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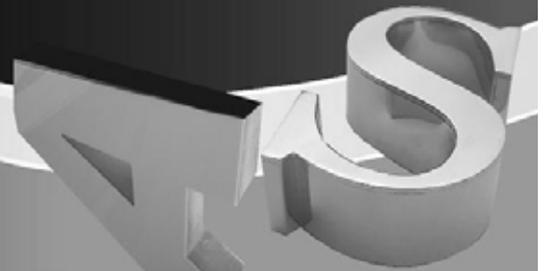


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**ISSUE 67
VOLUME 22**

Number 3

**MARIJUANA LAW
HOW UNCLE SAM LAUNDERS
MARIJUANA MONEY**

E L L E N B R O W N
8

**NEW TAX LAW
THE DEMOCRATS' ANSWER
TO THE TRUMP TAX CUTS**

M A X B . S A W I C K Y
12

**GOVERNMENT DEBT
A MILLION DOLLARS
A MINUTE**

A N D R E W P . N A P O L I T A N O
18

**LB RENT CONTROL
SIGNATURE COLLECTION
FOR RENT CONTROL**

J O R D A N W Y N N E
20

**F O O D
TWINKIES, CARROTS, AND
FARM POLICY REALITY**

J O H N I K E R D
22

**S C I - F I R E A L I T Y
PHILIP K. DICK AND THE
FAKE HUMANS**

H E N R Y F A R R E L L
24

**G U N V I O L E N C E
TIME TO DEAL WITH SECOND
AMENDMENT IDIOCY**

H A R V E Y W A S S E R M A N
32

**I N T E R N E T
COMMUNITY OWNED
INTERNET**

K A R L B O D E
38

**F I L M
BLACK PANTHER: A THRILLING
SUPERHERO STORY**

G L E N W E L D O N
40

**I M M I G R A T I O N
ICE UNLAWFULLY DETAINS
THOUSANDS OF SUSPECTED
IMMIGRANTS**

A C L U S O U T H E R N C A L I F O R N I A
44

AMASS

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COVER:

“CALIFORNIA'S NEW STATE FLOWER”

HELI SWENSSON



“California's New State Flower”

Cover design by Heli Swenson.

For the this cover of AMASS featuring an article on some of the unintended—as well as intended—consequences of the legalization of marijuana, Ms. Swenson depicts marijuana leaves in the process of sprouting at a time when the controversial cannabis herb is sprouting as a factor in our society—not just socially and medically, but legally and financially. Marijuana is visually presented—not as an isolated plant substance to be smoked or combined with food—but as a lush environment we're invited to enter. It can be viewed as a peaceful paradise or a perilous jungle. Perhaps both. That's in the eye of the beholder.

A caveat to readers with an over-active imagination or already in some manner of altered state: As attractive as the cover picture may be, it's printed on the same type of paper we use for all our AMASS covers. Cutting it into small pieces and igniting it will produce no effect beyond setting off your smoke alarm.

-Dan Marcus

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HOW UNCLE SAM LAUNDERS MARIJUANA MONEY

E L L E N B R O W N

Thirty states and the District of Columbia currently have laws broadly legalizing marijuana in some form. The herb has been shown to have significant therapeutic value for a wide range of medical conditions, including cancer, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, glaucoma, lung disease, anxiety, muscle spasms, hepatitis C, inflammatory bowel disease, and arthritis pain. The community of Americans who rely on legal medical marijuana was estimated to be 2.6 million people in 2016 and includes a variety of mainstream constituency groups like veterans, senior citizens, cancer survivors, and parents of epileptic children. Unlike patented pharmaceuticals, which are now the leading cause of death from drug overdose, there have been no recorded deaths from marijuana overdose in the US. By comparison, alcohol causes 30,000 deaths annually, and prescription drugs *taken as directed* are estimated to kill 100,000 Americans per year.

Under federal law, however, marijuana remains a Schedule I Controlled Substance – a “deadly dangerous drug with no medical use and high potential for abuse” – and its possession remains a punishable offense. On the presidential campaign trail, Donald Trump said the issue of marijuana legalization “should be up to the states,” continuing the “hands off” policy established under President Obama. Under the 2013 Cole Memorandum, the Department of Justice said it would not prosecute individuals and companies complying with robust and well-enforced state legalization programs. But on January 4th, Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded that memo and gave federal prosecutors the authority to pursue marijuana cases at their own discretion, even in places where the herb is legal under state law. The action has made banks even more afraid to take marijuana cash,

which can be prosecuted as illegal “money laundering,” an offense that can incur stiff criminal penalties.

The Government Has “Unclean Hands”

As explained by Dr. Richard Rahn, author of *The End of Money and the Struggle for Financial Privacy*:

“Money laundering is generally understood to be the practice of taking ill-gotten gains and moving them through a sequence of bank accounts so they ultimately look like the profits from legitimate activity. Institutions, individuals, and even governments who are believed to be aiding and abetting the practice of money laundering can be indicted and convicted, even though they may be completely unaware that the money being transferred with their help was of criminal origin.”

The law has focused on banks, but all sorts of businesses accept money without asking where it came from or being required to report “suspicious activity.” As Rahm observes, even governments can be indicted and convicted for money laundering. Strictly construed (as

If the goal of the anti-money laundering statutes is to identify and deter criminal activity, strictly enforcing the law could actually backfire in the case of state-legalized marijuana businesses.

– Ellen Brown

Attorney General Sessions insists when interpreting the law), that means the US government itself could be indicted. In fact the US government is the largest launderer of marijuana cash in the nation. The IRS accepts this tainted money in the payment of taxes, turning it into “clean” money; and it is not an unwitting accomplice to the crime. Estimates are that marijuana business owners across the US will owe \$2.8 billion in taxes to the federal government in 2018. The government makes a massive profit off the deal, snatching up to 70 percent of the proceeds of the reporting businesses, as opposed to the more typical rate of 30 percent. It does this by branding marijuana businesses criminal

enterprises which are not entitled to deduct their costs when reporting their income. This is not only a clear case of the unequal protection of the laws but is a clear admission by the government that it is knowingly accepting illegal funds. The government is a principal beneficiary of a business the government itself has made illegal.

Under those circumstances, both marijuana businesses and banks should be able to raise the “unclean hands” defense. As summarized in *Kendall-Jackson Winery, Ltd. v. Superior Court (1999)*, 76 Cal.App.4th 970, 978-79:

“The defense of unclean hands arises from the maxim, “He who comes into Equity must come with clean

hands.” The doctrine demands that a plaintiff act fairly in the matter for which he seeks a remedy. . . . The defense is available in legal as well as equitable actions. . . . The doctrine promotes justice by making a plaintiff answer for his own misconduct in the action. It prevents a wrongdoer from enjoying the fruits of his transgression.”

The government is enjoying the fruits of money it considers “dirty.” It has unclean hands, a defense against prosecuting others for the same crime.

Should “Money Laundering” Even Be a Crime?

In an article titled “Why the War on Money Laundering Should be Aborted,” Dr. Rahn asks whether money laundering should even be a crime. It became a criminal activity in the US only in 1986, and in many countries it still is not a crime. Banks operating in the US must now collect and verify customer-provided information, check names of customers against lists of known or suspected terrorists, determine risk levels posed by customers, and report suspicious persons, organizations and transactions. The reporting requirements are so burdensome and expensive that they have caused many smaller banks to sell out to larger banks or close their doors. According to Dr. Rahn:

“It has failed to produce the advertised results and, in fact, has not been cost effective, has resulted in wholesale violations of individual civil liberties (including privacy rights), has violated the rights of sovereign governments and peoples, has created new opportunities for criminal activity, and has actually lessened our ability to reduce crime.

. . . Banks are required to supply the government with not only Currency Transaction Reports but also Suspicious Activity Reports. These reports impose huge regulatory costs on banks and require bank employees to operate as police officers. As a result, the total public and private sector costs greatly exceed \$10,000,000 per conviction. This whole effort not only does not make any economic sense, but is clearly incompatible with a free society. The anti-money laundering laws allow almost complete prosecutorial discretion.”

One small banker complained that banks have been turned into spies secretly reporting to the federal government. If they fail to comply, they can face stiff enforcement actions, whether or not actual money-laundering crimes are alleged. In 2010, one small New Jersey bank pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the Bank Secrecy Act and was fined \$5 million for failure to file suspicious-activity and cash-transaction reports. Another small New Jersey bank closed its doors after it was hit with \$8 million in fines over its inadequate monitoring policies. The cost of compliance and threat of massive fines for not complying have been major factors in the collapse of the community banking sector. The number of community banks has fallen by 40 percent since 1994 and their share of U.S. banking assets has fallen by more than half, from 41 percent to 18 percent.

“Regulation is killing community banks,” Treasury Secretary Stephen Mnuchin said at his confirmation hearing in January 2017. If the process is not reversed, he warned,

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we could “end up in a world where we have four big banks in this country.” That would be bad for both jobs and the economy. “I think that we all appreciate the engine of growth is with small and medium-sized businesses,” said Mnuchin. “We’re losing the ability for small and medium-sized banks to make good loans to small and medium-sized businesses in the community, where they understand those credit risks better than anybody else.”

If the goal of the anti-money laundering statutes is to identify and deter criminal activity, strictly enforcing the law could actually backfire in the case of state-legalized marijuana businesses. As noted in a January 9 article in *The Daily Beast*:

“Marijuana businesses have to register and incorporate in states and that puts them on the IRS radar. . . . Sky-high federal taxes on top of state taxes can make it almost impossible to operate a legal business. . . . If the government fails to cut businesses a break, legal marijuana could be sold on the black market to dodge taxes.”

On the black market, cash proceeds can be dispersed in a way that avoids banks and makes the money hard either to trace or to tax.

Federal Law Needs to Be Changed

With more than half the states legalizing marijuana for medical purposes, Congress needs to acknowledge the will of the people and remove this natural herb from the Schedule I classification that says it is a deadly dangerous drug with no health benefits. The Tenth Amendment gives the federal government only those powers specifically enumerated in the Constitution, and regulating medical

practice is not one of them. Federal courts have held that the federal Controlled Substances Act does not allow the federal government to usurp states’ exclusive rights (pursuant to their inherent police powers) to regulate the practice of medicine.

H.R. 1227, the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act, sponsored by Virginia Republican Thomas Garrett and 15 cosponsors, would remove marijuana from Schedule I and eliminate federal penalties for anyone engaged in marijuana activity in a state where it is legal. Congress just needs to pass it.

In its zeal for eliminating burdensome, costly and ineffective regulations, the Trump administration might also consider lightening the heavy reporting burden that is killing community banks and the local businesses that have traditionally relied on them for affordable credit. On Tuesday, January 16th, a bipartisan coalition of state attorneys general sent a letter to leaders in Congress requesting advancement of legislation such as the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act to “provide a safe harbor” for banks that provide financial products or services to state-legal marijuana businesses. If the government can accept marijuana money in the payment of taxes, banks should be able to accept it to keep track of it and prevent the crimes associated with storing and transporting large sums of cash.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, chairman of the Public Banking Institute, and author of twelve books including *Web of Debt* and *The Public Bank Solution*. Her 300+ blog articles are posted at EllenBrown.com.

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DIANE DI PRIMA

THE DEMOCRATS' ANSWER TO THE TRUMP TAX CUTS

MAX B. SAWICKY

From the heart of Barack Obama's exiled brain trust comes Jason Furman, former head of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, with a proposal in the *Wall Street Journal* to "repeal and replace" the recent Trump/Republican tax cuts. How do his ideas compare to alternatives that might appeal to the vast legions of disaffected citizens?

Furman's analysis provides a useful window into the concerns of financial elites. To be fair, he takes aim at certain sources of tax relief for the rich, including those related to capital gains and "pass-through" entities (a form of business organization often used by medium-to-large-sized companies). In general, however, he prioritizes deficit reduction and a lower tax burden on corporate capital. In short, if Furman's views are any indication, when it comes to tax policy mainstream Democrats have learned nothing and forgotten a great deal.

Scary Deficits

Furman's point of departure is the impact of the Trump tax cuts on deficits. He glosses over the question of whether the current deficit is too high by referring to projections of its long-run trajectory. The deficit-hawk mantra always goes, "If nothing is done, in sixty years..." The fallacy here is *that something is always done*. Things that can't continue, don't. Furman admits as much himself. The real question is what to do now.

It's worth remembering that the last time a Republican was in the White House, we heard exactly the same laments from liberals about "budget-busting" tax cuts. In 2003, Paul Krugman argued that "the government of the United States faces a fundamental fiscal shortfall" due to the Bush tax cuts, a problem so serious that Krugman called it a "planned crisis" that could be masked "for a

while, by running huge budget deficits," but that would eventually wreak economic havoc.

At the time, the CBO was projecting that federal debt in 2013 would hit 14.4 percent of GDP. By the time 2013 rolled around, a deep recession had intervened and federal debt actually stood at 72.6 percent of GDP. Rather than wreaking havoc, though, the higher deficits were actually providing crucial support to the economy, and Krugman was arguing that even bigger deficits were needed.

The lesson here is that when it comes to liberal finger-wagging over imagined future deficit crises — even under Republican presidents — the watchword should be: fool us twice, won't get fooled again. Regressive tax cuts should be opposed because they're regressive — not by pointing to a coming fiscal Armageddon.

Favoring Capital

The most notorious feature of the Trump cuts was the new tax advantage provided for what are called "pass-through" entities: businesses whose profits go untaxed except at the level of the individual owners.

— Max B. Sawicky

The remainder of Furman's piece addresses what a desirable tax system would look like, and more specifically, the best ways to expand tax revenues. From the Left's point of view, priority should be given to shifting the tax burden from labor to capital, from consumption to saving, and from low-and-middle-income households to higher-income households.

One of the strongest weapons in the capital-tax arsenal is the corporate income tax (CIT). The 2017 Republican tax cuts made the CIT a chief target, cutting the rate from 35 to 21 percent and granting new opportunities for individual income-tax avoidance in the name of tax relief for small business. While defending the need to restore some

CIT revenue, Furman skates past the idea of restoring the rate to 35 percent and invokes the general idea of broadening the tax base, without specifics. This is hardly surprising: the Obama administration was also prone to dismay over the alleged ill effects of the old 35 percent rate on competitiveness.

The most egregious element proposed by Furman is what's called "full expensing" of new business investment. Like many mainstream economists, Furman regards capital taxation as inherently inefficient, and a switch to full expensing would amount to cutting the



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capital tax rate to zero.

Under full expensing, business firms deduct the full cost of their purchase of plant and equipment in the year of purchase. It is not widely appreciated that this *would effectively convert the corporate income tax into a consumption tax*. And insofar as workers spend all their income (rather than saving it), that would completely shift the burden of corporate taxes from capital to labor. (The reason expensing exempts capital from tax is that, since money today is worth more than money tomorrow, the value of the tax savings from the deduction in the year of expensing in effect offsets the future tax on the returns to the investment. It's a wash.)

The most notorious feature of the Trump cuts was the new tax advantage provided for what are called "pass-through" entities: businesses whose profits go untaxed except at the level of the individual owners. Furman, like other centrist Democrats, would dispense with the pass-through breaks while raising taxes on capital gains, and he also suggests restoring revenues by means of a new value-added tax or carbon tax. Both would amount to new taxes on consumption and increase income inequality.

A dicey issue is raised when a tax break disproportionately benefits higher-income taxpayers but also helps many others. Two examples with immediate relevance are the exclusion of employer-provided health insurance from taxable income, and the deductibility of state and local income tax. In a dubious appeal to tax fairness, Obamacare included a "Cadillac tax" on high-value health insurance policies — an exception to the standard tax break for employer-provided health insurance. The tax was designed in part to encourage the spread of skimpier health insurance, on the nefarious theory that increasing out-of-pocket health care costs will induce workers to use care more "wisely." And since generous health insurance is a major advantage of membership for many unions, the Cadillac tax was vociferously opposed by labor.

The Republicans want to eliminate the Cadillac tax a) because it's a tax and b) because it's part of Obamacare (though their tax bill will actually increase the number affected by it). Furman, meanwhile, suggests

an increase in the tax.

As for the long-standing state and local tax break, the Republican bill scaled it down to help pay for their business tax cuts. Due to deficit concerns, Furman goes wobbly on the matter of restoring the deductions, while others of a centrist persuasion have spoken approvingly of eliminating them altogether.

In actuality, the benefits of both tax preferences — or tax loopholes, if you don't like them — are not confined to the rich. The health insurance tax cuts well into the middle of the income distribution. The deductions for state and local taxes aggrandize the budgets of higher-income states that tend to be more forthcoming with public services in general and means-tested benefits (chiefly Medicaid) in particular. As a practical matter, the ambiguous distributional implications commend a policy of leaving well enough alone. (As for the deficit angle, we've already seen why we needn't care about it.)

A full-bore assault on capital via the tax system would cover all returns to capital — which can take the form of corporate profits, capital gains, interest, rents, and royalties — and regardless of a firm's size or legal status. It would include efforts to reverse the shift in firms' ability to avoid the CIT altogether, and it would seriously beef up the IRS's resources dedicated to curbing tax evasion. (About one dollar in six of federal tax liability is either not paid on time or paid ever.) Rebuilding the estate and gift tax is another priority. Thanks to the labyrinthine nature of law governing taxation of estates, much capital income escapes tax altogether.

Of particular interest in this vein is a new proposal from Dean Baker to convert the federal CIT into an annual capital levy. In this scheme, instead of paying cash to the federal government, corporations would transfer a fixed proportion of shares of their stock. Public ownership of these shares would provide the government with an additional revenue stream, insofar as the corporation paid out dividends or bought back shares, thereby denying the revenue to the wealthy. Over time, the public sector would own an increasing share of the nation's capital. Virtues of this approach include the fact that opportunities for corporate tax avoidance would be narrowed, and the political sway of private capital could

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be attenuated. (Baker suggests the government's shares be non-voting, although others might prefer to forego this feature of his plan.)

To recap: Tax reform is more properly about inequality than about funding public spending. And piecemeal expansions of the tax burden with a superficial nod to equality can have perverse implications.

Max B. Sawicky is an economist and writer in the wilds of Virginia. He has worked at the Government Accountability Office and the Economic Policy Institute. He writes in *Jacobin* and other publications.

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Now imagine that this happens every minute of every day for the next three years. At the end of the three years, you owe back more than \$6 trillion. So you borrow \$6 trillion to pay back the \$6 trillion you owe. Is this unending spigot of cash reality or fantasy?

I am not speaking of Amazon or Google or Exxon Mobil or Apple. They deliver products that appeal to consumers and investors. They deal in copious amounts of money because they sell what hundreds of millions of people want to purchase and they do it so efficiently that hundreds of thousands want to invest in them. If they fail to persuade consumers to purchase their products and investors to purchase their financial instruments, they will go out of business.

My analogy about all that cash in your kitchen sink that just keeps coming is not about voluntary commercial transactions, which you are free to accept or reject. It is about the government's spending what it doesn't have, the consequences of which you are not free to reject.

Government produces no products that consumers are willing to pay for voluntarily, and it doesn't sell shares of stock in its assets. It doesn't generate wealth; it seizes it. And when it can no longer politically get away with seizing, it borrows. It borrows a great deal of money — money that it rolls over, by borrowing trillions to pay back trillions to prior lenders, and thus its debt never goes away. Last week, after eight years of publicly complaining that then-President Barack Obama was borrowing more than

\$1 trillion a year to fund the government — borrowing that the Republicans silently consented to — congressional Republicans, now in control of Congress and with a friend in the Oval Office, voted to spend and hence borrow between \$5 trillion and \$6 trillion more than tax revenue will produce in the next three years; that's a few trillion more than they complained about in the Obama years. That's borrowing \$1 million a minute.

Obviously, no business or household or bank can survive very long by borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. Yet the federal government, no matter which party controls Congress or the presidency, engages in staggering borrowing — borrowing that will cripple future generations by forcing them to pay for goods and services that were consumed before they were born.

The government has often borrowed to meet critical emergency needs, typically during wartime. Indeed, the country was born in debt when Alexander Hamilton, the father of big government, offered the idea that the new federal government created by the Constitution could purchase the fidelity of the states by assuming their Revolutionary War debts.

But those debts were paid back using inflation, gold and tax dollars, and the country enjoyed sporadic periods of nearly debt-free government. Then three unhappy events coincided about 100 years ago: Woodrow Wilson — the father of modern-day big government — was elected president, and he brought us into the useless battle over national borders among old European royalty called the Great War, and he financed American participation in

that first world war using the new printing presses owned by the new Federal Reserve System.

The \$30 billion President Wilson borrowed from the Federal Reserve and others has been rolled over and over and has never been repaid. The federal government still owes the \$30 billion principal, and for that it has paid more than \$15 billion in interest. Who in his right mind would pay 50 percent interest on a 100-year-old debt? Only the government.

Wilson's \$30 billion debt 100 years ago has ballooned to \$20.6 trillion today. At the end of President Donald Trump's present term — because of the Republican budget signed into law a few weeks ago — the

Yet the federal government, no matter which party controls Congress or the presidency, engages in staggering borrowing — borrowing that will cripple future generations by forcing them to pay for goods and services that were consumed before they were born.

— Andrew P. Napolitano

government's debt will be about \$27 trillion.

That amount is a debt bomb waiting to explode. Here's why. Every year, the federal government collects about \$2.5 trillion in revenue and spends it all. It borrows another \$1.5 trillion to \$2 trillion and spends it all. To avoid paying back any of the \$27 trillion it will owe, the federal government will need to spend about \$1 trillion a year in interest payments.

That \$1 trillion is 40 percent of the revenue collected by the federal government; that's 40 cents on every dollar in tax revenue going to interest on old debts — interest payments that are legally unavoidable by taxpayers and voters.

Will the taxpaying public tolerate this much longer? What would happen if taxpayers stopped paying taxes because 40 percent of what they've been paying has produced nothing for them? Would investors stop lending money to the government because of fear that the government could not pay them back? The Constitution requires the government to pay its debts. Would the government's creditors acquire control of the government's fiscal policy in order to pay themselves back? The government's biggest creditor is one of its biggest menaces — the government of China.

Borrowing money at \$1 million a minute is digging a hole out of which we will never peacefully climb. President Obama's and President Trump's own military and intelligence chiefs have argued that the national debt — not the Russians or the Islamic State group or the North Koreans — is the greatest threat to freedom and security that we face today.

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TENANTS READY FOR FIGHT: SIGNATURE COLLECTION FOR RENT CONTROL TO BEGIN IN LONG BEACH

JORDAN WYNNE

Long Beach, CA, January 30, 2018 --- Tenants in Long Beach are set to begin collecting signatures for a proposed rent control ballot measure. The measure is titled the "Long Beach Rent Control Ordinance." Yesterday afternoon, proponents of this ballot measure received confirmation that the language of the proposed measure has been approved by the City Attorney and will move forward with signature collection. The proposed ordinance, if approved by the voters, would establish residential rent control and "just cause for eviction" requirements in the City of Long Beach.

Karen Reside, Secretary of the Long Beach Gray Panthers and



co-sponsor of the ordinance, is confident that the coalition will be able to collect the signatures needed to place this ordinance on the November 2018 ballot.

Unaffordable rents are pushing generations of local community members and those most vulnerable out of their homes and neighborhood.

— Jordan Wynne

"Seniors are facing the highest rents we've ever seen," says Reside, who adds, "With most of us on fixed incomes and limited retirement funds, we can't keep up. Rent control and just cause eviction will give us security instead of worrying about ending up on the streets."

Martha Cota, President of Latinos in Action California, sees this initiative as vital to Long Beach and its vibrant communities. As a community leader who has organized academic enrichment and leadership programs for youth citywide, Cota wants to see stability for renters in Long Beach. She adds, "Long Beach has a community like nowhere else, full of

active members who give back to the community every day. Unfortunately, many have already been displaced. With this ordinance, we're going to stop the displacement of our community."

Nearly 60% of residents in Long Beach are renters. Without protections, hundreds of thousands of working families are at risk of eviction and homelessness -- if they have not lost their homes already. Long-time residents such as Deena Abuyounes, a founding member of the Long Beach Tenants Union, believe the time is now to address rising rents resulting from increased corporate development and real estate speculation



in the city. “Development without displacement is possible and should build up, not tear apart the thriving communities that tenants have created in Long Beach. Unaffordable rents are pushing generations of local community members and those most vulnerable out of their homes and neighborhoods. Community-first policies like rent control and just cause for eviction support our neighborhoods, keep residents in their homes, and make Long Beach the city that we all love,” says Abyounes.

To get involved with the #RentControlNOW Coalition, you can sign up for volunteer shifts by visiting bit.ly/LBRentControlVolunteer. For more information, contact (562) 436-8592.



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TWINKIES, CARROTS, AND FARM POLICY

J O H N I K E R D

In a recent article, *Washington Post* food columnist Tamar Haspel took author and journalist Michael Pollan to task for blaming the farm bill for the sizable price difference between junk food and fresh vegetables. She wrote:

“...Pollan, whose work I’m a fan of, held up a package of Twinkies (which cost 99 cents) and a bunch of carrots (\$2.99). The Twinkies are a complex food with 39 ingredients, and the carrots are ‘a very simple bunch of roots,’ he said. So why do the carrots cost so much more?”

Haspel added: “The idea that wholesome foods are expensive and junk foods are cheap because of the system of subsidies in the farm bill pervades the conversation about food policy. But that idea has one very big problem. It’s false.” She points out that vegetables would cost more to produce than the corn and soy in junk foods, regardless of the federal subsidies determined by the farm bill. According to one of the economists with whom Haspel spoke, those subsidies account for only “a penny and a half” of the cost of the Twinkies and three cents’ worth of the cost of the carrots.

This point is worth examining—and it points to a much larger, more complex set of facts about our food system. As Pollan and other farm policy reform advocates routinely point out, the impacts

of government farm programs reach far beyond those that can be easily translated into quantities and prices. Government-subsidized crop insurance, farm loans, tax credits, agricultural research and education, as well as environmental and public-health exemptions for farming have all helped shape the basic structure and function of the agri-food industry.

The Twinkie-carrot example is simply a convenient, accessible entry point to those who are new to learning about our nation’s many misplaced public policy priorities. And treating it as the beginning and end of the discussion distracts from useful public discourse.

Prior to the 1970s, federal farm programs existed as a way to keep enough family farmers on the land to provide

food security for the nation. The basic strategy was to stabilize farm incomes at levels that would keep farming profitable and food prices affordable. The 1970s brought a dramatic shift, as agricultural efficiency became the goal. The model of choice for accomplishing this new policy objective was industrialization: specialization, standardization, and consolidation of control. Farm programs shifted from stabilizing the farm-food economy to subsidizing the agri-food industry. And the farm bill shifted from supporting food production and distribution to food manufacturing and marketing.

The primary advantage for row crops like corn and soy over fruits and vegetables is that field crops were easier to industrialize and it was easier to develop farm policies to mitigate the risks inherent in their industrialization. For example, fruit and vegetable production involved potentially hundreds of different crops and production systems, whereas commodity crop production has been specialized to include just a handful of plants—corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, sugar cane, beets, and a few other others—using standardized production practices. With this standardization, farmers were

able to grow and consolidate, and farms became larger, and owned by fewer operators. Farm consolidation made it much easier to influence the efficiency of production using a simpler and more manageable set of farm policies such as crop insurance and commodity-linked direct payments.

The industrialization of American agriculture was well intended. But it failed to provide food security: A higher percentage of Americans are food-insecure today than during the 1960s. It has also fueled an epidemic of obesity and diet-related health problems that threaten the physical and economic future of the country.

We know now that “cheap food” will not eliminate hunger. Even our

public food-assistance programs leave food security up to the recipients’ food choices at the grocery store. And we have focused on providing cheap calories and have done essentially nothing to ensure that the agri-food system will actually meet the nutritional needs of anyone—let alone meet the basic food needs of everyone. Instead, we have allowed food processing, distribution, and retailing to become dominated, if not outright controlled, by a few giant agribusiness corporations that have to compete with other publicly traded corporations for investor capital.

This means they have been under constant pressure to increase sales by more than the increases in food consumption associated with normal population growth—which has

**Instead, we have
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investor capital.**

– John Ikerd

been growing about 1 percent per year. To meet this goal, these corporations make foods with addictive properties to maximize consumption—which is how we ended up with Twinkies on the shelves. But human stomach capacity is limited. And a more promising strategy for maintaining corporate growth has been to sell more foods whose value comes from something other than the food itself.

Rather than provide food security, federal subsidies have provided these food companies with cheap, reliable sources of raw materials to be manufactured into what Pollan calls “food-like substances.”

You see, only about 15 percent of retail food costs paid by consumers are accounted for by the cost of agricultural raw materials paid to farmers. This is down from 35 to 40 percent during the 1960s and early 1970s. The “non-farm” food costs include transportation, manufacturing, packaging, marketing, and corporate profits. For example, the farm share of a consumer’s dollar spent for fresh vegetables is about 25 cents but is only about 5 cents for bread, because the cost of bread includes more manufacturing, packaging, and advertising.

Perhaps more important for food manufacturers, government farm programs ensure a stable, as well as abundant, supply of raw materials. Farmers can focus on maximum production with taxpayers absorbing most of the risks of overproduction. This allows food manufacturers to finance continuing expansion without the risk of scarcity or high cost of raw materials.

By focusing on food items that can minimize the cost of raw material relative to retail value—like Twinkies—the corporation can grow faster than actual food is consumed. It has been easier to add value to cheap corn and soy by making Twinkies than to add value to carrots, although big carrots are sometimes chopped into “baby carrots” and sold for a premium.

In order for markets to actually serve the collective interest of society, as economists suggest today’s markets do, several conditions would need to exist. Consumers would have to have accurate information about the nutritional value of the foods they eat and their ultimate health consequences. But most do not. There would need to be a large number of alternative processors, distributors, retailers, and other providers of a wide variety of foods. Obviously there is not. Consumers would need “real” food choices rather than “illusory” food choices created by processing and advertising. Persuasive and misleading advertising would need to be prohibited, particularly to kids—and it is not. These are essential conditions of an authentic free-market economy.

Our epidemic of obesity, diet-related disease, and persistent hunger are natural consequences of a failed food system that has been propped up for nearly 50 years by failed government farm policies including the farm bill. Even if markets worked effectively, they would not provide food security. Hunger is a consequence of income and economic inequity, not food scarcity. We will not fix farm policy or our food system until we are willing to confront these realities.

John E. Ikerd is professor emeritus of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri and author of *Sustainable Capitalism*. He writes for *CivilEats.org* and other publications.

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PHILIP K. DICK AND THE FAKE HUMANS

H E N R Y F A R R E L L

This is not the dystopia we were promised. We are not learning to love Big Brother, who lives, if he lives at all, on a cluster of server farms, cooled by environmentally friendly technologies. Nor have we been lulled by Soma and subliminal brain programming into a hazy acquiescence to pervasive social hierarchies.

Dystopias tend toward fantasies of absolute control, in which the system sees all, knows all, and controls all. And our world is indeed one of ubiquitous surveillance. Phones and household devices produce trails of data, like particles in a cloud chamber, indicating our wants and behaviors to companies such as Facebook, Amazon, and Google. Yet the information thus produced is imperfect and classified by machine-learning algorithms that themselves make mistakes. The efforts of these businesses to manipulate our wants leads to further complexity. It is becoming ever harder for companies to distinguish the behavior which they want to analyze from their own and others' manipulations.

This does not look like totalitarianism unless you squint very hard indeed. As the sociologist Kieran Healy has suggested, sweeping political critiques of new technology often bear a strong family resemblance to the arguments of Silicon Valley boosters. Both assume that the technology works as advertised, which is not necessarily true at all.

Standard utopias and standard dystopias are each perfect after their own particular fashion. We live somewhere queer— a world in which technology is developing in ways that make it increasingly hard to distinguish human beings from artificial things. The world that the Internet and social media have created is less a system than an ecology, a proliferation of unexpected niches, and entities created and adapted to exploit them in deceptive ways. Vast commercial

architectures are being colonized by quasi-autonomous parasites. Scammers have built algorithms to write fake books from scratch to sell on Amazon, compiling and modifying text from other books and online sources such as Wikipedia, to fool buyers or to take advantage of loopholes in Amazon's compensation structure. Much of the world's financial system is made out of bots— automated systems designed to continually probe markets for fleeting arbitrage opportunities. Less sophisticated programs plague online commerce systems such as eBay and Amazon, occasionally with extraordinary consequences, as when two warring bots bid the price of a biology book up to \$23,698,655.93 (plus \$3.99 shipping).

In other words, we live in Philip K. Dick's future, not George Orwell's or Aldous Huxley's. Dick was no better a prophet of technology than any science fiction writer, and

was arguably worse than most. His imagined worlds jam together odd bits of fifties' and sixties' California with rocket ships, drugs, and social speculation. Dick usually wrote in a hurry and for money, and sometimes under the influence of drugs or a recent and urgent personal religious revelation.

Still, what he captured with genius was the ontological unease of a world in which the human and the abhuman, the real and the fake, blur together. As Dick described his work (in the opening essay to his 1985 collection, *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*):

“The two basic topics which fascinate me are “What is reality?” and “What constitutes the authentic human being?” Over the twenty-seven years in which I have published novels and stories I have investigated these two interrelated topics

over and over again.”

These obsessions had some of their roots in Dick's complex and ever-evolving personal mythology (in which it was perfectly plausible that the “real” world was a fake, and that we were all living in Palestine sometime in the first century AD). Yet they were also based on a keen interest in the processes through which reality is socially constructed. Dick believed that we all live in a world where “spurious realities are manufactured by the media, by governments, by big corporations, by religious groups, political groups— and the electronic hardware exists by which to deliver these pseudo-worlds right into heads of the reader.” He argued: “...the bombardment of pseudo-realities begins to produce

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— Henry Farrell

inauthentic humans very quickly, spurious humans—as fake as the data pressing at them from all sides. My two topics are really one topic; they unite at this point. Fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves. So we wind up with fake humans inventing fake realities and then peddling them to other fake humans.”

In Dick’s books, the real and the unreal infect each other, so that it becomes increasingly impossible to tell the difference between them. The worlds of the dead and the living merge in *Ubik* (1969), the experiences of a disturbed child infect the world around him in *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), and consensual drug-based hallucinations become the vector for an invasive alien intelligence in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965). Humans are impersonated by malign androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and “Second Variety” (1953); by aliens in “The Hanging Stranger” (1953) and “The Father-Thing” (1954); and by mutants in “The Golden Man” (1954).

This concern with unreal worlds and unreal people led to a consequent worry about an increasing difficulty of distinguishing between them. Factories pump out fake Americana in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), mirroring the problem of living in a world that is not, in fact, the real one. Entrepreneurs build increasingly human-like androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, reasoning that if they do not, then their competitors will. Figuring out what is real and what is not is not easy. Scientific tools such as the famous Voight-Kampff test in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (and *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott’s 1982 movie based loosely on it) do not work very well, leaving us with little more than hope in some mystical force—the *I Ching*, God in a spray can, a Martian water-witch—to guide us back toward the real.

We live in Dick’s world—but with little hope of divine intervention or invasion. The world where we communicate and interact at a distance is increasingly filled with algorithms that appear human, but are not—fake people generated by fake realities. When Ashley Madison, a dating

AMERICAN CRISIS

the harder the conflict
the more glorious the triumph
to bind us all with unlimited power
and we have none to blame
but ourselves

a ravage superstition in secret opinion
to avoid every decent method
which wisdom could invent

how rapidly panic runs through hidden thoughts
to secure a bridge to hell

there is a cabinet of fortitude in which
we must reason together
to awaken the flame of liberty
to set bounds to progress
with the devotion of
happy revenge

the soft resentment of a suffering people
staked to their own determined language of sorrow
draw forth the heart steeled with prejudice
determined to lay shoulders to the future world
alarmed at one common danger

the blood of children
shrinks back at the man that can
smile and grow the business of little minds
reasoning that all the treasures of the world
support murder
the absolute reason
of just cause

call me a whore of swearing allegiance
shrieking to the rocks and mountains
and slain of America
where the trick is to terrify
or seduce the people
and receive the power to
fear in the chain of mutual love
that breaks the vapors
of imagination

bring reason to your ears
hold up truth to fear
know well and see the way out of
our collected ravage
recruiting fast

we have the prospect of a glorious issue
the sad choice of a future
whose fathers shall look
on this picture
and weep

and yet there remains
one thoughtless wretch
who believes it not

– S.A. Griffin, author of *Dreams Gone Mad With Hope*,
and editor of *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*.

Deleted from *The Crisis* by Thomas Paine,
December 23, 1776

site for people who want to cheat on their spouses, was hacked, it turned out that tens of thousands of the women on the site were fake “fembots” programmed to send millions of chatty messages to male customers, so as to delude them into thinking that they were surrounded by vast numbers of potential sexual partners.

These problems are only likely to get worse as the physical world and the world of information become increasingly interpenetrated in an Internet of (badly functioning) Things. Many of the aspects of Joe Chip’s future world in *Ubik* look horrendously dated to modern eyes: the archaic role of women, the assumption that nearly everyone smokes. Yet the door to Joe’s apartment—which argues with him and refuses to open because he has not paid it the obligatory tip—sounds ominously plausible. Someone, somewhere, is pitching this as a viable business plan to Y Combinator or the venture capitalists in Menlo Park.

This invasion of the real by the unreal has had consequences for politics. The hallucinatory realities in Dick’s worlds—the empathetic religion of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the drug-produced worlds of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, the quasi-Tibetan Buddhist death realm of *Ubik*—are usually experienced by many people, like the television shows of Dick’s America. But as network television has given way to the Internet, it has become easy for people to create their own idiosyncratic mix of sources. The imposed media consensus that Dick detested has shattered into a myriad of different realities, each with its own partially shared assumptions and facts. Sometimes this creates tragedy or near-tragedy. The deluded gunman who stormed into Washington, D.C.’s Comet Ping Pong pizzeria had been convinced by online conspiracy sites that it was the coordinating center for Hillary Clinton’s child-sex trafficking ring.

Such fractured worlds are more vulnerable to invasion by the non-human. Many Twitter accounts are bots, often with the names and stolen photographs of implausibly beautiful young women, looking to pitch this or that product (one recent academic study found that between 9 and 15 percent of all Twitter accounts are likely fake). Twitterbots vary in sophistication from automated accounts that do no more than retweet what other bots have said, to sophisticated algorithms deploying so-called “Sybil attacks,” creating fake identities in peer-to-peer networks to invade specific organizations or degrade particular kinds of conversation.

Twitter has failed to become a true mass medium, but remains extraordinarily important to politics, since it is where many politicians, journalists, and other elites turn to get their news. One research project suggests that around 20 percent of the measurable political discussion around the last presidential election came from bots. Humans appear to be no better at detecting bots than we are, in Dick’s novel, at detecting replicant androids: people are about as likely to retweet a bot’s message as the message of another human being. Most notoriously, the current U.S. president recently retweeted a flattering message that appears to have come from a bot densely connected to a network of other bots, which some believe to be controlled by the Russian

government and used for propaganda purposes.

In his novels Dick was interested in seeing how people react when their reality starts to break down. A world in which the real commingles with the fake, so that no one can tell where the one ends and the other begins, is ripe for paranoia. The most toxic consequence of social media manipulation, whether by the Russian government or others, may have nothing to do with its success as propaganda. Instead, it is that it sows an existential distrust. People simply do not know what or who to believe anymore. Rumors that are spread by Twitterbots merge into other rumors about the ubiquity of Twitterbots, and whether this or that trend is being driven by malign algorithms rather than real human beings.

Such widespread falsehood is especially explosive when combined with our fragmented politics. Liberals’ favorite term for the right-wing propaganda machine, “fake news,” has been turned back on them by conservatives, who treat conventional news as propaganda, and hence ignore it. On the obverse, it may be easier for many people on the liberal left to blame Russian propaganda for the last presidential election than to accept that many voters had a very different understanding of America than they do.

Dick had other obsessions—most notably the politics of Richard Nixon and the Cold War. It is not hard to imagine him writing a novel combining an immature and predatory tycoon (half Arnie Kott, half Jory Miller) who becomes the president of the United States, secret Russian political manipulation, an invasion of empathy-free robotic intelligences masquerading as human beings, and a breakdown in our shared understanding of what is real and what is fake.

These different elements probably would not cohere particularly well, but as in Dick’s best novels, the whole might still work, somehow. Indeed, it is in the incongruities of Dick’s novels that salvation is to be found (even at his battiest, he retains a sense of humor). Obviously, it is less easy to see the joke when one is living through it. Dystopias may sometimes be grimly funny—but rarely from the inside.

Henry Farrell teaches at George Washington University and is the author of *The Political Economy of Trust*. He writes at *Crooked Timber*, *The Monkey Cage*, *Boston Review* and other publications.



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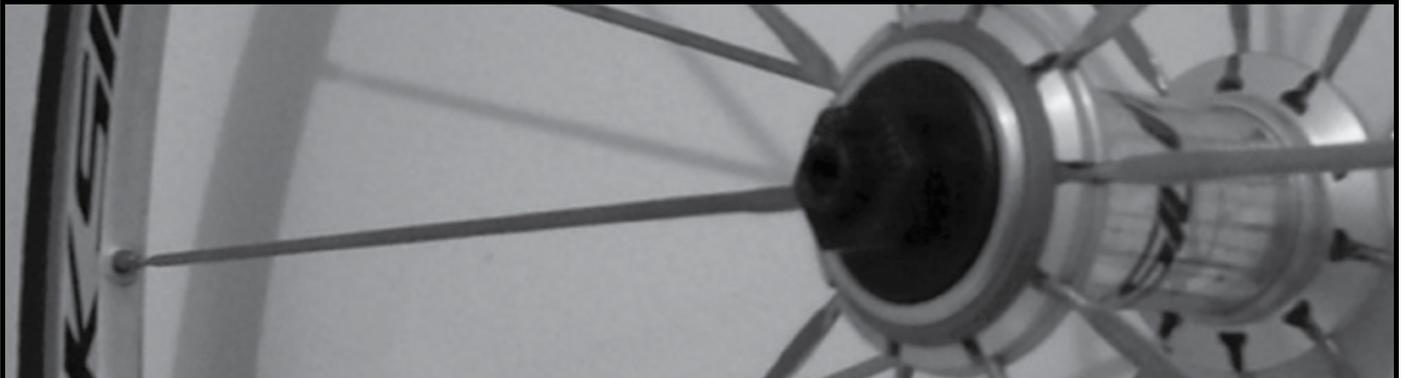
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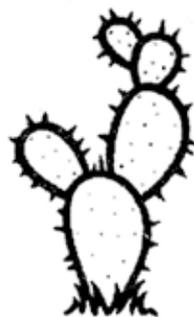
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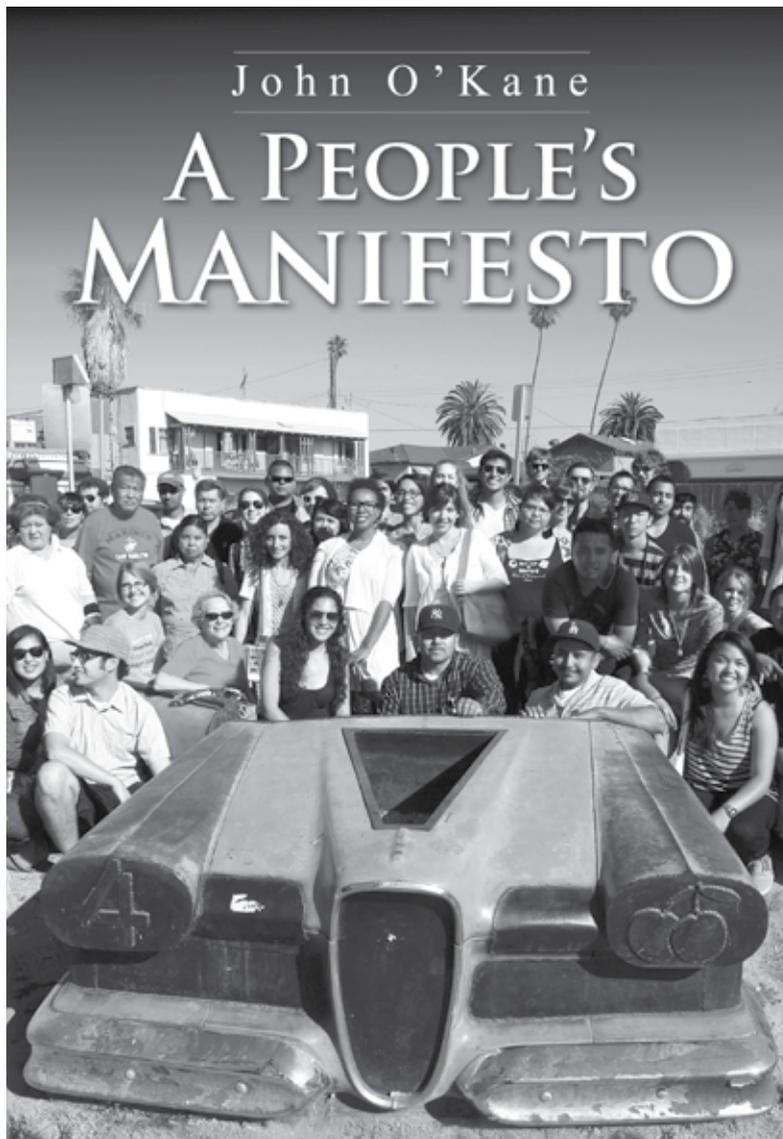
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Publisher of *AMASS* Magazine Releases *A People's Manifesto*

2015-05-13 www.everythinglongbeach.com/publisher-of-amass-magazine-releases-a-peoples-manifesto/



A People's Manifesto, by John O'Kane, editor and publisher of *AMASS* Magazine, is a new book just published by SPD Books. It focuses on the opinions and perspectives of the people, ordinary citizens, non-experts, outsiders, those without influence, about the state of American society over the past several years, especially since the Great Recession of 2008. More specifically, the author engages in a series of conversations with a diverse number of people from varying backgrounds on the issues: the economy and jobs, political polarization, campaign reform, the elite domination of political life, the Tea Party phenomenon, inequality, immigration, austerity and the ongoing budget crises, and foreclosures, among others.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part compiles these conversations in an easy-to-grasp journalistic style, at times reading like a novel. All of the conversations are with enlightened Long Beach citizens from differing lifestyles and political orientations. A significant part of these conversations includes a focus on Occupy Long Beach and its efforts to raise awareness about these issues above, as well as its relation to other activists in the area from a wide spectrum of age groups. The cover is a photo taken at Cherry and 4th streets of a group of local activists ranged around the remains of an Edsel (taken by long-time Long Beach photographer Slobodan Dimitrov). The second is a sampling of op-ed pieces from

Huffingtonpost and other publications over the course of the past six years or so about the issues that the citizens in part one discuss and react to. These are in chronological order and in response to the post-recession crisis as it evolved, and mostly left in their original form.

The book's tone and substance are shaped by a striking irony. Populism is all the rage these days. Bloggers and journalists from across the political spectrum are obsessed with speaking for the people, citizens who have become victims of the Great Recession of 2008. But these very-same citizens can rarely speak for themselves. One of the quite remarkable insights to come from all this is that citizens without access to insider "facts" can make sense of these times and pass along knowledge—not mere information—that motivate others to learn and act. And they can express their opinions through a variety of venues, especially op-ed writing.

The book is 200 pages long, and priced at \$24.95. It can be purchased at all fine bookstores, as well as online at Amazon and other sites.



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**TIME TO DEAL
WITH SECOND
AMENDMENT
IDIOTRY**

HARVEY WASSERMAN

My beloved childhood friend, someone I've known since before elementary school, has lost his grandson in the latest Florida shooting. He was a freshman in high school, a beautiful innocent, full of joy and promise. My sister cannot stop crying. Writing this article is the only way I can deal with it. I cannot yet bring myself to call.

Make no mistake about this: Sooner or later, these mass murders will strike you personally in your home and in your heart and in your soul. You may see them as abstract ghosts, fleeting horror shows off in the distance. But there are so many of them, it is absolutely inevitable you will lose someone you love very soon. Close your eyes and ask who it will be, and what that will do to you and yours for the rest of your lives.

America's gun holocaust has become a ghastly game of Russian Roulette and all of us are losing to the House, which is to say the gun industry. The White House says it's a mental health issue, and for once it's absolutely right. The President and those like him are criminally insane when it comes to (among so many other things) guns.

The first thing to remember about gun violence is that it is A BUSINESS. There is an entire corporate infrastructure that makes BIG MONEY on these murders. Whoever makes and sells the automatic weapons and the bullets

that do these slaughters makes a profit on them. This shooting, like tomorrow's, puts money in their bank account. They will be enriched by the next mass slaughter and the one after that and the one after that.

They can haul out all the fake Constitutional rhetoric they want. But the National Rifle Association is out there promoting an industry that is IN BUSINESS to threaten your health, safety, legal rights, and long-term security. By law, nothing beyond their own corporate bottom line has the least impact on them.

America's gun holocaust has become a ghastly game of Russian Roulette and all of us are losing to the House, which is to say the gun industry.

– Harvey Wasserman

Every limitation on gun ownership COSTS THEM CASH. That they have warped the Bill of Rights comes with the territory.

Here's what the Second Amendment actually says: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

No other of the first Ten Amendments has an explanatory

introduction. The right to keep and bear arms is assumed as a basic right, but ONLY in light of service to the security of a free state, and under the auspices of a well-regulated militia.

In other words: NOBODY HAS A LEGAL RIGHT TO OWN A GUN IN THIS COUNTRY UNLESS THEY CAN SHOW THAT THEIR OWNERSHIP OF SUCH A WEAPON SERVES THE SECURITY OF OUR FREE STATE, and, SUCH OWNERSHIP MUST BE INTEGRATED INTO A WELL-REGULATED OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION.

So if you are a demonstrably sane person, and can show that your gun ownership will help protect our security, and you are a member of a sanctioned, well-regulated official organization with real social accountability, then the Second Amendment does indicate you have a legal right to own a gun.

Otherwise, FORGET IT. There is NO CONSTITUTIONAL REASON to believe you have the right to keep and bear arms.

There are historic roots to this Amendment. The Founders were foisting a Constitution that imposed a strong central government on a nation that didn't want one.

In an agrarian society, farmers who'd just fought a guerrilla war to defeat an imperial power wanted assurances their local militias would remain intact, and that their ownership of single-shot, hard-to-load muskets would be protected. These were groups of neighbors who knew and trusted each other and wanted mutual protection for their communities.

Slave owners like James Madison, who crafted the Bill of Rights, also wanted to protect the

military units they relied on to track down runaways and stop a slave rebellion.

But the idea that a general populace, full of unbalanced crazy people, would be left at random to own huge arsenals with the killing power we've seen in Florida, Las Vegas, Connecticut and so many other places would have absolutely horrified every one of those who wrote the Constitution and then demanded a Bill of Rights.

The government they were establishing, for all its class, gender,

racial biases, and other faults, was meant to secure "the general welfare."

The Second Amendment is now being deliberately misinterpreted by a predatory industry, a corrupt corporate elite, and an uncaring political establishment. They are protecting the bottom line of a for-profit industry with not a shred of conscience or concern for the security of a free state or the law.

So next time some gun lover throws the Second Amendment at you, throw it right back. And when you read the horrible news about

the inevitable next mass slaughter, remember that sooner or later it will be you or someone you love and it will forever ruin your life. This does not happen in other industrial nations.

It's long past time to remove the gun industry's unlawful control over our government. We have overcome before, and we will again, even on this. Our lives depend on it.

Harvey Wasserman's *America at the Brink of Rebirth: The Life & Death Spiral of US History*, will be published in the fall at Solar-topia.org.

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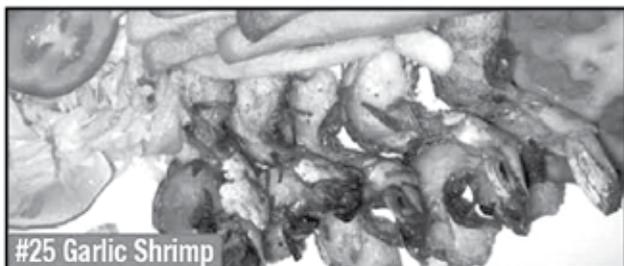


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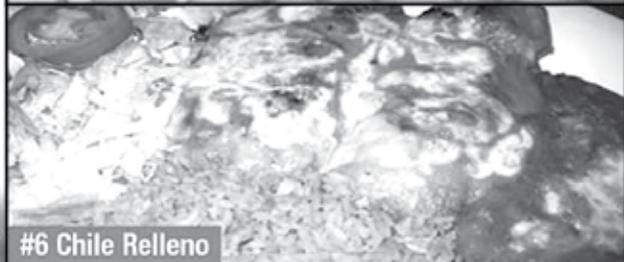
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COMMUNITY OWNED INTERNET

K A R L B O D E

More communities than ever are embracing building their own broadband networks as an alternative to the Comcast status quo.

According to a freshly updated map of community-owned networks, more than 750 communities across the United States have embraced operating their own broadband network, are served by local rural electric cooperatives, or have made at least some portion of a local fiber network publicly available, according to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a nonprofit that advocates for local economies.

These networks have sprung up across the nation as a direct reflection of the country's growing frustration with sub-par broadband speeds, high prices, and poor customer service. They've also emerged despite the fact that ISP lobbyists have convinced more than 20 states to pass protectionist laws hampering local efforts to build such regional networks.

Many of these laws even bar communities from striking public/private partnerships with companies like Google Fiber, even in instances where no private ISP is willing to provide service.

The Institute's latest update indicates that there are now 55 municipal networks serving 108 communities with a publicly owned fiber-to-the-home internet network. 76 communities now offer access to a locally owned cable network reaching most or all of the community, and

more than 258 communities are now served by a rural electric cooperative.

Many more communities could expand their local offerings according to the group's data. 197 communities already have some publicly owned fiber service available to parts of the community, while more than 120 communities have publicly-owned dark (unused) fiber available for use by local residences and local area businesses.

The group also highlights which states have erected legislative barriers to hamper these local efforts

**A recent study by
Harvard University
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community
broadband networks
tend to offer notably
lower pricing than
their private-sector
counterparts.**

– Karl Bode

and explains what these laws actually do.

A recent study by Harvard University researchers indicated that community broadband networks tend to offer notably lower pricing than their private-sector counterparts. The study also found that community broadband network pricing tends to be more transparent and less intentionally confusing than offers from incumbent ISPs like Comcast or

AT&T.

With the Trump administration's recent assault on both net neutrality and broadband privacy protections, interest in local broadband as an alternative to incumbent providers has only grown.

"What this update shows is that, despite federal hostility to community network solutions, more communities are investing than ever," Christopher Mitchell, director of the Community Broadband Networks initiative at the ILSR said. "Municipal and cooperative networks were essential in driving electrification and we are seeing the same dynamic with the expansion of high-quality Internet access."

Much like net neutrality, ISP lobbyists and policy folks have long framed municipal broadband as a partisan debate in the hopes of derailing such efforts. But the group's data shows that these networks are most frequently popping up in Conservative areas and have broad, bipartisan support. Our desire for better broadband, and our collective disdain for Comcast, tends to be one of the few things capable of bridging the partisan divide.

Incumbent ISPs have a long history of using dirty tricks to try and derail these efforts. In Illinois, regional cable and phone companies

once funded push polls (polls intentionally designed to shape, not measure public opinion) informing locals that community broadband would help subsidize porn production, or result in government rationing of TV viewing.

As we recently saw in Fort Collins, Colorado, ISPs are frequently willing to spend plenty of money in attempts to malign and denigrate community broadband at every

opportunity. They've long been afraid of this trend taking off and threatening the cash cow that is the overall lack of competition in countless markets nationwide.

"Evidence from other cities suggests that a real choice in broadband services could reduce Comcast's revenues by millions of dollars per month," the group stated in a policy brief late last year. "Competition in Fort Collins would cost Comcast between \$5.4 million

and \$22.8 million per year. In Seattle, robust competition would cost between \$20 million and \$84 million per year."

ISPs eager to nip these efforts in the bud could offer better, cheaper broadband. Instead, they've chose to spend that money lobbying for state laws prohibiting your town or city from even exploring the option.

Karl Bode writes for *Motherboard* and other publications.

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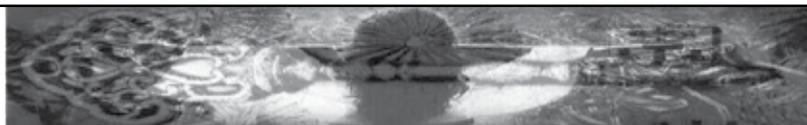


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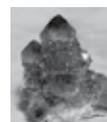
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F I L M
**BLACK PANTHER:
A THRILLING
SUPERHERO STORY**

G L E N W E L D O N

In 1938, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster — two Jewish kids from Cleveland who were reading the alarming news coming out of Europe — created precisely the hero necessary to put things right: an impossibly strong and nigh-invulnerable paragon of virtue and butt-kicking they called Superman. He could have ended Hitler's advance with a snap of his fingers — and he definitely would have, if only he weren't a creature of pure fantasy. Three years later, as the Nazi threat escalated, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby went a step further, summoning into being a hero who was essentially an American flag come to dynamic, Hitler-punching life. They called him Captain America, because subtlety is not what superhero comics are about.

There's a poignancy in the fact that these two heroes were products of grim necessity — a global menace threatened our way of life, and a nation gripped by fear and anxiety found in Superman and Captain America twin release valves. By indulging in the belief that someone big and strong and primary-colored could rescue them and beat the bad guy, Americans managed to steal a few moments of vicarious satisfaction.

There was a hole in the world, so they created heroes to fix it.

That same poignancy permeates *Black Panther*, which is Marvel Studio's 18th superhero movie, though it certainly doesn't feel like it. Ryan Coogler's third film is, happily, no by-the-numbers, big-budget hero narrative of the sort to which we've grown inured — it's by turns as intimate and immediate as 2013's *Fruitvale Station* and as stirring as 2015's *Creed*.

Chadwick Boseman is

T'Challa, king of Wakanda, an unimaginably advanced, ruthlessly isolationist African nation that hides its riches and its tech from the world at large. Wakanda, as vividly and gorgeously realized here, is a soaring Afro-futurist utopia powered by the world's rarest, hardest and blue-glowiest metal, vibranium. (Fair warning: If one were to sneak a flask into a screening of *Black Panther* and drink every time any character says the word "vibranium," one would spend the film's final hour in the lobby having one's stomach pumped by a team of professionals.)

It's a credit to the production team that, even after 18 times at-bat, we're still finding innovative ways to visualize superhero tech (this time out,

But in a much more crucial way, *Black Panther* is a story we haven't seen told before in popular cinema — a story about black people completely untouched by colonialism, who exist entirely outside the global systems of institutionalized racism.

— Glen Weldon

it's a kind of *Matrix*-meets-Magic-Sand sort of deal), and still turning out fight choreography and stunts capable of quickening even the most jaded pulse (a nighttime car chase through the streets of Seoul, South Korea, includes a moment engineered to elicit cheers, because Coogler knows what these films are about).

Plus there are war rhinos, so. I mean.

As for the story, it is a truth universally acknowledged that wherever there is a palace, there must be palace intrigue: T'Challa's claim to the throne is challenged by Michael

B. Jordan's fabulously monikered Killmonger, who manages to mong quite a few kills before facing off against his rival. Like all of the best villains, Killmonger's motivations are grounded in his zeal to correct a great injustice — one may quibble with his master plan's methodology (i.e., the wholesale slaughter of billions), but you gotta admit: Dude has a point.

The Walking Dead's Danai Gurira, as Okoye, leads Wakanda's elite corps of female warriors, the sight of which in combat provides many of the film's most thrilling moments. Shuri (Letitia Wright), T'Challa's wry and brilliant younger sister, supplies the kingdom with its tech, and the film with its laugh lines. Lupita Nyong'o plays a love interest who's actually interesting — a young woman who chafes against Wakanda's age-old policy of hoarding its wealth and tech from the world. Angela Bassett is on hand, along with her cheekbones, to look regal and fierce in costume designer Ruth E. Carter's royal couture.

There's also a couple of middle-aged white dudes (Martin Freeman and Andy Serkis) doing stuff somewhere in the background, but never mind, the film isn't about them.

Which, of course, is truly what's new here.

The genre of superhero cinema is wider and deeper than many give it credit for, because the stories we've seen thus

far have followed similar arcs, starring similar actors, in similar settings. In *Black Panther*, Coogler, too, rounds the familiar bases: Yes, those T'Challa versus Killmonger scenes *do* duly check the "Hero Fights Evil Version of Himself" box; yes, you've seen elements of that car chase before; and yes, the sudden but inevitable death of a supporting character does inspire T'Challa to scream "NOOOOOOO!" because that's the law.

But in a much more crucial way, *Black Panther* is a story we haven't seen told before in popular cinema — a story about black people

completely untouched by colonialism, who exist entirely outside the global systems of institutionalized racism.

It's a fantasy, in other words — but then, that's exactly what superhero stories are for. It's difficult to explain the simple, inspiring and empowering joy of seeing a version of oneself onscreen, to those who've spent their lives unthinkingly soaking in it. A key reason for Wonder Woman's runaway success last summer was that moment she climbed out of that trench, revealed herself to the world, withstood an onslaught of machine-gun fire and proceeded to get Amazonian on some enemy soldiers. Male heroes have been doing something similar for

decades, in and out of spandex, but now, women in the audience got the chance to feel the raw and blissfully uncomplicated power of representation and understand what the nerds in their life saw in this silly stuff. *Black Panther* is filled with similar moments: a pan-African cast getting hero moment after hero moment in a gorgeous Afro-futurist setting where the light is always golden, and the tech is always glowy.

There is a hole in the world, a big one. And although one movie, one fictional hero, can't fix it, it can tell a story — a new story — that millions have hungered for.

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A federal court in California has ruled that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) unlawfully detained thousands of suspected immigrants on the basis of unconstitutional requests from ICE known as immigration detainers.

The landmark decision entitles class members to injunctive relief and monetary damages and is a result of two lawsuits brought by the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), the law firm of Kaye, McLane, Bednarski & Litt, the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), and the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project.

"The court's decision vindicates years of work by the Los Angeles immigrant community to challenge the Sheriff Department's abuses and throws a major wrench in the Trump administration's deportation machine," said Jessica Bansal, litigation director of NDLON.

"Together with the recently enacted California VALUES Act, this decision is proof that Trump's assault on immigrants faces stiff—and effective—opposition in the streets, the state legislatures, and the courts."

The decision issued in *Roy v. County of Los Angeles* and *Gonzalez v. ICE* holds the LASD liable for

violating the Fourth Amendment rights of thousands of inmates detained without probable cause of any crime, including some who were held for days after they should have been released. It also holds that the LASD unconstitutionally incarcerated thousands of individuals with low bail amounts who would not even have been booked into jail if it were not for unconstitutional immigration detainers. Based on this decision, members of both classes may be entitled to monetary damages.

Kaye, McLane, Bednarski & Litt. "This decision holds law enforcement agencies accountable for anti-immigrant abuse of their authority."

The decision issued in *Gonzalez v. ICE* holds that ICE's practice of issuing detainers based on evidence of a person's foreign place of birth and no other information about a person's citizenship or immigration status violates the Fourth Amendment. It also holds that its practice of issuing detainers without obtaining an administrative warrant

violates its own statutory arrest authority. The decision entitles a national class of people currently subject to immigration detainers to relief from their detainers.

The court further found that factual issues about certain detainer-related practices of ICE and LASD would require a trial.

"This decision is a victory for the constitutional rights of both citizens and noncitizens alike who for years have been subject to unlawful arrest and detention due to ICE's immigration requests," said Jennie Pasquarella, director of immigrants' rights and senior staff attorney for the ACLU of Southern California. "As the highly polemical 'sanctuary city' debate continues, this decision further clarifies that the immigration detainers at the heart of that debate are unlawful and that police who honor them violate the constitution."

"The ICE detainer program damages communities and is built on a foundation of illegality," said Mark Fleming, associate director of litigation at the NIJC. "We are pleased that this court joined other precedents across the country in recognizing the statutory and constitutional problems with detainers."

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violates the Fourth
Amendment.**

– ACLU Southern California

"For years, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the largest law enforcement agency in the United States, callously denied immigrants constitutional protections that universally apply to all other jail detainees – unjustifiably holding them without cause as prisoners," said Lindsay Battles, an attorney with

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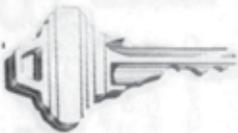
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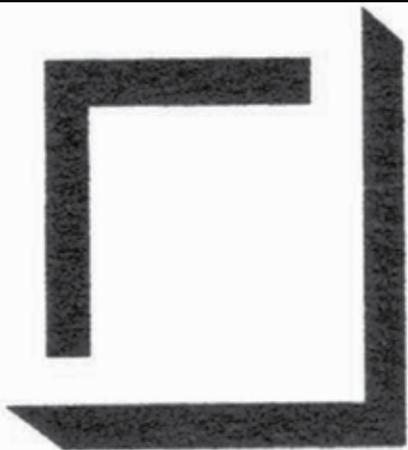
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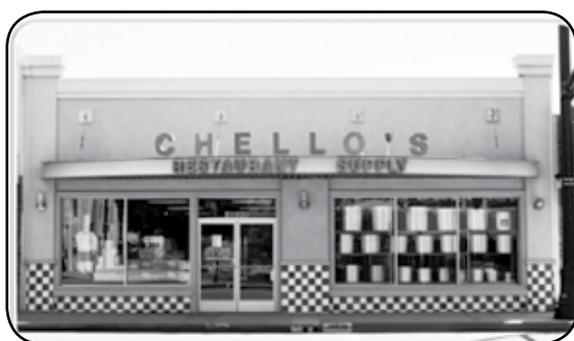
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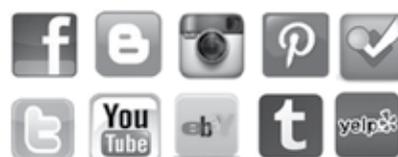
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