to know each other.

Another quotes this past but with greater sympathy for the moment's fashions. His mostly-gray shoulder-length hair, apparently the focus of some recent guerilla stylefare, is capped off with a California Angels logo. He inspects what looks like a tequila sunrise with calm perplexity, granny glasses removed, as if he's surfaced from a profound meditative state to find what drove him under.

Though a writer and long-time Venice resident, no one appears to recognize him except the woman targeted by the bikers. They return daggers. I wait for the negative vibes to subside.

"How's the reprint of your book coming?"

"No one will touch it. They're trying to stop me from ever publishing again. No one reads these days anyway...no interest in the past."

"Come over to Dudley Cinema one of these weeks. They're always doing films on Venice history and getting a pretty good turnout. They did Philomene Long's documentary on the Beats not long ago."

"They don't want...the last time I went to one of those events several people asked me to leave!"

A man suddenly hobbles to the bar and gravitates toward the nearest freak costume, followed by a woman who's quickly labeled a hooker by one of the footballers. He asks for a glass of water. Manny asks both to leave.

Pleased with himself, the footballer says, "What happened baby, run otta clients?"

She moves slowly to the exit with the fading yuks, while the man seems on the verge of unraveling.

"Brenda said yesterday...we'll be...why are you always...Randy get you!" he blurts out.



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As the man slips out the door a trio of fatigued, new-age Rambos rolls in, braying their way to the bar with the grace of a speeding hummer on main street at noon. In the mini hush to come I hear the pounding classic rock and clack of pool balls for the first time.

Tempted to leave before this gets too real, I glimpse the woman from another angle who gave the bikers such fits. She now seems somewhat familiar, though I can't place her. I sense something might be happening so I get another draft.

The space suddenly fills with classic rock (Manny manages edgy behaviors with more decibels), run-on head-pounding metal, mood-bursts of sweet and sour, light and dark, all the way from lyrics imagining other worlds to Jim Morrison's haunting apocalypse. Fitting since this local icon's wild-eyed performing torso is caked on the side of a very familiar sight, the jerry-built apartment monument, a few blocks away at 18th and Speedway. And he lived, quite briefly and sporadically from most accounts, a block or so from here on the southeast corner of Westminster and Speedway in a structure aptly named the Morrison Building...

If Rhiannon the spiritual advisor who services drop-ins at her table just up the Boardwalk could chart our futures insync she might see a town still tangy, lots of folks riding out new storms, and actors dogged with uncollectible loans beating it back to their rooms through a soft parade of Italian Greyhounds bred on boneless Trader Joe's gourmet. And probably many of us still waiting for the end of a Venice we once knew...

I welcome the nostalgia these songs resurrect, and try to pass through its layers so that I can fully grasp the rush they once gave me, and possibly re-experience if only for a fleeting instant that vaulting beyond everyday dullness to something like euphoria.

Who knows what turns most on to these aging tunes. For many boomers they conjure visions of social change, however fuzzy, and the poetic imaginings of other universes that compensated for their failure. But little of that survives the music's conversion to the playlist, a constantly-repeated selection of overly-popular tunes whose main purpose is to deliver the maximum number of listeners to advertisers. Robo-deejays denude the songs of their relevant history and deliver the din of mere satisfaction. For many here any sound is probably alright that pumps them up and lets the good times roll. They must feel they've ridden out all storms, deservedly high on their luck to be living in a nostalgia-free moment without hesitation.

Perhaps they take to heart that wisdom from their parents in the long 60s to "just do it," but with little interest in matching their behavior to a code or philosophy.

Kelly, a long-time regular, is schmoozing with mates in the corner while almost disguising her ecstasy as the object of attention from the gallery of lookers, one in particular, Kevin the surfer and aspiring rock star. She carefully pivots and strides toward the imaginary powder room somewhere in the back as if she's entering a runway to flaunt the latest fashions. She abruptly veers into the arms of a fan, and I take advantage of the opening.



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- 1/29 2pm & 2/4 8pm: "Maria de Buenos Aires" - tickets \$150 - \$29 - LongBeachOpera.org
- 2/2&3 7:30pm, 2/5 2:30 & 6:30pm: "Annie" - tickets \$18/\$14/\$16 - encoreentertainers.org
- 2/11 8pm: "Cinema Fantastique" - Golden State Pops Orchestra & the USC Concert Choir - tickets \$45/\$25/\$15 - GSPO.com
- 2/12 6pm: "Dr. Iven" in concert - \$20 donation at the door - M3Workshops.org
- 2/18: Tribute Concert for Ryan Rossi
- 2/26: "Gone With the Wind (1939)" - San Pedro Convention & Visitors Bureau - visit SPCVB on Facebook
- 3/4 7pm: "Psalmfest: An Interfaith Celebration in Song" - theoffice@bethelsp.org
- 3/9 7pm & 3/10 2pm & 7pm: Rolling Hills Prep School Spring Production - 310.791.1101
- 3/17 8pm: "Beatles vs. Stones - A Musical Shootout" Tribute bands ABBEY ROAD and JUMPIN' JACK FLASH tickets \$40 - \$20 - brownpapertickets.com/event/213079
- 3/21 7pm: Community Cinema "Revenge of the Electric Car" FREE ADMISSION! - grandvision.org
- 3/23 & 24 7:30pm: "The Verdict" Gospel musical - NuVision Productions - tickets \$40 - \$25 - 888.653.3334

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“Hey, what’s the good word? Make it to work okay last Thursday?”

“Was sorta there in spirit!...after a couple of hours I made my way back home.”

“That must’ve been brutal...bad enough for a sane gig...how’s everyone treating you over at Century 21?”

“Not too bad...people are pretty cool...great benies!”

“Must be a drag after working so long for non-profits.”

“NO!...not into that anymore...too depressing.”

“Wow, you must’ve had a bad week...been gorging on astrology again?...your rad parents are gonna freak out!”

“Na, na...they’re just a couple of aging hippies who did lots of drugs and had a good time and...”

“...wait!...is this revisionist history?”

“It’s the same one...just don’t always talk about it all in complete chunks...have a hard time with that since they split...dad’s down in Florida somewhere, and mom’s searching for the fountain of youth in a trailer park up in Humboldt!”

“So what’s it all mean?”

“Have fun...be cool!...you only go around once. Just don’t pretend it’s something else. Gotta go...see ya at the shindig.”

Suddenly someone blurs by in a bee-line toward one of the few spaces at the bar. It’s Billy, or at least that’s the handle he caters. His real name is as mysterious as his occupation. He bulls up next to Marvin who cowers from his speedy arrival.

“Hey man, how they hangin? Man...you wouldn’t believe what just happened to me. Was comin back from Georgie’s pad over in Palms, gettin loaded all day watchin the weather channel and...those birds, all the colors...farout, farout man...missed Henny over at the Red Garter, had some good weed and guess he knew about some dude out in Joshua Tree needed help movin...some bucks man, some bucks...I blew it...but I got otta there fast, I mean I jumped on the bike and...wow man!...headed to the Circle but couldn’t see too good for a while so stopped at the mall just off Ocean, not far from Abbot Kinney, took a couple deep breaths and kicked it comin otta the driveway tryin to get over to the other side so I could make a turn...wanted to get down here for happy hour...couldn’t stop to turn onto Kinney and jerked right...ended up through the fence near Samy’s Camera...man!...tried to get up and otta there and...here comes Tony the greaser...the biggest banger in town back when...now he’s a cop!...he let me go man, didn’t check!”

Billy’s rapture at evading the man leaves a grin to polish off his syllables that, with a symbolic boost from his cowboy hat, beard and dangling locks, strongly suggests his Easy Rider namesake. He must’ve spent an awful lot of time in front of the mirror to get the look just right. I want those famous Steppenwolf lyrics to begin pounding through the speakers and tell us how the goddam pusher man made Billy into a wild copycat!

Still on a high, Billy begins to rap with Marvin, a

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*“Barbering is
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handy-man living at the hostel over on Windward and Pacific. His lack of vestments and hairy plumage are nearly as conspicuous as Billy's excesses. He soaks up Billy's careening gusto with awestruck deference, and begins to sound a little like the master himself.

"Bummer!...the pigs are trouble, man!...you're lucky. I got stopped once a while ago because I had a tail-light out. The pigs gave me tickets for everything in the book! Hey, I was over in Palms last week. There's a great place just off Centinela. Went there with some buds after I worked on this woman's sockets all day. We got so wasted on brews I didn't think I was gonna make it back here. Wow man, you wouldn't believe all the cool chicks over there...farout!...let's make that scene when..."

"...are you for real, man...are you for real?"

Marvin might as well be parading alone down main street in a football helmet. Billy busts a gut. He's beside himself with patronizing confidence, like he knows how to pull the chains of all the Marvins who idolize those with the balls to defy society's rotten rules and regulations.

Billy's only a version of a copy of a celluloid outlaw but he demonstrates something Hunter Thompson found long ago in his sojourn with biker outlaws during the 1960s. Many go at life like voyeurs at a distance from it and really don't experience it to the fullest. They make up for this by acting out their fantasies through the cool images and identities that comprise more and more of our

reality.

"The streets of every city are thronged with men who would pay all the money they could get their hands on to be transformed--even for a day--into hairy, hard-fisted brutes who walk over cops, extort free drinks from terrified bartenders and thunder out of town on big motorcycles after raping the banker's daughter...They command a fascination, however reluctant, that borders on psychic masturbation."

Now Billy is quite hairy, but also a bit limp-wristed compared to the proles Thompson dealt with. He just kind of spooks cops. And his warrants are apparently so petty anyway that they're probably not always visible on the screen when his numbers are punched, getting lost somewhere in the cyber slips. Bartenders give him free drinks because they're hip to his melodrama and can claim him as a sort of trophy. He claims to have played house with the daughter of a VP over at the local credit union, and has made a politically correct transition to hookers. Not exactly the image we have when picturing his namesake!

I hear a commotion in back, then a very brief but muffled scream, and see the woman who was playing video games earlier emerge from the crowd and head toward the exit. She makes an arc around the Angels logo...

Excerpted from *Venice, CA: A City-State of Mind* (2012).

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 • plundered by reason looking to sack.
 • Is all this liberty really a crime ?

• When Byron swam the Hellespont
 • Romantics cheered for manumission.
 • Should we give them credit for our submission?
 • Capitalist crockery in freedom's font !

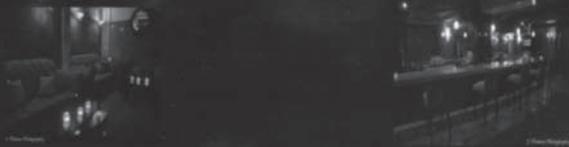
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MEDIA BIAS AGAINST ELECTRIC CARS

JOCELYN FONG

Just as mainstream automakers are beginning to launch electric vehicle (EV) technology, *The Washington Post* is calling for an end to federal tax credits encouraging consumers to purchase electric cars. The *Post's* editorial coincides with a Republican proposal (not mentioned in the editorial) to repeal the tax credits, which date back to the latter years of the George W. Bush administration. Continuing what has become a pattern in the paper's energy coverage, the *Post* presents a selective and short-sighted version of the facts.

Take, for instance, the argument that "only upper-income consumers can afford to buy an electric vehicle." In a highly misleading move, the *Post* provides the price of only one EV option, the luxury \$100,000 Fisker Karma. By contrast, the after-credit cost of a Nissan Leaf

is \$27,700. A *CNNMoney* guide to the "remarkable assortment" of plug-in cars coming online in 2012 quotes prices starting "from \$22,000." Beyond the sticker price, EVs have lower operating costs and represent the only option most families have for really shielding their financial security from perennial spikes in the price of gasoline.

The *Post* goes on to argue that the electric car industry is "not ready for prime time," saying "sales of electric vehicles were disappointing in 2011." Chelsea Sexton, an electric car advocate who has advised GM, said via email that 2011 sales of electric cars have for the most part "been limited by production, not demand." "Even so, 2011 [EV] sales were nearly double first year (2000) hybrid sales," Sexton added.

The editorial makes no note of the economic factors suppressing consumer demand for many goods and services. Nor does it recognize that lawmakers supported electric cars *because* they are not already a well-established technology, not in spite of that fact. The federal government has long played an important role in supporting innovations that later became "the tech-

This debate is not just about cars, but also the prospects for a robust advanced battery manufacturing industry in the United States.

-- Jocelyn Fong

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nologies we take for granted,” in the words of the Breakthrough Institute. The *Post* editorial declares that “conventional hybrids” show “much more promise” than electric cars, without mentioning that those hybrids were boosted by federal tax credits from 2005-2010.

The *Post* also frets about the “taxpayers’ commitment” to the EV industry, but some perspective is in order. Auto writer Nick Chambers estimates that up to 19,000 EVs were sold in 2011 and if the full \$7500 credit was applied to every sale, it cost us about \$142 million in lost revenue. That’s about .000039 percent of federal spending last year. It’s 7 times less costly than the “percentage depletion allowance,” one of many tax breaks bestowed upon the oil industry, which continues to report enormous profits.

The government has subsidized fossil fuels for decades, not least by building an entire national infrastructure catering to vehicles powered by petroleum. On top of all that, the price of oil fails to account for its actual costs, including threats to public

health from pollution, damages to the environment and the economy from spills, the effects of climate change, etc. So to argue against federal support for EVs because they struggle to compete in a system designed for cheap fossil fuels seems to be exactly backwards.

Finally, the editorial argues that EVs “are not likely to form a significant part of the solution to America’s dependence on foreign oil, or to global warming, in the near future.” But global warming and U.S. oil dependence aren’t going away anytime soon. Energy policy should look beyond the “near future” -- that’s kind of the whole point. Importantly, this debate is not just about cars, but also the prospects for a robust advanced battery manufacturing industry in the United States. “The U.S. battery industry will grow only as fast as the hybrid and electric vehicle market,” according to the Congressional Research Service.

There’s no question about the superior efficiency of electric motors over combustion engines, and their significantly lower greenhouse

gas emissions. But it remains to be seen if the adoption of EVs will be widespread. Michael Omotoso, senior analyst at LMC Automotive, has compared the EV industry to “a baby taking its first steps,” saying “the market is in its infancy” and “will stumble and fall several times before finally learning how to walk.” Pike Research reports that “The early market for electric vehicles is proving that demand for the vehicles exists across the globe. The combination of consumer purchase incentives, rising fossil fuel costs, and exciting new vehicle models is fueling a strong early adopter market.”

The *Washington Post*, along with ideological media commentators who delight in rooting against advanced vehicle technology, should make their coverage thoughtful and accurate, for infant industries are not immune to negligent media narratives and the stakes are ultimately quite high.

Jocelyn Fong writes for *MediaMatters.org*. Jill Fitzsimmons contributed to this piece.

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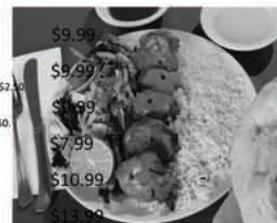
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ECONOMY

HALF OF AMERICA POOR

PAUL BUCHHEIT

Recent reports suggest that almost 50% of Americans are in poverty or at a "low income" level. The claim is based on a new supplemental measure by the Census Bureau that includes health care, transportation, and other essential living expenses in the poverty calculation.

The concept of "low income" is controversial. It has been defined as earnings between 100 and 199 percent of the poverty level, a claim which, if true, would place every American family making \$50,000 or less at a near-poverty level.

Conservative organizations believe the whole 'poverty' issue is overblown. The Cato Institute blames LBJ and Obama for reversing a declining poverty rate. Forbes blames the calculations. The Heritage Foundation argues, "The average poor person, as defined by the government, has a living standard far higher than the public imagines... In the kitchen, the household had a refrigerator, an oven and stove, and a microwave."

The case for a growing "consumption equality" is alternately defended and denied. With emotions running high on both sides we need to take a balanced look at the available data to determine how well the highest-earning family of the poorest 50%-a family with a \$50,000 income--can survive (The maximum individual income for the poorest 50% is about \$30,000).

Start with taxes. It is frequently noted by conservatives that the richest 1% pay most of the federal income taxes, and indeed they paid about 37 percent in 2009, more

than the poorest 90% of Americans. But only the richest 5% of Americans have experienced income growth since 1980. And during that time, their tax rate has dropped from 34 to 23 percent. As for the 3 percent rate paid by the poorest 50%, the Tax Policy Center sums it up nicely: "The basic structure of the income tax simply exempts subsistence levels of income from tax."

More relevant to the poverty issue is that federal income tax is only a small part of the tax expense for lower-income families. According to a study by The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the poorest 50% paid about 10 percent of their incomes in state and local taxes (the

Critics bemoan the amounts of aid being lavished on lower-income Americans, making dubious claims about \$16,800 in government funds going to every poor family and families with \$90,000 incomes being classified as "near poor."

-- Paul Buchheit

richest 1% paid 5 percent). Congressional Budget Office (CBO) figures reveal that the bottom 50% pays about 9 percent of their incomes toward social security (the top 1% pays just under 2 percent). CBO also shows that

the bottom 50% is paying about 2 percent of their incomes on excise taxes, a negligible expense for the people at the top. Another year of Bush tax cuts will chop another 1-2 percent off the taxes of the very rich.

So total taxes for the poorest 50% are 24 percent of their incomes (3% + 10% + 9% + 2%), as compared to 29 percent for the richest 1% (23% + 5% + 2% - 1%).

Other significant expenses for low-income people, based on the most conservative estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Census Bureau, the National Center for Children in Poverty, the Carsey Institute, and the Economic Policy Institute, include food (10%), housing (27%), transportation (6%), health care (5%), child care (8%), and household expenditures (5%). Expenses for insurance and savings and entertainment, although important to most households, are not being included here.

Energy costs hit low-income families especially hard, taking about 20% of their incomes. At the \$50,000 income level the burden is closer to 12%, as generally agreed upon by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the American Gas Association.

Total expenses for the richest family in the bottom half of America? 24% taxes; 27% housing; 34% food, health care, child care, transportation, household needs; 12% energy.

That's 97% of their income. The richest family among 70,000,000 households is left with just \$1,500 for a car, appliances, a TV, a cell phone, a loan repayment, an occasional night out. It comes to \$30 a week, barely enough to take the family out for a pizza.

Critics bemoan the amounts of aid being lavished on lower-income Americans, making dubious claims about \$16,800 in government funds going to every poor family and families with \$90,000 incomes being classified as "near poor."

The fact is that only 4,375,000 families (out of 70,000,000 in the bottom half) received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

in 2010, for a total expense of about \$36 billion. Current federal budgets include about \$350 billion for food, housing, and traditional 'welfare' programs for needy children, elderly care, and energy assistance. This averages out to about \$400 per month per family.

Another fact is that earnings have remained flat for most people while productivity has grown 80%

since 1980. If a \$50,000 family had received a fair share from their contribution to America's growth, they'd be making \$90,000, and they wouldn't need a dime from government...

Paul Buchheit is an active member of US Uncut Chicago, and founder and developer of social justice and educational websites (*UsAgainstGreed.org*, *PayUpNow.org*, *RappingHistory.org*).

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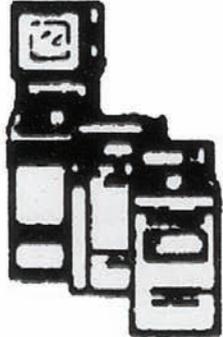
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**LONG BEACH
MUSIC SCENE:
EUGENE & THE 1914**

GREGGORY MOORE

Yeah, it doesn't hurt that Eugene Owens — the "Eugene" in Eugene & The 1914, a too-cool but understatedly soulful project in its third year of a sometimes nebulous existence—is the younger brother of Ikey Owens, former member of The Mars Volta and founder of Free Moral Agents. But whatever ins come with such a family connection don't mean much if you can't bring it on your own.

But Eugene & The 1914 bring it.

The story of the Long Beach band with perhaps the most phonetically pleasing name on Earth has its roots in 2004, when still-teenage Eugene Owens left Long Beach for NYC music school. His prodigious talents on upright bass, though, kind of interfered with his formal education, as he found himself in demand to play live

and on film soundtracks with jazz luminaries like Terence Blanchard.

"I stopped going to school because I was so busy," Eugene recounts. "I was gone like three weeks out of the month for two or three years, just kind of traveling around. It was fun. [...] It's great to be in London one day and Israel the next. It's not like a day-job." Heady—and lucrative—stuff. "You wouldn't even imagine what they're paying these jazz musicians to go to Europe—or what Lauryn Hill paid me to do," he says.

Yes, that's *the* Lauryn Hill. Eugene did a stint as her musical director. But then he felt the need to scratch an itch to write his own songs. "I kinda figured I wanted to do my stuff—even if it meant kinda going broke," he says. "I had some stuff inside of me that I wanted to get out. I need the space to do it; and playing for other people, I couldn't balance it out as much as I wanted to."

Enter big bro Ikey, who introduced Eugene to the Smashing Pumpkins' James Iha, who co-produced Eugene & The 1914's debut album, *Troubles.*, for New Line Cinema's re-

cord division. Multi-instrumentalist Eugene played most of the music, though guest musicians included Ikey, Iha, Ryan Adams, and members of Ambulance LCD. The result was a well-produced batch of breezy-voiced, soulful, low-key music slightly reminiscent of the mellower side of Lenny Kravitz and poppy enough to have charted with a little PR help. It's no surprise to learn that Eugene's had little trouble tunessmithing his way onto film soundtrack and TV-show placements.

Not too long after the album's release, Eugene's father came to the terminal stages of a battle with cancer, and Eugene returned to Long Beach to be with the family. If this very dark cloud had a silver lining, it's that Eugene found himself amongst good people and like-minded musicians in a hometown he'd never fully known (e.g., he'd attended a Los Angeles high school), and so he decided to transplant himself here—and to turn Eugene & The 1914 into more of a full-fledged band with a live presence.

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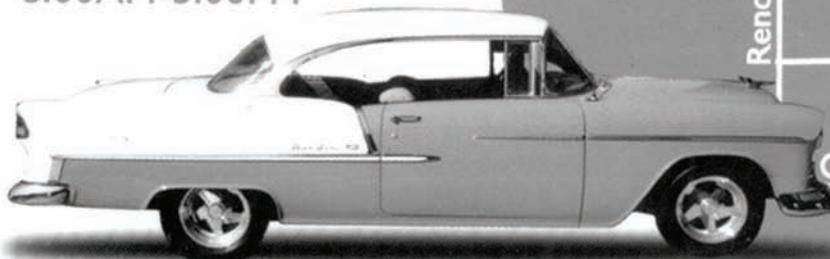
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senses at the Art Theatre in December 2009 or their inspired set at the Colorado Lagoon (yes, it's a real lagoon) the following July. As accomplished as *Troubles*. is, catch the band live and the music has a little more punch; simultaneously more rocking and more danceable.

What does that bode for the next album? "Now I feel I'm experimenting more with beat-driven songs," Eugene says. "I think the world has changed, and I'm seeing things through different eyes. [...] more atmospheric, more dancey."

Every day at around 11 a.m. Eugene heads down to "the Boo," his tiny DIY studio, and sets to work, recording not just Eugene & The 1914 music but really anything and anyone else that catches his fancy.

"As long as it's good music, I'm down to make it happen," he says. "Because you never know when you're not going to be able to make it happen. You could walk down the street and get hit by a car. ... So my thought process is: Work until you can't work anymore."

That ethos had led Eugene to guess that he's recorded something on the order of 30 songs over

the past month-and-a-half, with more on the way — a product, perhaps, of his current favoring of recording over playing live. "But I would like to eventually play live more often and tour more often," he says, noting he's got plans to get the band playing a couple of shows a month in Long Beach and more frequently than that in L.A., then "maybe squeeze in a West Coast tour" before moving on to playing South by Southwest — by which point he hopes to have the new

album completed, at least digitally. "It's a new year," he says. "Time to reevaluate and keep it moving."

It's a lot of work, but you can do that when you're in a good place. "Obviously I'm not famous or anything," he says, "but I don't think that's what I'm looking for."

Doesn't mean it might not happen, anyway. Check out Eugene & The 1914 on Facebook MySpace, etc. — and if you're lucky, live — and see what I mean.



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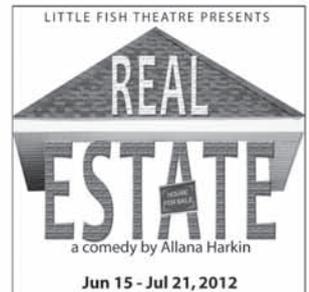
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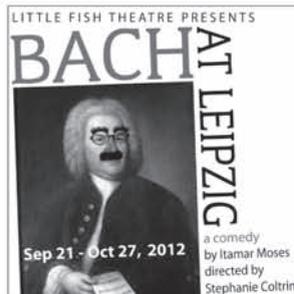
Kathleen wants a license plate with the word "Panache" on it - but Harry has it.



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