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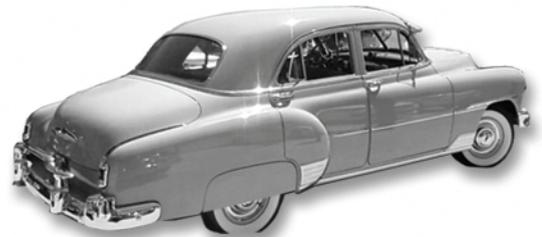
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photo by Slobodan Dimitrov

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# AMASS

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SLOBODAN DIMITROV



## “Long Beach Living Wage”

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by Slobodan Dimitrov

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# CONSTITUTION IS JUST PARCHMENT, GET OVER IT

DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

**L**ast week America engaged in one of its perennial paroxysms of constitutional cogitation – this time over the Obama health care bill – with (mostly) predictable results.

Four of the great legal priests on our High Temple's Council of Scriptural Interpretation said that, yes, the Affordable Care Act was within the boundaries of what a small collection of men riding horseback to a meeting in Philadelphia one summer two-and-a-quarter centuries ago allow us to do today as a continent-wide superpower society of 300 million people in the age of atom bombs, space travel, heart transplants and genetic engineering. George and John and Thomas say it's okay, we can have health care. Whew. That's a relief.

But then four other priests insisted, "Oh, no, this is fundamentally not allowed. Not at all." And one apparently went both ways, voting against it before he was for it.

Such, in "the greatest country in the world" – as regressives, doing their national equivalent of Allahu Akbar, seek to assuage their insecurities and reassure themselves by constantly shouting at the rest of us – is the way we determine whether tens of millions of children will or will not receive pediatric care. This – by pondering what would John Hancock do? – is how we figure out whether one-sixth of our population deserves to have their lives lengthened by early cancer detection and intervention, or must instead resort to "treatment" of their already metastasized masses in hospital emergency rooms.

The very fact of this debate and the questions on which it turns tells you far more than you'd care to know about just how great your greatest country is, the one which spends vastly more on health care than any other, but delivers the least to its citizens. But that is the subject of another essay!

Today's rant is on the destructive dogmas and horrid habits of our national addiction to the practice of constitutionalism itself. By that, I don't mean the fact that law in America is ultimately decided by five unelected, politically insulated and almost entirely unremovable individuals, meeting in secret and doing who knows what underneath their black robes. I have addressed the wisdom of that profoundly undemocratic process, known as judicial review, though that's not our concern here. The absurdity of the process as demonstrated so emphatically once again last week nevertheless cannot go without being briefly noted.

How anyone can argue with a straight face that judicial review of legislation in America – especially in our hyper-polarized era, where presidential elections are as much about loading up the courts as they are about executive branch policies – is not entirely political, but purely about "finding" the constitutionality of issues, is

quite beyond me. I guess it's just a massive coincidence that the votes of the Supreme Court are almost always entirely predictable based on ideology, eh? I guess it's also just a quirk of legal quantum mechanics that conservative justices always find their way to the conservative ruling, no matter what principles they need to invoke to get there. If, for example, the question is whether the federal government has the power under the commerce clause to smash state law on medical marijuana, Scary Scalia explicitly says, "Hell, yes, the feds can do just about anything they want!" Anything except, as it turns out, providing people with health care. Then, it's abundantly clear to the very same good judge, that the

national government has no such power according to the very same provision of the Constitution.

Anyone who would still today deny that the Supreme Court is little short of a profoundly non-democratic mini-legislature is simply lying to you, and probably lying to themselves as well. The very ideological predictability of the justices' votes, and the way they obliterate any principle in their way makes that emphatically clear, as does the swaggering aggressive activism of the regressive majority of the Court in cases like *Bush v. Gore* or *Citizens v. United*. As, for that matter, does the rage this week in the regressive community focused on John Rob-

**Somehow we've gotten  
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Constitution of the late  
eighteenth century  
permits us to do.**

-- David Michael Green

erts for his defection from Tory orthodoxy. Does anyone seriously think that these people have a problem with his “legal reasoning,” as opposed to his ultimate vote? Let’s not be ridiculous. They’re angry because a guy on the conservative team defected to the enemy, and legal principles have nothing whatsoever to do with it. It’s like the friends and family of a Red Sox fan who suddenly start rooting for the Yankees.

By the way, the vote itself also demonstrates the pure politicization of the judicial process. By the available evidence, Roberts appears to have been all set to vote his ideology in this case, just as he has in the past, and just as we would expect him to have done on this issue. But then something happened, and he switched votes. I can tell you what that something was, and why it affected John Roberts and not, say, Anthony Kennedy, who is normally considered the swing vote (though never, it should be noted, when there is real money on the table). What happened was that the rising crescendo of criticism of the Court for its bias, its massive overreach, and the horrific decisions it has been rendering, such as those creating the Bush presidency and the monstrosity of corporate-owned government, got to him.

If there was a single development that switched Roberts’ vote, it was the *New York Times* front page article published in recent weeks detailing poll data which demonstrate that America’s admiration for the Court is way down, at historic lows. This is why it was Roberts who switched, and not one of the associate justices. His name will forever be attached to this court, and he didn’t want

history to record that it was the Roberts Court that ruined the historically well-regarded institution. He didn’t want “Roberts Court” to show up on the same list as *Dred Scott* and *Plessy v. Ferguson*. By taking a hit on this big issue once, he can now go back to stuffing plutocracy down our throats, as he assuredly will, but henceforth with an historic alibi in his pocket. In other words for the next thirty years we’ll be hearing: “Hey, you can’t say my vote is always just a shill for the corporatist oligarchy – look how I voted on Obamacare!”

Our current system of jurisprudence – which is often really our current system of legislation – is wrong on all sorts of levels. It was, to begin with, a bad idea for these justices to be deciding health care policy in America. And it was an even worse idea for them to be doing so on the basis of attempting (or pretending to be attempting) to decipher the Founders’ thoughts about the provision of health care to the public, more than a century before governments anywhere ever contemplated providing such services, and two centuries before it became the norm in developed countries.

But what’s really wrong, at the foundation of this pyramid of bad practices, is the whole notion of constitutionalism itself. Somehow we’ve gotten it into our heads that we as a twenty-first century contemporary society are only permitted to do what the Constitution of the late eighteenth century permits us to do. I, for one, don’t see the wisdom in that for a number of good reasons.

To begin with, it is a fool’s errand to believe that we can ascertain the intentions of the Founders on a

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huge raft of contemporary issues which – like radar itself, would have been completely off their screens in the pre-industrial, let alone pre-post-industrial, agrarian society in which they lived. Even the Founders themselves – the very people who wrote the document in question – began debating about what the Constitution permits immediately after ratification, notably the 1790 row between Hamilton and Madison over whether a federal bank was permitted.

That particular debate – between two key authors of the Constitution a mere one year after it was ratified – suggests a second problem with the notion of constitutionalism as the foundational mechanism for policy-making. Namely, that the document is written in vague enough language in many places so as to permit multiple interpretations on given questions, each sometimes equally valid. Not for nothing, for example, is one of the key provisions of the document referred to as the “elastic clause.”

So already, any rationale for making decisions on everything from health care to pornography to torture to racial equality in this fashion is on the shakiest of grounds on the basis of these two critiques alone. But there are other reasons for rejecting this approach as well.

Americans love and revere their constitution, but my guess is very few of them could begin to tell you why, and among that handful, even fewer still could defend the laudable characteristics they might be able to identify in any sort of comparative contest against alternative possibilities. It's quite a lot like religion. If you feed a society

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“Allah, Allah, Allah” non-stop, 99 percent of its members are gonna turn out to be good Muslims (some of them quite fervent) without thinking about it one way or the other (and the other one percent will, I assure you, be very quiet about their doubts). You can even go “Jesus, Santa, Jesus, Santa” if you want, and then come along ten years later and say “Just kidding about the Santa part – but the Jesus thing is totally real!”, and that’s exactly the set of beliefs you’ll get, almost no one ever looking askance.

And that’s pretty much how we do our knee-jerk constitutional adoration in this country, as well. But, truth be told, it’s actually not such a very good document, if we’re honest about it. I know you’re not supposed to say that, but then again if we occasionally told the truth in America we wouldn’t be in the mess we’re in right now either. So I will.

The first thing to notice about the Constitution, looked at dispassionately, is what is not in it. It is, in terms of actual content, very little of a moral statement at all. It does include some guaranteed freedoms as something of an afterthought in the Bill of Rights, but it does not otherwise have any substantive content, especially on any serious ethical or philosophical issues. Moreover, on the great moral question of democratic inclusion, the prescriptions of the Constitution are highly wanting (though some – but not all – of this may be fairly excused by the ethos of the historical moment). There is no room for women here, nor for less-than-wealthy men, nor for non-whites. I don’t know about you, but if you want me to be impressed with any given manifesto or political statement, it needs to stand for something at least a bit novel and profound.

So what is in the document, then, if not some secular equivalent of the Ten Commandments? It is essentially a blueprint for a governing structure, and little else of note. The Constitution says who decides in American society, how they come to occupy those positions, and how these positions relate to each other in terms of their powers. That’s just about it, really.

Now if that happened to represent some brilliant form of governing structure, far superior to all the others, then I might be persuaded that our national reverence for this centuries-old document was well founded. In point of fact, however, I would argue rather the opposite is true here. Though I think the Constitution represents a fairly clever bit of engineering on the part of the Founders, given the goals and parameters of their moment, those aren’t goals I particularly share, nor can they be fairly argued to be very helpful to national governance in our time.

For the key thrust of the regime created by the Founders in the Constitution is the dilution of power. Their task was to come up with a government of stronger power than the failing Articles of Confederation, but they were adamant that it not be too strong, so they found three ways to spread power out. First, vertically, by sharing power between the states and the federal government. Second, horizontally, within the federal government, by means of separation of powers across independent branches of policy-making and implementing institutions, otherwise known as the idea of “checks and balances.” And, third, by

expressly limiting the powers that the federal government possessed over the public and over the states, as itemized in the Bill of Rights.

It was a fairly clever bit of engineering, considering the needle the Founders had to thread between strength and weakness at their specific historical moment, but is it a particularly efficient or otherwise felicitous form of government for our purposes today? Do Americans seem remotely enamored with their government today?

This is a governing structure that is designed to mostly be incapable of doing anything, other than when very, very broad consensus exists across all the governing institutions. The diffusion of power also means that assigning responsibility is rather difficult as well. If you’re unhappy with your government today, who do you blame? Democrats? Republicans? The President? Congress? The Courts? And if you have a hard time affixing blame, how can you choose a different alternative as a remedy?

I would argue that this is a form of government – one in which so many veto points guarantee relative inaction – only well suited to a people who are paranoid about the supposed perils of governmental powers. It’s true that probably no other culture on the planet fits that description as well as American society, but that said, it seems to me that there comes a point at which the dysfunctionality of weak government outweighs any benefits. Besides which, the small government limitations in place today seem only to apply to making it difficult for our government to provide benefits for its citizens, like health care. When it comes to the really ugly stuff, and the stuff that the Founders were concerned about – like unrestrained warfare, warrantless spying on citizens, endless incarceration without due process, and now even assassination of citizens on the president’s unilateral whim – there’s no small government to be found anywhere in sight, anyhow. And, by the way, do the other democracies of the world – those not possessing the power-diffusing principles of governance America has – suffer from totalitarian regimes controlling their subjects’ lives in some sort of nightmare right out of Orwell? Is that what you see in Sweden? Canada? New Zealand?

Which reminds us that there is actually a better way. In a parliamentary, unitary (non-federalist) democracy, power resides in parliament. Period. Which also means that responsibility resides there as well. There are no checks and balances, no competing institutions, no great secular scripture on high to consult, and no gridlock. If you don’t like the way things are going in your country, you know who to blame, and what to do about it at the next election.

And this reminds us further, then, that American ultra-reverence for the US Constitution is even more misplaced. The main thing – indeed, just about the only thing – that the document does is to spell out the governing structure for the society. I’d say that’s undeserving of reverence enough but if, in doing so, it prescribes a fairly dysfunctional one, why must we always genuflect in its direction every time we need to make a decision more than two centuries later? If it doesn’t even do the one thing it

was designed to do so very well, why in the world should it be controlling our lives?

There are two great ironies here. One is that I suspect that we take the Founders a whole lot more seriously than they took themselves. They referred to their regime-creating enterprise as an “experiment,” and they meant that rather literally. Not only did they not think their Constitution walked on water, they didn’t really have much of a clue as to whether it could work. And there were good reasons to adopt such a healthy skepticism. First because they had gotten it wrong very recently, and not once, but twice. They had tried monarchy and abandoned it as a failure. They then substituted the Articles of Confederation, a governing design so flawed it barely lasted a decade. Moreover, if you look at what actually transpired at the constitutional convention, you see all sorts of ideas and debates and compromises flying around amongst the delegates. The point is, it’s not like these people were hand-delivered an instruction manual for good governance by the Supreme Being. They knew that they weren’t, so how come we don’t?

The other great irony here is that our twenty-first century slavish reverence for the diktats of the Constitution (or what some of us claim to be able to decipher as its diktats) does a massive disservice to the one great thing that the Founders actually did contribute in penning the document.

In truth, it’s not the contents of the Constitution that are to be greatly admired, for all the reasons noted above. This was a significantly flawed document in 1787, and is even more so today. What really matters is not what they did so much as that they did it. The really amazing thing about the Founders and the Enlightenment movement of which they were leading lights, was the transition they provided to the concept of self-rule, and to the notion of governance based on the principle of reason, or rational analysis based on empirical observation. This idea was almost wholly foreign to their time, and their broader ethos that humans could be trusted to think for themselves and govern themselves was truly a gigantic leap out of the dark ages and into modernity. Indeed, Enlightenment ideas arguably represent the most significant development in all of human history.

For this, I truly admire the confidence, courage and ingenuity of Founders’ generation, and I’m truly grateful for their contribution.

In light of this, then, how much more absurd and sad is it that we – centuries further down the road – dishonor their contribution by continually trying to make policy on the basis of interpreting some über-text written by some quasi-deities from a wholly different culture and time, instead of following their prime directive and thinking for ourselves?

I’m pretty confident that the Founders would agree that in slavishly seeking to decipher their ancient words and letting those govern us today, we have in fact missed the very core essence of what they were trying to say.

Justice Antonin Scalia, one of the most destruc-

tive forces in American history, not long ago had a message for liberals and other patriots still smarting from the judicial coup he engineered which put another of the most destructive forces in our history into the White House for eight years: “Get over it” said the nice judge.

I’d like to return the favor with respect to his brand of regressivism masked as constitutional originalism: It’s just parchment, people. Get over it.

David Michael Green teaches politics at Hofstra University. [www.regressiveantidote.net](http://www.regressiveantidote.net)

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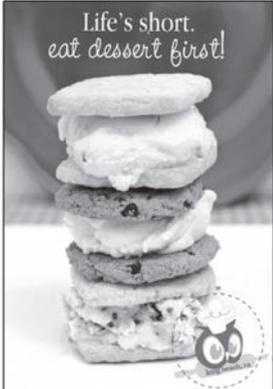
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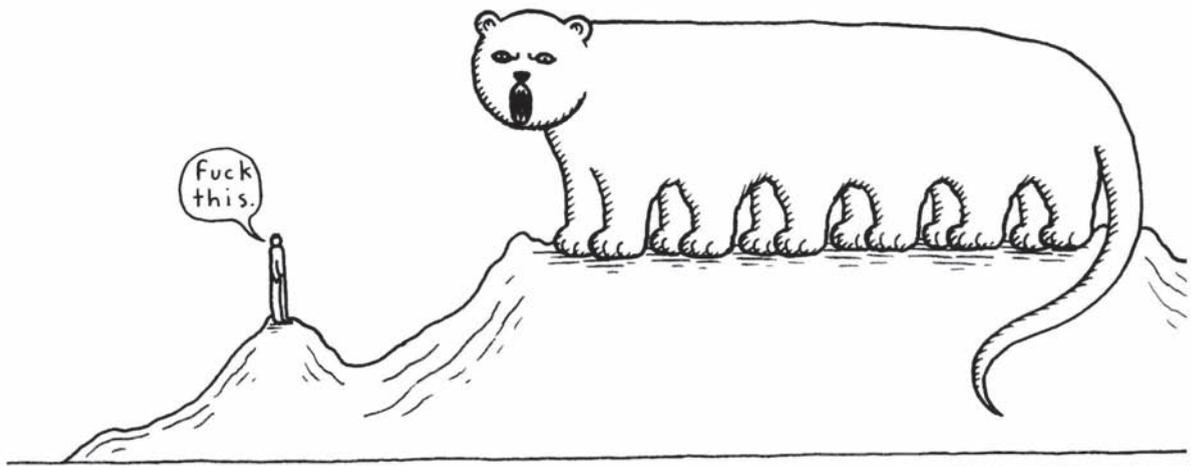
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# HOSTAGE RACKET

JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER

**N**ot to put too fine a point on it, but didn't that cunning rogue Chief Justice John Roberts pour a jug of Karo syrup into the gas tank of America's twelve trillion cylinder engine? Or, put another way (forgive the metaphor juke), didn't he just give President Obama enough rope to hang himself? Out to dry, that is. Roberts must know exactly what he is doing: prompting x-million young and/or poor voters to an election year tea party tax revolt. The Obama health care reform will henceforth be defined as a tax against people too economically strapped to buy health insurance -- in other words, a gross injustice, courtesy of Obama.

Or call it a poison pill. Obama gets to brag that the heart of his 2700-page reform package stands -- at the expense of the very people it was designed to protect. Forget about the niceties regarding the interstate commerce clause and other chatter points. This was all about Chief Justice Roberts interfering in a presidential election in a most mischievous way. He might as well have just heated up a branding iron that spelled out T-A-X and applied it to Mr. Obama's forehead.

Of course, with or without the so-called reform, the American health care system remains a hostage racket. When you are sick, you will do anything to get better, and the system knows it. You will sign onto any agreement to keep yourself alive, even if the health care system ends up taking your house and your children's educations. It is a well-established fact that the chief cause of personal bankruptcy in the USA is unpayable medical bills on the part of people who have health insurance. It is considered bad manners to inquire of a surgeon what his fee might be for a life-saving operation. Anyway, you don't want to know because it will be a figure with no anchor in the reality of hours spent or services rendered. Ditto the folks who run the hospital, where there is no reality-based relationship between things dispensed and prices charged. It's simple racketeering and true health care reform would be the vig-

orous application of Department of Justice attorneys on the doctors, pharma companies, insurers, hospitals, and HMOs who are engaged in routine, systematic swindling. But the truth is, we don't want to remove the swindle and the grift, we just want to find some way to get the American public to pay for their own shakedown.

Before you get too exercised over the multiple idiocies and injustices of the current American medical situation, just reflect for a moment that the whole creaking system cannot possibly survive no matter what the Supreme Court might have ruled or whatever Obama sought to accomplish. The US economic system is about to blow up. The banking sector has been kept technically alive on the life-support of accounting fraud since 2008, but that artful racket is coming to an end because sooner or later the abstraction called "money" must make truthful representations of itself in relation to reality, or else people cease to accept its claims of value. Without a functioning banking system none of the rackets organized into US health care can continue.

The eventual destination of health care, like everything else in society categorically, is a much smaller, more modest, more local scale of operation. We'll be lucky if the people with medical expertise can reorganize the wreckage of the system into something resembling small local clinics with all the costly and pernicious racketeering bureaucracy peeled off it. The insurance companies will be in the elephants' graveyard of failed institutions. Let's hope the doctors and their support staff remember to wash their hands.

A couple of side notes. Anyone seeking to understand the deplorable physical condition of the general public, need only stroll through the supermarket aisles and see the endless stacks of manufactured sugary shit that pretends to be food in this culture. That whole matrix is coming to an end, too, by the way, but probably not soon enough to save the multitudes programmed into metabolic disorder. They will just have a shorter life-span, aggravated by loss of income in a cratering economy and everything that comes with being impoverished. The doctors themselves by and large know almost nothing about nutrition, and make no orga-

**The Obama health care reform will henceforth be defined as a tax against people too economically strapped to buy health insurance -- in other words, a gross injustice, courtesy of Obama.**

-- James Howard Kunstler

nized effort to militate against the homicidal processed food industry -- which brings me to the second side note.

Namely, that the diminishing returns of extreme bureaucratization and turbo-specialization in medicine has only made the doctors generally stupider and more inept. My own situation is a case in point. For two years I suffered an array of peculiar symptoms ranging from numb hands to supernatural fatigue. My ex-GP showed no interest in investigating the cause. Even my request for a toxicology workup was essentially shrugged off. I had to become my own doctor. For a while I suspected Lyme disease, which is raging in my corner of the country. I went to see a Lyme specialist who didn't accept insurance (because the insurance companies did not recognize his aggressive treatment protocols as falling within the current "standards of practice" -- and this because the medical establishment doesn't know its ass from a hole in the ground about Lyme disease).

Anyway, I asked the Lyme specialist to include a test for cobalt levels in my bloodwork because I thought there was an outside chance I had cobalt poisoning. The reason I thought this was because Google searches of my symptoms kept pointing to metal-on-metal hip replacement failure. I had gotten just such a metal-on-metal hip replacement in 2003. The hardware was developed because the orthopedists wanted to give younger patients a longer-lasting implant. That's when the diminishing returns of technology stepped in and kicked everybody's ass, including mine.

My cobalt blood test came back off-the-charts high. (My many Lyme tests all came back negative.) Wouldn't you know, though, that the Lyme specialist wanted to treat me for Lyme anyway. He ignored the cobalt numbers and wrote out a prescription for \$400 worth of antibiotics. He was the proverbial guy with a hammer to whom everything looked like a nail. I declined that course of treatment and instead went to my new GP for a first appointment and asked for an additional cobalt test, along with one for chromium. (My hip implant is an alloy of titanium, cobalt, and chromium.) They both came back way over the toxic level. Apparently, the rotation of the metal joint has been shedding metal ions into my system for nine years.

Next I went to the orthopedic surgeon who put the implant in. He ordered an MRI and xrays and appeared rather concerned. Eventually I was routed to yet another orthopedic surgeon who specializes in "revising" hip implant failures -- in particular ones of the type I have, which have been failing at such a staggering rate that the lawyers have assembled one of the greatest litigation feeding frenzies in history. They are going after the manufacturers of these devices.

I have health insurance but I am quite sure that I will be soaked for many thousands of dollars beyond the coverage to resolve this problem, which will involve at least the changing out of the terminal bearings of my implant -- if I am lucky. In the meantime, I have to become exactly the kind of pain-in-the-ass patient who asks too many questions so I don't end up crippled, or dead, or tak-

en for a ride like a purloined human ATM machine. I suppose I am also lucky that this happened to me soon enough to even have this kind of remedial surgery. Another year or two and I would have just steadily turned purple and croaked like some poor 19th century foundry worker.

There's an excellent chance that I will be on the operating table at the same moment that another financial crisis erupts, one that will be orders of magnitude worse than the 2008 Lehman collapse. Won't that be something? I hope that the surgeon and the anesthesiologist, and whoever else happens to be on hand, don't all run out of the room at once to call their investment managers while I'm lying there inert, like a boned-out Thanksgiving turkey. Pray for my ass. I'm a hostage in the system.

James Howard Kunstler's new book, *Too Much Magic*, has just been published by Atlantic Monthly Press. It concerns the diminishing returns of technology.

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--Mark Breza

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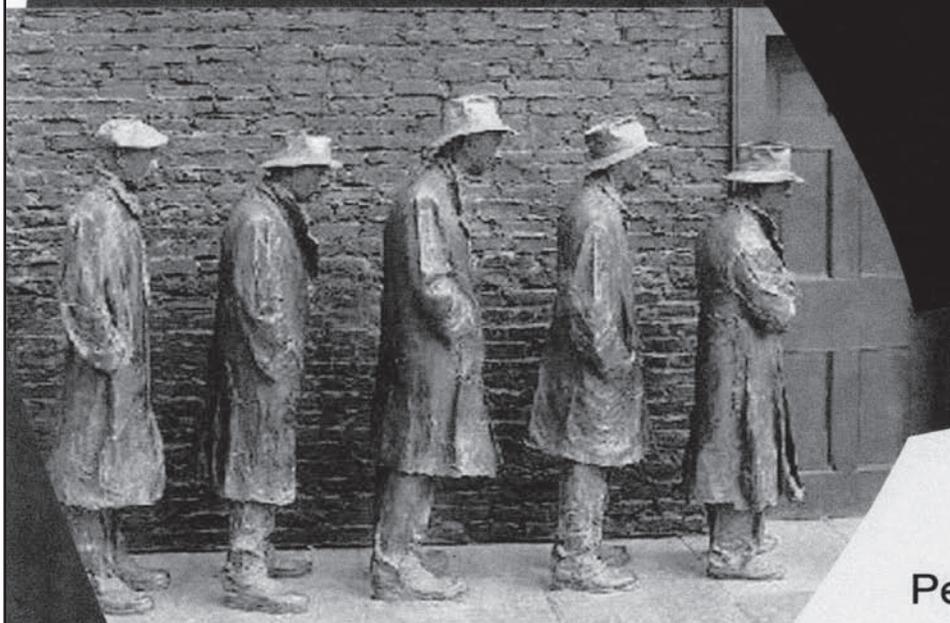
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# THE REAL LIBOR SCANDAL

PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS  
NOMI PRINS

According to news reports, UK banks fixed the London interbank borrowing rate (Libor) with the complicity of the Bank of England (UK central bank) at a low rate in order to obtain a cheap borrowing cost. The way this scandal is playing out is that the banks benefitted from borrowing at these low rates. Whereas this is true, it also strikes us as simplistic and as a diversion from the deeper, darker scandal.

Banks are not the only beneficiaries of lower Libor rates. Debtors (and investors) whose floating or variable rate loans are pegged in some way to Libor also benefit. One could argue that by fixing the rate low, the banks were cheating themselves out of interest income, because the effect of the low Libor rate is to lower the interest rate on customer loans, such as variable rate mortgages that banks possess in their portfolios. But the banks did not fix the Libor rate with their customers in mind. Instead, the fixed Libor rate enabled them to improve their balance sheets, as well as help to perpetuate the regime of low interest rates. The last thing the banks want is a rise in interest rates that would drive down the values of their holdings and reveal large losses masked by rigged interest rates.

Indicative of greater deceit and a larger scandal than simply borrowing from one another at lower rates, banks gained far more from the rise in the prices, or higher evaluations of floating rate financial instruments (such as CDOs), that resulted from lower Libor rates. As prices of debt instruments all tend to move in the same direction, and in the opposite direction from interest rates (low interest rates mean high bond prices, and vice versa), the effect of lower Libor rates is to prop up the prices of bonds, asset-backed financial instruments, and other "securities." The end result is that the banks' balance sheets look healthier than they really are.

On the losing side of the scandal are purchasers of interest rate swaps, savers who receive less interest on their accounts, and ultimately all bond holders when the bond bubble pops and prices collapse.

We think we can conclude that Libor rates were manipulated lower as a means to bolster the prices of bonds and asset-backed securities. In the UK, as in the US, the interest rate on government bonds is less than the rate of inflation. The UK inflation rate is about 2.8%, and the interest rate on 20-year government bonds is 2.5%. Also, in the UK, as in the US, the government debt to GDP ratio is rising. Currently the ratio in the UK is about double its average during the 1980-2011 period.

The question is, why do investors purchase long term bonds, which pay less than the rate of inflation, from governments whose debt is rising as a share of GDP? One might think that investors would understand that they are losing money and sell the bonds, thus lowering their price and raising the interest rate. Why isn't this happening?

Paul Craig Roberts's June 5 column, "Collapse at Hand," explained that despite the negative interest rate, investors were making capital gains from their Treasury bond holdings, because the prices were rising as interest rates were pushed lower.

What was pushing the interest rates lower? The answer is even clearer now. First, as PCR noted, Wall Street has been selling huge amounts of interest rate swaps, essentially a way of shorting interest rates and driving them down, thus causing bond prices to rise.

Secondly, fixing Libor at lower rates has the same effect. Lower UK interest rates on government bonds drive up their prices.

In other words, we would argue that the bailed-out banks in the US and UK are returning the favor that they received from the bailouts and from the Fed and Bank of England's low rate policy by rigging government

bond prices, thus propping up a government bond market that would otherwise, one would think, be driven down by the abundance of new debt and monetization of this debt, or some part of it.

How long can the government bond bubble be sustained? How negative can interest rates be driven?

Can a declining economy offset the impact on inflation of debt creation and its monetization, with the re-

**On the losing side  
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purchasers of interest  
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bond bubble pops  
and prices collapse.**

-- Paul Craig Roberts & Nomi Prins

sult that inflation falls to zero, thus making the low interest rates on government bonds positive?

According to his public statements, zero inflation is not the goal of the Federal Reserve chairman. He believes that some inflation is a spur to economic growth, and he has said that his target is 2% inflation. At current bond prices, that means a continuation of negative interest rates.

The latest news completes the picture of banks and central banks manipulating interest rates in order to prop up the prices of bonds and other debt instruments. We have learned that the Fed has been aware of Libor manipulation (and thus apparently supportive of it) since 2008. Thus, the circle of complicity is closed. The motives of the Fed, Bank of England, US and UK banks are aligned, their policies mutually reinforcing and beneficial. The Libor fixing is another indication of this collusion.

Unless bond prices can continue to rise as new debt is issued, the era of rigged bond prices might be drawing to an end. It would seem to be only a matter of time before the bond bubble bursts.

Nomi Prins is author of *It Takes A Pillage* and a former managing director at Goldman Sachs. Paul Craig Roberts was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under Reagan; an associate editor of the *Wall Street Journal*; and columnist for *Business Week*, Scripps Howard News Service, and Creators Syndicate. Reprinted from [www.paulcraigroberts.org](http://www.paulcraigroberts.org) with permission. Authors retain copyright.

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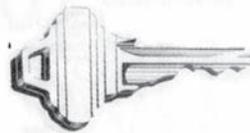


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# CHEATING YOUNG AMERICANS

PAUL BUCHHEIT

**M**y own generation faced the Vietnam War. We were at risk of getting drafted, and then maimed or killed in an unwinnable battle against imagined evils.

Today's young people are being drafted into an economic war that they don't understand. It's a slowly waged, diabolical war that substitutes debt and underemployment for missing limbs and psychological disorders. The soldiers are college-age men and women who can't find jobs or pay tuition, and who are seduced into submission by the promise of eventual rewards. The Vietnamese jungle has turned into Wall Street.

For those of us who weren't particularly good activists in the 60s, age has widened our perspective, and the lack of opportunities for our children has given us a second chance to protest, to help make it clear how the leaders of my generation have abandoned the people they no longer need. Here's why young people should be angry.

## 1. The Great WEALTH Transfer.

18- to 35-year-olds: Median net worth has dropped 68% since 1984. It's now less than \$4,000. The Richest 1%: They tripled their share of income between 1980 and 2006, then took 93% of all the new income in the first year after the 2008 recession. Their median net worth is now over \$5,000,000.

## 2. The Lack of JOBS: No one's hiring, so you have to "create your own job."

This from Michael Barone of the *Washington Examiner*: "The good news is that information technology provides the iPod/Facebook generation with the means to find work and create careers that build on their own personal talents and interests...creating your own career will produce a stronger sense of satisfaction and fulfillment."

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Just grab your iPhone, open up Facebook, and create your own job. Become

an entrepreneur, just like the richest Americans. Except that the richest Americans aren't entrepreneurs. Based on U.S. tax return data, only 3% of the wealthiest 130,000 Americans are entrepreneurs. Most are in management or finance.

As your parents and mentors, we told you to stay in school and work hard and everything would be fine. But you don't have jobs. Over half of college graduates were jobless or underemployed in 2011. More than 350,000 Americans with advanced degrees were receiving food stamps or some other form of public assistance.

If you do have a job, it's probably not paying much. Salaries for new graduates dropped 10% just in the last year. Worse yet, most of you are dealing with college loan debt, which averages \$24,000, and with the reality of zero net worth for over a third of you.

As wages are hitting an all-time low, corporate profits are hitting an all-time high. But the corporations that have built their profits on American innovation and labor are telling you they don't need you anymore. Apple -- much admired for its slick products -- shows little respect for anyone below upper management. With 47,000 employees, about 1/10 the number employed by IBM, Apple makes a profit of \$420,000 per employee. Yet most Apple store workers make about \$12 per hour.

And your representatives in Washington are no help. In October, 2011 Senate Republicans killed a proposed \$447 billion jobs bill that would have added about two million jobs to the economy. Nearly two-thirds of the American public had supported the bill.

## 3. The Portrayal of EDUCATION as a

"lifetime investment."

Yes, it's a lifetime investment, for the holder of your student loans. As corporate profits and CEO salaries and incomes of the 1% have surged over the past ten years, education financing declined by 24 %, and tuition at state schools increased 72 %. Since 1985, while consumer prices have approximately doubled, tuition has risen almost 600%.

Total state education cuts for fiscal 2012 were \$12.7 billion. A study by Citizens for Tax Justice noted that 265 of our nation's largest companies avoided about the same amount in state taxes each year from 2008 to

**As corporate profits and CEO salaries and incomes of the 1% have surged over the past ten years, education financing declined by 24 %, and tuition at state schools increased 72%.**

-- Paul Buchheit

2010.

So your massive tuition bills are paid for with mounting student debt, which has more than tripled in the past ten years. Here again my own generation has deceived you. Our once-idealistic anti-war activists now excel at flashy marketing and sloganeering, with admissions pitches of “affordability” and “lifetime investment,” and carefully avoided references to costs and debts and contracts.

To make up for lost revenue, cutbacks continue and educational opportunities disappear. State colleges are eliminating expensive-to-run engineering and computer science departments. Arizona doubled college tuition in four years. California K-12 schools have one counselor for every 800 students. Ohio’s Governor Kasich suggested rationing college majors among state schools. Illinois cut 2012 educational funding by a greater percentage than any other state. Not to be outdone, Pennsylvania’s Governor Corbett tried to cut higher education funding by half, and New Hampshire DID cut university funding by half. Florida’s college tuition is up 15% in a year, Nevada’s is up 13%, Tennessee’s about 10%, and Washington’s 24% over two years.

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College graduates, you shouldn’t be working for \$12 an hour. The computer and networking technologies that gave life to companies like Apple and Google grew out of 50 years of public research. It was an accomplishment of society, not of a few well-positioned individuals. You, the descendants of industry pioneers, and the potential creators of even greater technologies, deserve at the very least a decent-paying job.

Your anti-war protest, if a time-weathered opinion matters, would include a flood of job demands at the offices of U.S. and state senators and representatives; in person and online. You are part of the fastest and most sophisticated means of communication ever devised. You have the power to make demands. But first you have to get mad.

Paul Buchheit is a college teacher and the editor of *American Wars: Illusions and Realities* (Clarity Press). Paul@UsAgainstGreed.org.

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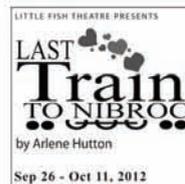
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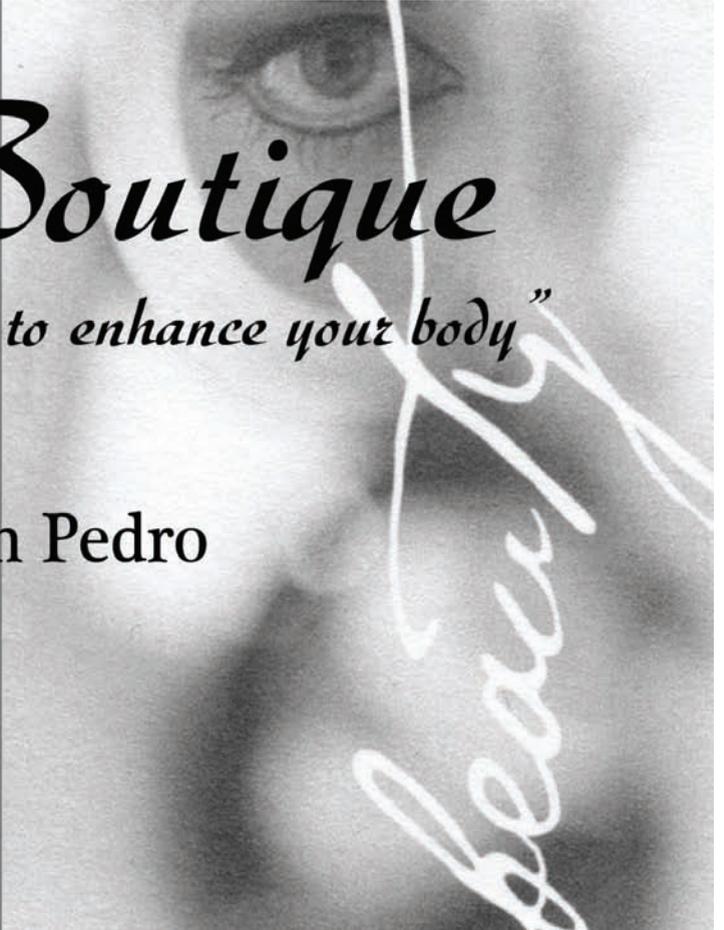
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# SPACE, TIME AND CONTROLLABLE SUBSTANCES

JOHN O'KANE

Many well-adjusted Americans have spent lots of cash and brain cells trying to forget time, and even do something about making space a bit more manageable. But these options are limited in small towns and rural areas. For one thing, sources and connections are pretty scarce if someone needs an extra boost. They can't hide very easily from the good citizens and certainly not the Lord's gaze. And what if someone has the misfortune of residing in a dry county in Texas and must constantly trek it to the Red River valley? There's only so much wine to score from the inventory surplus at the local parish, no matter how many cousins with altar boys in the family the perp may have.

This dilemma predates changes in demographics and shifts in sensibility. As isolated small towns and rural areas have begun to blend in with exurban bedroom communities, meth labs have sprouted from fallow warehouses, and out-houses rising like primitive steeples from clusters of rusted implements on Grandma's acreage.

But blowing off time naturally, without the aid of artificial substances, controlled or not, can be one of the pluses from living in towns that time has forgot, an ironic unintended consequence of artisans

committed to small town life who refuse to accept what the passing of time has done to their habitats. And this sheds new light on the old argument that the quality of life is pretty low in small towns, and that not much interesting happens.

Most are familiar with the notion of making your own fun, the good clean variety of course, and not merely watching paint dry on elevators or trying on gloves down

at the general store on Saturday night, but the sort that needs no synthetic stimulus or techno-titillation. If pursued with the purest of intentions and a clear head you might discover how to drop in at Shady Lanes and do a few lines in full view of a few deputies on dates, happy as can be. Genuine happiness is difficult to measure, however, since it lies in the senses of the beholder. Mere giddiness can mark its painful absence. The glummost of looks can be the cusp of rapture. Someone speaking in tongues can suddenly get answered and project an unknown state beyond pleasure and pain.

Perhaps the most revealing image in the story that captures so well the journey through the heartland is from *Easy Rider*, when Wyatt throws his watch away in the desert before biking it with Billy into rural New Mexico, where they confront something close to an essence of Americana, though a few excrescences as well, like over-eager free-lance barbers and preachers.

The ending validates, by default, the chemical-free option for expanding consciousness. As these anti-heroes bad-trip their way through images of death and regression in the big city cemetery, we realize that their artificial arrangement of space and time is a lie. So when they ride the rural back roads to their death at the hands of the rednecks soon after, we're not surprised. Their disoriented senses lead them into an errant slipstream of rural life from which there's no exit. Death is inevitable it seems when they meet up with those who distort the rural experience. And these mutual distortions effectively cancel each other out.

The moral here is clear. There are good and bad ways to forget time. Pure escapism can lead to a fuzzy nothingness where little matters except self-interested pleasure, states that invite chemical boosts. And these states can breed ulter-

rior motives or a hidden agenda that may result in criminal or anti-social behavior. Many get this sort of attitude in the big city where the passion to survive and compete distorts motives, and encourages a certain ragged individualism that diminishes one's faith in the higher verities and represses church attendance.

A morally superior way to forget time is to find substitutes for ego escapism that bond folks together with

**Bob Raphaelson's 1968 film *Head* terminates with the acutely pitched *Monkees* going topsy-turvy off San Pedro's Thomas Bridge into the harbor waters, surfacing in a Hollywood studio as directors of their own illusion.**

-- John O'Kane

socially relevant hobbies, or inspirational religious activities. Since idleness is the devil's workshop, religion can soak up the time, and offer a wealth of ready-made guides for good behavior, as well as a sort of metaphysical attitude adjustment in case physical barriers become insurmountable.

One of the central insights we owe Christianity, and arguably the framework and impetus for residents to transcend circumstances many believe are constraining, is the idea that we can forget, or actually lose our selves in order to find them on a higher plane after opening up to the timeless mysteries of the universe. And if this transition doesn't happen too quickly, there's always snake handling, or naturally induced forms of rapture that keep folks glued to what matters.

Admittedly sometimes residents have to make do with substances they have or can score without much effort, and this means the chance to get creative with existing materials. But these are only stopgaps for the most part, what many of us need on occasion to get through the day or night, like a pharma fix, or a snort. There's no question that modern small towns have had their problems with alcohol too, but they've been mostly confined to those where deindustrialization and outsourcing have taken their toll, or where the Temperance Movements have yet to root out the behaviors that give rise to them.

One of the truly promising advantages of small towns, however, is that they draw energy from their proximity to remote rural areas where tribal life once flourished, and in some instances persists. They're close to the primitive, pre-industrial and native cultures that modern urban society has covered over or demolished through progress. This juxtaposition can give certain residents a special slant on what matters, and suggest different lifestyles and even ways to consume differently. We find pockets of refusal, of even regular town life, in activities like farming which give them freedom and independence. Or sharecropping where they can practice a nomadic, gypsy existence; the perfect style-less dropout style for those without a sheepskin. Or even some semblance of hunting and gathering, a further break from the normal everyday routine where they might trip on substances with magical or medicinal qualities. Nature is so profuse in some of these areas that no going back is necessary.

Both pleasurable and potentially curative, these substances have a different function than drugs in the urban drug culture. Whereas the drug culture can be seen as made up of fashionable lifestyle choices by those alienated from consumer society who have too much surplus cash to dispose of, and who are mainly out for kicks, these rural refusers can integrate these substances into their everyday lives. Given the difficulty of blending into the crowd, they're probably not even inclined to deal. It's even likely that such a caricature of small town substance abuse as addiction to the chaw reflects the utopian desire for natural substances that are momentarily out of reach.

There's the belief popularized in the urban counter-cultures of the late 1960s, and which persists in more limited circles today, that synthetic substances can posi-

tively alter one's perspective on reality, its space and time relations. Central to this belief is the notion that the consumption vibes have to be on the up and up. If heads are responsibly focused and reasonably aware of what's happening out there, they can potentially penetrate life's illusions and get closer to reality. Bob Raphaelson's 1968 film *Head*, which terminates with the acutely pitched Monkees going topsy-turvy off San Pedro's Thomas Bridge into the harbor waters, surfacing in a Hollywood studio as directors of their own illusion, perfectly captures this.

If your head isn't, well...you may tumble into the dark and soupy recesses of your unknown mind, and even retrace your steps back to the womb.

But if the head's in the right place already, the upstanding citizens from rural America will say, you'll never need synthetics to mesh your separate mentalities into the whole person you could have become. Prostheses will never effectively argue your case, or even slightly improve on nature and the God-given. Crutches are for cripples.

The counter-culturalist comeback is that it is unlikely, depending on what muse or philosopher you consult, we can ever get to reality anymore, even if our heads are clear and clean and somehow find the right place, and our substances are natural. We can only access reality's surface forms and appearances, not the thing itself, and even the former are getting more difficult in a media society where heads are clogged with riots of information.

But we must at least try, and get into the best men-

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tal shape we can so that the chemical boost will help us get closer to what really is, not only what appears to be. What do rural residents really see out there on the fringes of America, and with only the ability to get themselves up by their own bootstraps and no boost? Perhaps only a blur of impressions and fragments that don't connect. You won't ask these kinds of questions until you get outside of the mental bubble that boxed you in. And that's not likely possible without a substance that can mesh your mentalities.

Consider nature, likely reality for many ruralists. What do the most sincere and dedicated farmers see through all that sweat and fatigue if they try to score nature naturally? Probably, like the rest of us, lots of putrid substances, blood-curdling shrieks and threatening creatures. Of course picturesque scenes are likely to overwhelm you at random, but these have to be balanced against fewer city creature comforts to appreciate and process them with.

This rift between the two sides begs some serious questions: Can substances produce substance? If so, what kind? Can we get closer to nature? Do we want to? Who's in better condition to attempt it, small-town folk with clean and clear minds, or the hippest of big-city folk with their murky and worldly-challenged ones?

Each side unwittingly gets to a different nature with different substances, and they produce different degrees of substance. But who can say which ones are the best? Chemically-charged hippies fled the cities to the country to live off the land but found nature mostly for themselves, inside their own minds. And when the seeds didn't sprout into something, they smoked or ingested them, and saw manure as a mere sanitation problem.

Since small town residents tend to be substance-free, and live a casual existence with few worries, they accept the flow of workaday time and the rhythm of the seasons, and possess the ingenuity to fertilize their surroundings into a life force. Again, they're masters at making the best use of existing materials.

What could be more natural than this? Granted, they may be so acclimated to natural phenomena that they hopelessly doze off. This seems hardly a path to wholeness or enlightenment. But if the maxim is generally true that when reason sleeps, watch out, the exception can certainly prove the rule in rural areas. In sync with the slow-down mentality, reason takes a nourishing nap to avoid birthing horrific repetitions. Residents relax and let destiny manifest itself through its many divine venues; let things happen in their own time. A sure boost to see the light.

After all, the notion is quite popular in rural areas that time is eternal, thanks to the strong influence of religion, especially Christianity. If you believe in eternity there's a good chance you're one up on city dwellers who are often slaves to a frenetic pace to stay even with the rat race and get more accomplished per hour. They're also likely lukewarm churchgoers, and even godless atheists whose mojo is mortality. They feel the passage of time in their bones, knowing they only go round once in life and at the end of the day, their time, they'll be doing nothing

more significant than pushin up the proverbial daisies. So get it done now!

If you lean more toward immortality, and you're pretty sure you're going to a better place, then finality vanishes from your thought processes, and you begin to lose interest in many issues of the day. You become more relaxed and have little incentive to put your own issues into a story.

Believing in eternity is one thing, however, and knowing your place in it is another. Will you be included in its game plan? Is providence irascible? How will you return?

Catholics, though a minority within the larger religious population, are better prepped to work through this thicket since they more easily accept things as they are, and wait joyously for fate to wrap their chapters. They're convinced of getting some role in the big script and avoiding damnation.

Protestants, having become protestors over the very issue of rejecting the claims of higher authorities to decide their role in the script, are more realistic and fudge the issue. They become devout believers in their salvation but, to hedge their bets, slave away and make material accomplishment the mantra the Lord will recognize and put them through the turnstiles. Of course, many of these will likely become work-ethic cripples and head to the city anyway.

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The Calvinists are a different breed of protestor. They're worry worts who can't manage the predestination thing, assuming for the most part they'll be saved but never completely sure. Time may be eternal on Friday during happy hour, when you see yourself mapped into the firmament, but fleetingly vernal by Monday morning when you're blowing in the wind. One way to manage the uncertainty is defer to the bible for assurance. Another is to take up snake handling. The supreme test as to whether your faith is real and the Lord recognizes it, comes from picking up a venomous reptile in exactly the proper way and giving it a credible impression by demonstrating your nerves of steel. At the termination of this exercise your confidence will either be pumped up until the next gathering is necessary, or your time may be abruptly cut short. But if it's the latter, we'll never know if the deceased merged into the eternal godhead, or became mulch. Uncertainty can never be permanently eliminated.

Some serious evangelicals are willing to gamble, however, since they've had so many successful handlings under their belt that they get itchy. They're so sure they'll be back, born again, that they wish for the end sooner, even support foreign policies on occasion that might lead to the apocalypse. Time for them will be neutralized, and they may even buy into the eternal recurrence thing and feel like supermen. Until of course they loop back as cop-heads.

Some born agains get into time travelling. They may have had trouble with the handling process, perhaps got nervous from being tested too many times, got bitten by a few snakes, and though they survived, this seeded their need to figure a more compatible cosmic situation, find a more doable deity in other galaxies of an infinitely expandable universe. There's usually been a close link between UFO sighters and born agains since both are searching for something bigger to insert themselves into. Sightings are also usually in rural areas, like Roswell.

The Heaven's Gate cult from the late 90s is an interesting example, though their members were not die-hard farmers but alienated city kids bunking it in the posh exurbs of San Diego who died too easy, committing suicide in the belief that at a certain moment they would be rescued from the earth, on the verge of being renewed, by an alien spaceship and taken to a better space. They hated modern society and its sinfulness, and saw through some of its hypocrisies, but were devoted consumers transported to the beyond with new Nikes. Appropriately named, they fused sci-fi-scripting with Christian cosmology, giving rebirth a whole new dimension.

It's interesting as well that a year earlier Timothy Leary died. A creative ruralist of sorts and horticulturalist, and guru for the 60s counter-culture who experimented with space-time relations through LSD, he announced his desire some months earlier at 01 Gallery in Los Angeles to have his ashes scattered in space. His wish was partially respected soon after his death when a few of his ashes were rocketed into the heavens with those of notables like Gene Roddenberry...

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# HERO BECOMES THE HUNTED

LAWRENCE DAVIDSON

It was back in 2006 that Julian Assange and associates founded the Wikileaks website. Their goal was and is a noble and necessary one. Wikileaks aims at forcing the world's governments to act with greater transparency, and therefore possibly rule more justly. It was Assange's opinion that if governments were less able to lie and keep secrets, they would be less prone to break their own and international laws, or at least more likely to adhere to a general rule of decency allegedly shared by their citizenry. This is a truly heroic undertaking. What did Wikileaks do to accomplish this task? It created a web-based non-governmental window on government activity through which it makes public those official lies and secrets. This information is supplied to it by whistle blowers the world over.

Soon Wikileaks was telling the world about "extra-judicial killings in Kenya... toxic waste dumping on the coast of Cote d'Ivoire... material involving large banks...among other documents." None of this got Assange into great trouble. The simple fact is that the ability of states such as Kenya and the Ivory Coast to reach out and crush an organization like Wikileaks is limited. However, in 2010 the website started publishing massive amounts of U.S. diplomatic and military documents, including damaging information on procedures at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and a video documenting attacks on civilians in Iraq.

It is at this point that Assange, as the editor-in-chief of Wikileaks, became a criminal in the eyes of the U.S. government. The hero now became the hunted. Republican Representative Peter King of New York, an Islamophobe who unfortunately chairs the House Homeland Security Committee, labeled Wikileaks a "terrorist organization" and said that Assange ought to be "prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917." On the Democratic side of the aisle, Diane Feinstein of California, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, claimed that Assange had harmed the national interest and "put innocent lives at risk" and

therefore should be prosecuted for espionage. Actually, a good argument can be made that the stupid and corrupt policies of American politicians have done much greater harm to objectively defined national interest, particularly in the Middle East. In addition there is no evidence that any of Wikileaks' actions have resulted in any loss of "innocent lives." However, none of this can save Assange.

## Who is the Real Criminal?

One of the serious questions raised by the case of Wikileaks and Julian Assange is just who is a criminal? If an organized crime syndicate commits illegal acts and some outside party reveals its activity, the syndicate might mark the witness for punishment. However, which one is the real criminal? Lots of governments act like organized

crime syndicates. If you ask King or Feinstein what they think about the behavior of, say, Russia in Chechnya or China in Tibet, they are likely to describe that behavior as criminal. And, if Assange had just exposed the sins of Russia or China, he would be praised within the halls of Congress.

But what happens when the U.S. government behaves like an organized gang of criminals? After all, a very good case can be made that the leaders of the United States are systematically violating their own constitution with policies like indefinite detention. And the government's behavior in Viet Nam, as well as

**When Julian Assange points out the criminal behavior of those supposedly defending the nation, most citizens are going to feel indignant and rally around the flag.**

-- Lawrence Davidson

in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq (for instance, in the application of draconian sanctions which did take the lives of up to a million innocents) and the actual occupation of that country, all violated more moral precepts than one cares to count. Then there is the practice of torturing suspected, but not actually convicted, terrorists, and the current use of drone attacks which kill more civilians than targeted enemies. Along comes Wikileaks and Assange to bear witness against some of these acts. Washington marks him for punishment. But just who is the real criminal?

It is to the enduring shame of most of the U.S. media that they did not, and still can't, manage a straight answer to that question. The establishment press has always kept its distance from Assange, asserting that he was not a "real" journalist. This no doubt reflects the attitudes of its basically conservative owners and editors. For instance, the *New York Times* executive editor, Bill Keller, once

called Assange a “smelly, dirty, bombastic...believer in unproven conspiracy theories....” He did this even while his own paper selectively dipped into the 391,832 Pentagon documents Wikileaks had divulged. Even then the information was used in the most innocuous fashion. I think it is fair to say that investigative journalism at a local (city or state) level still goes on in the U.S., but at the national level it has become an increasingly rare phenomenon.

### Popular Disbelief

Though a noble and necessary effort, Assange’s Wikileaks experiment always faced very high odds, particularly in the U.S. This is because its revelations play themselves out within the context of an establishment culture that has long ago turned the great majority of people into subservient true believers. True believers in what? In the essential goodness of their nation as it operates in the world beyond its borders. Therefore, transparency might be acceptable for one’s local political environment where the mayor turns out to be corrupt, but foreign policy is something else again. For Americans in the post 9/11 age, foreign policy boils down to promoting democracy and development on the one hand, and protecting the citizenry from terrorists on the other. Within that frame of reference, it is nearly impossible for Americans to conceive of their national government as purposefully acting like a criminal organization. They just refuse to believe it..

Particularly in the so-called war against terrorism, most Americans see nothing noble or necessary about

exposing the government’s clandestine operations. Thus, when Julian Assange points out the criminal behavior of those supposedly defending the nation, most citizens are going to feel indignant and rally around the flag. The messenger is soon the one who is seen as criminal and dangerous because he is undermining national security.

There are no greater adherents to this point of view than the political and military leaders who claim to be defenders of the nation. For them the old Barry Goldwater saying, “extremism in defense of liberty is no vice” excuses all excesses. Wikileaks both challenged and embarrassed them by making their innumerable excesses public. Thus, be they Democrats or Republicans, the so-called champions of homeland security are determined to silence him.

U.S. authorities have latched onto an exaggerated sex scandal in Sweden in which Assange is sought for questioning (though as yet not charged with any crime). They have pressured the Swedes to extradite Assange from his present UK residence when it would be much easier and efficient (as Assange has offered) for Stockholm to send court representatives to England to perform the questioning. So why do it the hard way? Because, once in Sweden, the head of Wikileaks could be given over to the Americans (something the British will not do). Assange will not cooperate in this game. As Glenn Greenwald has pointed out, “as a foreign national accused of harming U.S. national security, he has every reason to want to avoid ending up in the travesty known as the American ju-



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dicial system.” When he recently lost his UK court battle against extradition, he sought asylum in the embassy of Ecuador, a country whose leaders are sympathetic to Assange’s plight. True to form, American media comment on Assange’s appeal for asylum has been disparaging.

**Conclusion**

Julian Assange is now a hero on the run. And, he is probably going to stay that way for the foreseeable future. Even if he makes it to Ecuador he will need bodyguards to protect him from kidnaping or worse. As one Pentagon spokesman put it, “If doing the right thing is not good enough for [Assange] then we will figure out what other alternatives we have to compel [him] to do the right thing.” And what do America’s leaders regard as the “right thing” in this case? Obviously, keeping silent about Washington’s doing the wrong thing.

That is the nature of our world. Submerged in a culture defined by the educational and informational dictates of our leaders and their interests, many of us can not recognize when we are being lied to or misled. And, if someone tries to tell us what is happening, they sound so odd, so out of place, that we are made anxious and annoyed. So much so that, in the end, we don’t raise a finger when the messenger is hounded into silence.

Lawrence Davidson teaches at West Chester University in West Chester PA. <http://www.tothepointanalyses.com/>

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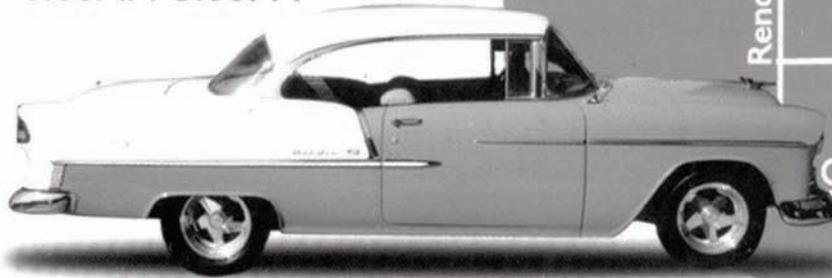
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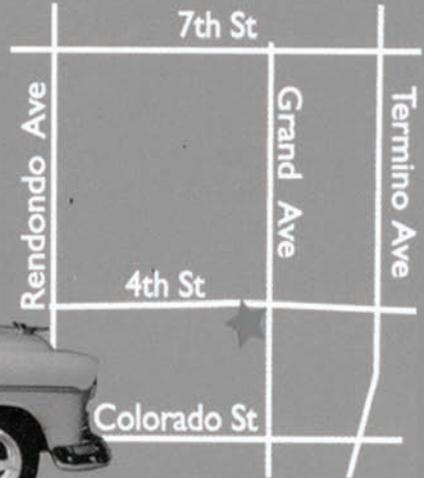
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**T**he Department of Energy wants to give the Southern Company a nuclear power loan guarantee at better interest rates than you can get on a student loan. And unlike a home mortgage, there may be no down payment. Why?

The terms DOE is offering the builders of the Vogtle atomic reactors have only become partially public through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed by the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. We still may not know all the details. SACE has challenged the \$8.33 billion loan guarantee package announced by President Obama in 2010. The documents show the DOE has intended to charge the Southern a credit subsidy fee of one to 1.5%, far below the rates you would be required to pay for buying a house or financing an education.

On a package 15 times bigger than what the federal government gave the failed solar company Solyndra, Southern would be required to pay somewhere between \$17 million and \$52 million. Advocates argue the fee is so low that it fails to adequately take into account the financial risks of the project. Numerous financial

experts have estimated the likely fail rate for new nuclear construction to be at 50% or greater.

Furthermore, since a primary lender would be the Federal Financing Bank, the taxpayer is directly on the hook. Guaranteed borrowings are not supposed to exceed 70% of the project's projected costs, but it's un-

down payment being required of Southern as it seems the loan is designed to be secured with the value of the reactors themselves, whatever that turns out to be. In the unlikely event they are finished, liability from any catastrophe will revert to the public once a small private fund is exhausted.

Southern wanted the terms of the DOE offer kept secret, and we still don't know everything about it. But in March, a federal circuit court judge ordered that the public had a right to know at least some of the details.

Apparently no final documents have actually been signed between Southern and the DOE. The Office of Management & Budget has reportedly balked at offering the nuke builder such generous terms. Southern has reportedly balked at paying even a tiny credit fee.

Construction at the Vogtle site has already brought on delays focused on the use of sub-standard concrete and rebar steel. The projected price tag---whatever it may be---has risen as much as \$900 million in less than a year.

Southern and its Vogtle partners are in dispute with Westinghouse and the Shaw Company, two of the reactors' primary contractors. Georgia ratepayers have

**Why should the  
builders of nuclear  
power reactors  
get better terms than  
students struggling  
to pay for college or  
working families  
trying to buy a  
home?**

-- Harvey Wasserman

clear what those costs will actually turn out to be, as the public has been given no firm price tag on the project.

There is apparently no cash



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already been stuck with \$1.4 billion in advance payments being charged to their electric bills. Far more overruns are on their way.

The Vogtle project is running somewhat parallel with two reactors being built at V.C. Summer in South Carolina, where \$1.4 billion was already spent by the end of 2011. Delays are mounting and cost overruns are also apparently in the hundreds of millions. Southern and Summer's builders both claim they can finance these projects without federal guaran-

tees. But exactly how they would do that remains unclear.

Two older reactors now licensed at the Vogtle site were originally promised to cost \$150 million each, but came in at \$8.9 billion for the pair. The project's environmental permits are being challenged in court over claims the Nuclear Regulatory Commission failed to account for safety lessons from the Fukushima disaster.

The terms of the guarantees are now apparently being scrutinized

by the Office of Management & Budget, which reports to a White House that may be gun-shy over new construction guarantees due to bad publicity from the Solyndra fiasco. Numerous petitions are circulating in opposition to this package. The Nuclear Information & Resource Service has already facilitated more than 10,500 e-mails sent directly to DOE Secretary Chu.

You might ask: why should the builders of nuclear power reactors get better terms than students struggling to pay for college or working families trying to buy a home? At least the home buyers can get private liability insurance, which the nuke builders can't.

If mounting grassroots opposition can stop this package, it's possible no new reactors will ever be built in the US. So send the OMB and DOE a copy of your mortgage or student loan statement. Demand that before they finance any more nukes, they drop your own payment to 1%, just like they're offering the reactor pushers. Also demand the right to buy a home without a down payment.

See how far you get, and then make sure Vogtle goes no farther.

Harvey Wasserman's *SOLARTOPIA!* is at [www.solartopia.org](http://www.solartopia.org). He edits [nukefree.org](http://nukefree.org).

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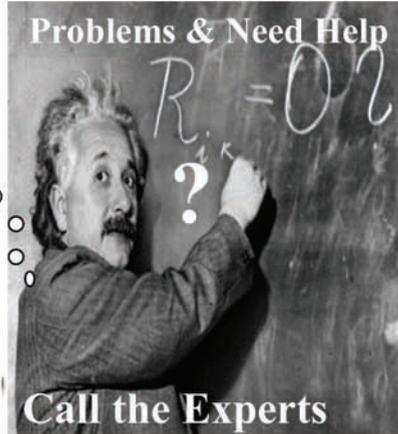
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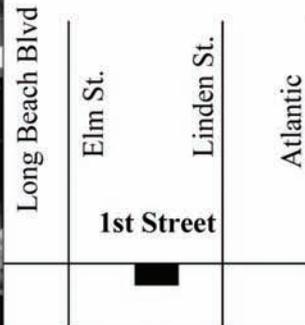
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RED SHADOW

XIMENA ORTIZ

*“Those who have given their lives to fight the terrorist scourge deserve our eternal homage of respect and gratitude.”* The Argentine junta’s farewell statement, April 1983.

What happens in the Third World when the ruling fear mongers are out of a job? Do they slither into obscurity? The agitators who are eventually wrested from power (and are not executed) often continue to exert a shadowy, extra-official authority long after their rule. Former *generalissimos* and despots hold sway over a constituency that continues to be in a state of shock over the previous crisis—believing their country still needs an iron hand to keep it functioning.

So it is not uncommon for practiced agitators that presided over a crisis to continue to command clout, well after they exit power. And sometimes they, or their acolytes, return to the helm. In Russia, former President Putin continued to rule extra-officially, and then returned to power. In Chile, the military for years was guaranteed seats in the legislature after the transition to democracy. In Argentina, after the Dirty War, the military staged rebellions to compel the executive to limit the scope of post-war prosecutions of torture and murders. That residual power is often a measure of how divided countries become in wake of a crisis, with much of the population still in crisis mode and supporting the bare-knuckled approach of a previous government.

When they are flexing their residual unofficial power, these figures have an inherent interest in generating alarm and rage towards the current government. The greater the distrust and anger, the stronger their

extra-official power becomes. And so they are a mainstream version of the *shockocracy* (which is made up by pundits paid by the alarmist word), with added flourish. In this new common era, America is polarized by such figures.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney has proven wholly unable to resist the temptation to enter the political fray from the bowels of his retirement enclave in McLean, Virginia. He has thereby exacerbated divisions. Not content on challenging the current administration alone, Cheney one-ups Third World trends, and has lambasted his former boss for not being extreme enough in the

**The Obama administration has also promoted, both through actions and rhetoric, fictions that shield Cheney and others.**

-- Ximena Ortiz

face of crisis. In August 2011, Cheney condemned W. Bush for not following his calls for, in effect, ruling by presidential decree after 9/11. And for good measure, he made another pitch for waterboarding.

Cheney has a durable constituency and--given the prevailing mindset of the post-9/11 NCE (New Common Era)--has wielded such clout that on his extra-official directive, previously classified information on “enhanced” interrogations have been made public during Obama’s presidency. Cheney’s contention that the information proved the value of

those interrogations remains dubious. Still, Cheney has demonstrated his reach.

The Obama administration has tried to uphold government secrecy in a number of areas that protect the previous administration, and Cheney in particular, such as efforts to block the release of the FBI’s interview of Cheney on the Valerie Plame case. A federal judge ruled in October 2009 that the interview had to be made public, after the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington sued to get the material under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Obama administration has also promoted, both through actions and rhetoric, fictions that shield Cheney and others. It has said post-9/11 abuses were committed by “bad apple” agents and were not condoned by high-ranking officials. Obama has declined to release pictures of detainee abuse, although he pledged to do so while on the campaign trail. According to some reports, those pictures appear to show abuse at prisons other than Abu Ghraib, which would discredit claims that a rotten few took it upon themselves to work over detainees at a single prison.

At any rate, Cheney’s public comments have demonstrated the absurdity of suggesting that only the agents that physically abused the detainees should be held responsible. In his comments, Cheney makes clear that he bestows the agents with impunity. In August 2009 Chris Wallace asked Cheney: “So even these cases where they went beyond the specific legal authorization, you’re OK with it?” Cheney responded with a succinct: “I am.”

Surely, Cheney communicated this attitude, in one form or another, to the agents working over the detainees. It seems a flawed justice, then, to hold only the lower rung wretches responsible.

Cheney added that those interrogators risked their lives and “The people involved deserve our gratitude”—as no doubt he does as well. The U.S. vice president appears to have cribbed from the outgoing message of Argentina’s disgraced gener-

als, cited above.

And while Cheney has attacked the Obama administration in terms of policy on numerous occasions, he is clearly appreciative of Obama's obliging and protective measures—and the continuum that the U.S. government has been loath to disturb. Cheney, in fact, has been downright complimentary of Obama and his decision to maintain the former administration's secrets and impunity. "I think he's—in terms of a lot of the terrorism policies—the early talk, for example, about prosecuting people in the CIA who've been carrying out our policies—all of that's fallen by the wayside. I think he's learned that what we did was far more appropriate than he ever gave us credit for while he was a candidate. So I think he's learned from experience."

The United States has not yet conducted the kind of truth commissions on abuses that even Third World countries have successfully complet-

ed. The establishment of a truth commission must be ordered by Congress. And the U.S. Congress will take no such step for any foreseeable future. By the time the shadowy wars on multiple fronts are over, it is unclear that America's institutions will be strong enough to execute one. The United States remains too divided and in the thrall of 9/11 trauma to complete such a practical retrospective. With the recession persisting, and more and more people joining the ranks of the unemployed, America's shadow politicians will continue pulling political strings and divisions will intensify. The Tea Party, the *shockocracy* and former officials have polarized the country. They are surely some of the most unseemly protagonists in America's cultural degradation and Third Worlding. But they are not the only players.

Ximena Ortiz has just finished a book, *The Shock and Awing of America: Chron-icling a Decline Made in our Minds*.

## ELEGY FOR MYSELF

News of my death was among this morning's obits. I was worthy of two columns and a photo of what I think I was. I served God and country and fed the hungry and uplifted the fallen, all the while making a fortune. My failures weren't mentioned, proof there probably were none. I passed away peacefully, it said, surrounded by my former selves. Cause of death was notification that I'd won a Pulitzer; my heart couldn't take it. I was pleased to read that I'd turned out better than my beloveds predicted. On my post-mortem walk the sky turned suitably gray. Birds sang my praises, a passing car honked condolences. I hurried home to console my wife and compose this elegy. I will miss me terribly.

--Sherman Pearl

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# BRIDGING THE GAP

DOREEN LE

**G**il Leiva is on a difficult mission: he plans to close the digital divide in San Pedro, California.

The digital divide is a term used to describe the socioeconomic inequality between people who have knowledge of and access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and people who don't. Internet connectivity can make a world of difference for a person, by opening up doors to information and opportunities that might not be available otherwise. It isn't just about online gaming and Netflix – those are luxuries – even basic needs are more easily met with access to the web. It is far more convenient to look for a job, enroll at a college, or apply for a student loan if one is connected. The world is rife with opportunity, but you have to know how to find it.

CyberSpot Computers, which sits on the corner of 13th and Gaffey in San Pedro, is equal parts computer-repair shop, Internet café, and print/fax/copy service provider. Leiva had originally intended for the computer-repair aspect of the business to be its bread and butter, and thus offers a wide range of services in that department – from system and file recovery to fixing iPhones to repairing gaming consoles. He will even travel to your home or office if necessary.

Providing Internet connectiv-

ity and print/fax/copy services for his patrons was meant to be more of something he did on the side. Leiva assumed that because he was situated in California during the 21st century, CyberSpot would not receive much of its income from that part of the company. To his surprise, many of the people who came into his shop not only needed Internet access, they didn't even have email addresses – something unheard of in this day and

to the web. He encourages students of all ages to come in and do their homework. During my visit, I was impressed to see children sitting at computers quietly, focused on their studies and actually being productive. For customers that speak little to no English, he offers proofreading services for resumes and cover letters, then helps email or fax them to the appropriate destinations. Older patrons are given assistance with basic computer



photo by John O'Kane

age. Since email is essential for business-related communication, it was obvious to Leiva that the regulars at CyberSpot didn't have much business flowing their way. For the first time, he became aware of the digital divide and the drastic loss of opportunity for those that aren't connected.

Leiva decided to take steps to correct this problem. He began offering discounted hourly rates and pre-paid memberships for Internet use. Depending on your situation, it can cost as little as \$1 per hour to log on

use and setting up email accounts. The idea is to make ICT available to everyone, so that those without access can enjoy the same opportunities that those with access take for granted.

It's a lofty aspiration, and one that will take a long time to realize on a global scale, but Leiva is determined to make a difference in his community. As CyberSpot has become a hangout for students and other individuals wishing to better themselves, the digital divide might very well close for the residents of San Pedro.



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# COFFEEHOUSE PIONEER CAROL MARTINI

LYN JENSEN

**C**arol Martini, veteran of the Southern California coffeehouse scene, is often found singing her songs and playing her guitar at the Library Coffeehouse, Coffee Cartel and other beachy venues. She's currently readying songs for a new still-untitled CD, following up indie tributes to her parents. *Petals of the Red Magnolia* was released in memory of her mother in 2010, while *The Rose in the Boxcar*, for her late father, was named one of "OC's Best of the Best" by the Orange County Register in 2005.

Both of Martini's parents died of Alzheimer's, her father, Ron, in 2003 and her mother, Dorothy, in 2007, she recalls. "Both times we thought they were going to come home but they never came home," and the dramatic effect on her life was her inspiration for the music featured on her most recent CDs.

Her earlier indie recordings have become rare collectors' items, including *Piece by Piece*, *Modern Loneliness*, and *The Story So Far*, which she's spotted being offered for \$28 on eBay. Her first appearance was with the song "Wishing Well" on *Co-Op*, a compilation made up mostly of Los Angeles and Orange County musical artists in the eighties.

Her style has changed since then, although she remains a singer-songwriter with an acoustic guitar. Early on her songs tended towards beautiful—and beautifully commercial—love songs that may have been big hits had only a major label taken interest. She still occasionally performs those older songs like "Wishing Well" or "Build a Bridge to My Heart."

Martini's dream has long been to expand her act to include a full band but she's never found the right combination of musicians for her style. Instead she continues to play weekly in coffee houses, clubs, book and music stores, and colleges.

Her performances as a singer-songwriter throughout Southern California since the early nineties helped create the current coffeehouse circuit.

Now her style leans more towards humorous and topical songs like "Surfer Chick," which often gets her audience looking up from their laptops and singing along at South Bay coffeehouses.

Of the stylistic change she explains, "There are a million love songs out there, I wanted to write something different, something people would

such genres as pop-rock, edgy folk-rock, adult contemporary and even a little country. She'd like to find a male vocalist for one country break-up song that's written from the man's point of view.

See [carolmartini.net](http://carolmartini.net) to get on the mailing list for upcoming shows. *The Rose in the Boxcar* and *Petals of the Red Magnolia* are available from such sites as Amazon and CD Baby or you may purchase them directly from the artist when you stop by to see her live.



want to hear." There are four "Chick" songs in her current repertoire. Besides "Surfer Chick," the others are "Skateboarding Chick," "Skydiving Chick," and "Biker Chick."

Why "Chick" songs? She answers, "It's not derogatory, I'm a chick—adventurous, a strong woman, that's what it means to me."

Her performances feature acoustic guitar versions of her original songs as well as her warm rapport with audiences. Her extensive repertoire (from the humorous to despairing) and subject matter (from taxes to her mom's station wagon to broken hearts) ensure no two performances are ever alike.

A songwriter since age eleven, having given up the violin for the more "songwriter friendly" acoustic guitar, her eclectic style encompasses

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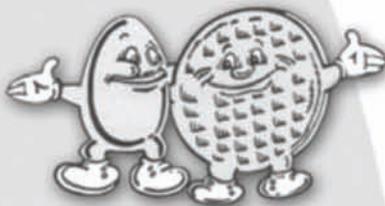
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