

Jaroujiji (Eureka), California, U.S.A.

Apparently a white man named James Marshall found it first, a glittering nugget in a creek at Sutter's Mill in 1848, then the rush was on. They came like ants to golden cookie crumbs, but unlike ants, they didn't share. Only a relatively few got rich, the rest stayed poor. This morning I saw an old Wiyot woman, her face weathered like a desert mountain, sitting on a curb beside the golden arches imploring each car exiting the drive-thru for something, please, anything helps. Beside her were 3 other indigenous indigents holding greasy cardboard signs with illegible scrawlings.

In 1850 after the Yankees won the Mexican War – an overtly racist war which, for the lily-white powers that be, for Manifest Destiny, nicely coincided with the Gold Rush – California joined the Union as a “free” state in which tens of thousands of African and Native-American children, women and men were enslaved. Southern whites brought their slaves west to mine for gold in the Golden State. The first elected governor of California, a former slaveholder from Tennessee named Peter Hardeman Burnett, called for the extirpation of the Indian race. Since *they* were primitive savages incapable of becoming civilized (as evidenced by their continuous theft of *our* horses and cattle, the punishment for which ought to be death) and since so many had already perished either of disease or in open range/race wars, the Indian race was like a mortally wounded animal with no hope of recovery, it should be put out of its misery. Burnett advocated genocide as a humane solution.

He also tried to prevent blacks (free or slave) from entering California under any circumstances. Since the 2 races couldn't possibly coexist peacefully side-by-side, Burnett believed it would only lead to a race war, an idea Charles Manson would exploit over a hundred years later. Burnett's worldview mirrored the worldview of most white folks, including Andrew Jackson, the first “populist” president who promised to keep the African enslaved in perpetuity. Old Hickory, a staunch proponent of corporal punishment, owned 161 slaves and routinely beat them for misbehaving. Those who tried to escape were tied up in chains and severely lashed nearly to death. If he happened to kill one, it was considered the equivalent of losing a mule or breaking a plow wheel. As for “the Indian problem,” Jackson promised to solve it through forced relocation, violent removal.

Native people originally had no concept of land ownership, land as a commodity to be bought and sold. It wouldn't make sense for a salmon or a fox or a human or a hawk to own an isolated piece of water or land or sky because creatures aren't separate from their environment. Creatures are fully embodied

features of the whole organic structure of the world. Our beings are an extension of Earth. For a Native person, to sell a piece of land would be to sell a body part. So some Europeans declared Native lands *terra nulla* – empty, unowned, there to be claimed, there for the taking. Other Europeans forced Native people to adopt the concept of land ownership so white settlers could “legally” acquire those lands by various nefarious means. Remember that joke about the Woody Guthrie lyrics: *this land is your land, and this land is my land*. Hmm, someone must've forged a deed to *this land*.

Thomas Jefferson's preferred method was to force Native people into extreme debt so they'd have no choice but to give up their land, a method which dated back to the 1650s. One thing Natives were indebted for was health care – for European diseases against which their shamans were powerless. Exorbitant health care costs, medical bankruptcies, some things haven't changed in 370 years. White patriarchs, from Puritan leaders to presidents like Jefferson and Jackson, presented Indians with an ultimatum: assimilation or annihilation. For many Native people they amounted to the same, since assimilation didn't necessarily guarantee survival, and if it did it was at the highest possible cost, the loss of one's cultural-linguistic identity, the spirit torn from one's being.

In 1830 Andrew Jackson signed The Indian Removal Act, a highly controversial piece of legislation with genocidal intent. After the Supreme Court declared the Cherokee a sovereign nation (with its own written language, its own constitution and legal system) whose lands could not legally be taken from them, Jackson simply ignored the decision and allowed armed white Georgians to remove Cherokee families from their homes by force. By now many Cherokees were short-haired, English-speaking Christian farmers. It didn't matter. In the winter of 1838 tens of thousands of human beings – Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, Seminole, Wyandot, Kickapoo, Potowatomi, Shawnee, Lanape and others – were forced to march west for hundreds of miles in the snow with little to no food or water. Over 4,000 died of either gunshot wounds, hypothermia, disease or starvation on The Trail of Tears.

One of Donald Trump's first acts as president was to have the portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the oval office removed and replaced by a portrait of Andrew Jackson. It's rumored Andrew Jackson will be removed from the 20-dollar-bill and replaced by Harriet Tubman. If and when this happens, expect a white backlash by neo-Nazi groups, an echo of the white backlash to every stage of black advancement,

including the one led by the KKK after the Civil War to re-establish white supremacy and black subservience, leading to the complete destruction of Reconstruction via disenfranchisement (poll taxes, grandfather clauses), sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, separate and unequal institutions, hiring discrimination, housing discrimination, redlining, the establishment of black slums and ghettos; the white backlash to the civil rights movement resulting in racial profiling, police brutality, mass incarceration; and the white backlash to the Obama presidency led by the alt-right white nationalist movement, the rise of Trump.

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The title-chain of every land-parcel in California traces back to the King of Spain. Before it was Mexico and before it was Spain, the territory now labeled California was inhabited by more than 500 Native tribes. 176 remain. Around 325 different tribes of human beings, each with its own cultural-linguistic heritage, stories, games, spiritual practices, erased. Most died of European diseases they had no immunity to, the rest were enslaved, raped, murdered en masse.

White settlers here in Eureka, the Wiyot ancestral homeland called Jaroujiji' (meaning *a place to sit and rest*), were typical. They considered Indians sub-human, demonizing them as horse- and cattle-rustlers, obstacles to white progress and freedom. Just before dawn on February 26th 1860, while young Wiyot men were away gathering supplies for the World Renewal Festival, a white gang entered the Wiyot village on Tuluwat Island (in the middle of what is now Humboldt Bay), shot all the elders and butchered women, children and infants with hatchets and bowie knives. The journalist Brett Harte described the graphics, "heads split by axes or beaten to jelly with clubs." After the massacre the white gang wanted official recognition as a state militia – they wanted to be paid for protecting life and property (of white folks). Though the Tuluwat Island incident was the most publicized, there were at least 56 other confirmed massacres in Humboldt County alone.

Yesterday, driving across Samoa Bridge listening to David Bowie sing "Young Americans" and thinking of James Bowie, an American soldier and frontiersman after whom the bowie knife is named, I gazed out at Tuluwat Island and saw thru foggy haze a large colony of egrets in a lush cypress grove. In 2017 as a gesture of apology, Tuluwat was finally officially returned to the Wiyot tribe. The entire city

of Eureka is built on ancestral Wiyot land, but the question of giving any other piece of it back was never considered. Almost daily I drive past Tuluwat and glance at the egrets' haunting elegance.

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When white settlers discovered red gold, the redwood forest was liquidated. Diabolical alchemy, primeval trees (some of them 300 feet tall and 2,500 years old) metamorphosed into money, most of it in the coffers of a few white-mustachioed timber-barons whose progeny still own much of Humboldt County. Behind the Victorian facade, Eureka was a hard-workin', -drinkin', -fightin', -gamblin', -prostitutin' town founded on resource extraction and Indian eradication.

Even though only 1% of old-growth redwood forest remains, the vast stands of 2nd- and 3rd-growth redwood or mixed conifer which have been conserved and relatively well-maintained, make much of Humboldt County quite lovely, still.

I live upstairs, in a white Victorian duplex built of solid redwood heartwood in 1895. In my bedroom closet where the ancient wallpaper has peeled away, several jaundiced pages of the April 11, 1901 San Francisco Chronicle are still stuck to redwood slats – multiple ads encouraging folks to invest in one of the many “reputable” oil companies in the state. One of the ads equates oil with water, maybe referring to the day someone realized there was an untapped sea of oil beneath the California soil. Black gold, the resource that fueled the 20th century, would make only a relatively few putridly rich, while making almost everyone else addicts, completely dependent upon a seemingly endless supply of the magical black narcotic that turns gold when refined, then black again when it burns, cooking the planet.

Gold, red gold, black gold, and now green gold, the cannabis boom, a new green revolution, not that it's “environmentally friendly.” Quite the contrary. With legalization came regulation, taxation and a permitting process so lengthy and costly that most growers find it more lucrative to remain on the black market, polluting watersheds with chemical fertilizers.

A combination of geographic isolation (5 hours north of San Francisco), a perennially depressed economy and a climate often characterized by 53 degrees and foggy has saved Eureka, so far, from the

whitewashing of gentrification. Some of the Victorians have been left to rot. One look at one and you know it's not up to code, but it's still inhabited. Many of them are owned by the same slumlord who's currently facing a class action lawsuit. Some of the Victorians have been gloriously, majestically renovated, though they sometimes resemble overly-wrought doll houses. The one across the street has a tall white corniced fence all around it, behind the fence elaborate brickworks, towering cedar and juniper hedges, an enormous southern magnolia, camellias, lilacs, rhododendrons, roses, a butterfly bush, a lime tree, a lemon tree, and a garden I can't see from here. About twice a year the white fence gets spraypainted with awkwardly-shaped letters of rude words, usually misspelled. The diligent gardener and maintenance woman dutifully cleans and repaints it the following day.

Just 2 blocks north stands a series of apartments with no aesthetic pretensions whatsoever, one of them fairly rundown, a few broken windows covered with cardboard or cloth and masking tape. Most of the houses in this neighborhood were built in the 1950s, rectangular cubes beneath A-framed roofs, some with slightly steeper slopes, each with a slightly different pitch. Every house is a different color. Even the whites aren't the same white – one has a faint yellow tinge like French vanilla ice cream. A wide palette of hues and shades: there's pink, beige, a peach-colored one with a turquoise door, a caramel with a russet chimney, a mint-green with a forest-green gable, a half milk-blue/half royal-blue beside an olive-green with slate-grey trim. There's a brown house with a brown roof. Then there's a red one, its once white molding now rusted orange. That one's claret or maybe magenta. And there's one that used to be Cosmopolitan but the chocolate, vanilla and strawberry have long since melted into a single tawny tone. The houses have as much variety as human skin tones.

This 126-year-old egg-white Victorian has been maintained just enough to allow for continuous habitation, as a rental probably since the 1960s. I've lived here for 17 years now, because my landlord hasn't raised the rent since the Reagan Administration, when the gap between rich and poor grew wider than at any time before or since, when funding for community mental health programs disappeared and the mentally ill became street-dwellers sleeping in alleys. When I was born at Saint Joseph's Hospital in 1972, Eureka was 95% white. Now, in 2021, at least this particular neighborhood is nicely mixed, economically and ethnically. Thru my north-facing window in the park across the street black, brown and white kids are playing basketball, 8 Hmong kids are playing volleyball (it's Saturday after all), a Wiyot Mom and her son are passing a soccer ball back and forth (he wants her to kick it higher so he

can head it back to her), and 2 little white girls in matching red helmets, pink dresses and purple roller skates are rolling slowly, their grandma under a sun hat watching from a bench, around the tennis courts, the tennis crew having left for the day.

Someone waves enthusiastically at L.J., the mailman. Everybody waves at L.J., a good-natured, soft-spoken, dignified black man who, casually and subtly, radiates kindness and generosity.

Rodney, a 64-year-old gregarious black man, is the unacknowledged legislator, the mayor, the Harold Washington of the tennis courts, where he gives lessons to young and old and plays doubles. Shortly after George Floyd's murder, Rodney was leaving the court walking to his truck, I'd just parked right behind him. I got out, greeted him and he said, "What's up, E-dog." Then he shook his head slowly, sadly and said, "they killin' us, man, they *killin'* us." For a second I thought he was referring to tennis, but then I knew better. "They still killin' us, E, they ain't never stopped killin' us."

"I know Rod, I know." I put my hand gently on his shoulder, noticing new white paint on tinted glass on the back of his truck – *Black Lives Matter* in an elegant cursive arc around a big fist (a direct link to the Black Panthers' *Black Power* movement). Rodney was silent for a minute which was unusual, so I told him I'd recently seen an excellent documentary about James Baldwin called *I Am Not Your Negro*. My stomach dropped for a second, the shame of hubris, a white dude informing a black man about black culture? Thankfully he hadn't seen it yet. He said he'd check it out as soon as he could and thanked me. We lightly touched fists and parted.

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Baldwin wrote and spoke eloquently about how senseless it was for poor white folks in particular to be racist, since they had much more in common with most black folks than with middle- and upper-class whites. They should unite in opposition to the system that oppresses them all. Baldwin was disarmingly charming. Because he wasn't physically formidable, being a petite gay man, white folks felt safe and secure as he explained to them the nature of their malady – how they take the dark scary energy of the unconscious, the origin of nightmares, their deepest insecurities and anxieties and project it all outward onto the dark-skinned other. It's true, I know, I've done it myself.

Until recently, when I saw a black person I didn't know, often the N-word would pop into my head automatically, the one word I didn't want to think of, but the harder I tried to suppress it the more tenaciously it would cling. During meditation I try to detach from thoughts, not by suppressing them but by allowing them to arise and pass away without fixating or extrapolating on any particular thought. But at some point I realized that this thought, the N-word, wasn't something I could let come and go anymore without causing anguish. It was something that needed to be reckoned with and processed. Why this word and what does it mean?

It's meant not just to demean but to dehumanize someone, to make me feel superior to someone not based on any merit whatsoever, but solely on physical appearance. So I had to ask myself, am I really so insecure that I need to feel superior to someone based on the fact that I have lower levels of melanin in my skin? Or that I have thinner lips than this person, or a narrower nose, blue eyes instead of brown, straight blond hair instead of curly black? Apparently for all these years the answer has been yes, which is exactly why I never asked myself the question.

Yes, my culture has bequeathed me its diseases. Having been born and assimilated into a thoroughly racist culture isn't my fault. It's the water we all swim in, no one's exempt. But whether or not to confront my subconscious racism by bringing it up into the light of consciousness, is a choice. If you're someone for whom the unexamined life is no longer worth living, then you don't have a choice, you have to face it. My sense is that most white people refuse to confront their own subconscious racism because it's too daunting. We do a quick cost-benefit analysis and decide it would be a difficult, scary process without yielding much reward. We don't have any incentive to do this potentially painful work because we aren't negatively affected by white supremacy; on the contrary, we benefit by it.

Where I grew up white supremacy was never talked about. It was a taboo subject, strictly avoided for fear of triggering white shame and guilt. White supremacy was never explicitly taught in school, church or any other societal institution, but it was always implied, taken as a given, an inevitable, ineluctable fact of existence. By being naturalized it was rationalized as being the way things are, as right as rain. But there's nothing natural about racism. No baby has ever been born a racist. Whether advanced and propagated explicitly or implicitly, it's learned. To unlearn it requires descending into the black depths of the psyche. Whatever seems too overwhelming to face, we repress. But as Freud discovered, the

repressed refuses to stay repressed. It returns in the form of a symptom.

The mass incarceration of black people (the new Jim Crow), the growing number of unarmed black people murdered by police, the fact that most of America remains deeply segregated, that most black people live in impoverished, disenfranchised, notoriously overpoliced neighborhoods with a dearth of access to quality education, food, jobs and health care, these are all symptoms of the fact that white people in general, and white people in positions of power in particular, are still unwilling to confront their own subconscious racism.

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From 1988 to 1990 I played football for Glendale High School. Of the 9 other schools in our league 2 of them were all black schools. There may've been 1 or 2 white kids on those teams, likely from relatively poor families. And we always had 1 or 2 black kids on our team, from relatively wealthy families. I remember wondering why those schools in those more urban neighborhoods were almost all black. I believed, along with my white peers, that they segregated themselves by choice because they didn't like us and didn't care to live among us. What wasn't taught at my high-school was that those black neighborhoods were a direct consequence of racist public policy – housing discrimination, redlining, the deliberate creation of urban reservations for black people. What I didn't realize is that black families wanted to live in those urban reservations about as much as my white peers and I did.

I wonder now how many of those black kids I played against had grandfathers who fought in World War 2, like my grandfather did. When he returned home from the war he went to UCLA on the GI Bill, a token for his service to Uncle Sam. Then he got a job at Sears & Roebuck managing the catalog department (the Sears catalog was something like the internet of its day). With a government-subsidized housing loan he bought a beautiful home in Glendale, a white, middle-class suburb in Los Angeles. My grandfather was a fun-loving prankster who sometimes made racist jokes.

The grandfathers of the black kids I played against probably served in all black regiments during the war. If and when they returned home they weren't allowed to go to college on the GI Bill, and they certainly weren't offered any government-subsidized housing loans, because they were black. Never

thanked by Uncle Sam for their service, they returned to their segregated urban reservations and did the best they could. Yes, those neighborhoods have changed in the last 30 plus years, but not very much.

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It isn't just racism. Being born and assimilated into American society entails the normalization and naturalization of other prejudices like sexism, homophobia and xenophobia, none of which were talked about when I was growing up – they were all repressed.

One of my downstairs neighbors, a burly butch Latina named Taylor, is a nurse who's certain that when the pandemic ends she'll lose her hero status. Taylor's a compassionate woman who doesn't take any shit from anyone – cops, homophobes, even her wife Elaine, the effervescent femme singer whose mellifluous falsetto voice sometimes rises thru the floor to serenade me.

Madeleine lives across the street to the west. An elderly white widow, she's quite sweet on the surface, but beneath it she's a bit picky about particular people, and her pickiness can be prickly. After Taylor parked in front of Madeleine's house for the 2nd time, Madeleine threatened to call the police. “Go 'head 'n' call the cops honey, it's a public street,” said Taylor, but she stopped parking there anyway because she didn't want to give Madeleine a heart attack and then have to go save her. I once heard Madeleine refer to Taylor and Elaine as *lez beans*, not pinto beans or kidney beans but *lez beans*. When I told Taylor she smiled and said, “if she would've called me a *lez beaner* I would've laughed. I'd've given her credit for that.”

Rodney told me he grew up in a black neighborhood in San Francisco, but every weekday morning he got on a bus and rode all the way across town to a white school, because his mom wanted him to have at least a halfway decent education. I pictured one of the trophies I used to have in my closet – *Athlete of the Year, White School, 1984*. Eddy Zenteno, the playground bully, told me the only reason I won it was because Mr. Bell was a racist. “Tae should've won it,” said Eddy, “and you know it.” I thought he was gonna say Terrence should've won – Terrence Quarrels, the only black kid at R.D. White Elementary, I think he rode the bus to school as well. Terrence Quarrels, no, he didn't quarrel with anybody, everyone liked Terrence, we all played together, for fun, yes, but competitively. Maybe Eddy

was right. Tae Yun was tall and strong, a fast runner, a gifted athlete. But then, maybe Eddy was jealous because he didn't win it. He shared 3rd place with David Sanchez, who taught me how to make bird calls in the bathroom by getting my hands wet, cupping them together and blowing into the space between my thumbs, then opening my fingers to raise the pitch – something I still do in the ocean, sitting on my board waiting for the next set.

A few years ago an old high-school friend informed me that Eddy Zenteno had suicided, leaving behind his wife and 2 teenagers, a boy and a girl. The last time I saw Eddy was at his wedding in 1991. I remember breakdancing, then playing a blowup pink and black electric guitar and singing along way too loudly to AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long." Eddy seemed genuinely happy.

Eddy was only a bully in elementary school. In jr. high and high-school, before he dropped out, he was fun, funny, mischievous. I remember dropping him off in an alley behind some grungy apartment – he didn't want me to come inside. Later I learned it was because his parents didn't speak English, they were poor and he was ashamed.

Eddy's elementary school – the elementary school both my parents, my brother and I attended in Glendale, California – was named after Richardson D. White, the City Superintendent of Schools (white schools, that is) in the 1920s. His great grandfather, William Henry White, left Westmoreland County, England in 1765 and settled in Virginia, where he became a landowner, a slaver and a soldier in George Washington's army during the Revolutionary War, fighting against his homeland. George Washington inherited his first 10 slaves when he was 11 years old. By the time he died there were 317 slaves at Mt. Vernon.

At Monticello, Thomas Jefferson owned over 600 slaves in his lifetime. His memorable phrase, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" was an edit of John Locke's phrase, "life, liberty, and property." Maybe Jefferson felt self-conscious about the word *property*, a little squeamish about being judged for having so much of it in the form of human beings (though he clearly conceived of Africans as an inferior breed of sub-humans – enslaving them for plantation labor was just as justified as yoking oxen). Despite the edit, the importance of property (private property) was paramount to the founding fathers (as it is to the ruling class today), so much so that in the beginning only white male property

owners could vote.

The unedited version of John Locke's phrase occurs in the 14th amendment, which states that no State shall “deprive any person of *life, liberty, and property*, without due process of law.” Meant to protect former slaves from persecution it became law in 1868, but it was recently used by the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The court's conservative super-majority argued that since a woman's lack of access to abortion services at the time of the 14th amendment didn't constitute an infringement upon her liberty, then it doesn't constitute an infringement upon her liberty now, in 2022. But in 1868 women had no rights to speak of – they were the *property* of their fathers until they became the *property* of their husbands. Women wouldn't win the vote for over 50 years. Most women had no access to education, no right to self-determination whatsoever, no property rights, including their “own” bodies, no right to choose whether or not, or when, to have a family, and no right to choose to pursue this or that interest (so much for “the pursuit of happiness”). According to the logic of the court's conservative super-majority, a woman's right to vote could be abdicated as well as her right to contraception. Same-sex marriage could be recriminalized, even miscegenation laws reintroduced. I mean, if the Supreme Court wanted to ban inter-racial marriage again, it could do so based on exactly the same grounds, because the fact that a white person couldn't marry a black person in 1868 certainly wasn't deemed an infringement upon anyone's liberty then, so why should it be so today?

Apparently to “Make America Great Again” is to make it not like it was during the Reagan era (which is where the Trump slogan originated) but like it was in 1868, though maybe it's more accurate to regard the Trump era as an echo of the radical and overwhelming backlash against Reconstruction beginning in the late 1870s, after a period of black political empowerment that lasted a little over a decade – Obama reigned for 8 years.

Because a relatively few wealthy white male landowners (patriarchs, oligarchs) owned not only their white women but vast quantities of slaves, and had children by them (so as to increase their property holdings and their work force), many African-Americans around the country today have names like Washington, Jefferson and Jackson.

Benjamin Franklin, the wise elder of the founding fathers who, by using his wit, charm and celebrity to

persuade the French crown to underwrite and bankroll the American revolution, arguably did more than anyone else to help win the war, and who in his twilight years wrote and spoke eloquently in favor of abolition, never freed a single one of his own slaves. Hypocrisy has remained a persistent American hallmark.

Employing hyperbole and hypocrisy as propaganda, Washington's rhetoric in favor of the war was always couched in terms of the master/slave dichotomy. England, the Crown, the Master wasn't just insulting us with these damn taxes, It was abusing us, forcing us to suffer the worst indignities, treating us like chattel, shackling us, enslaving us. Us. We, the People.

R.D. White's father, Edward White, was a soldier in the Civil War for 4 years in General Lee's army. When I was a boy my favorite TV show was The Dukes of Hazzard, my favorite matchbox car a replica of the General Lee, the star of the show, a beautiful orange 1969 Dodge Charger, a hot rod with the number 01 on the side and a Confederate flag on the roof (it was an American-made 2010 Dodge Challenger a white supremacist Trump supporter drove through a crowd of anti-fascist protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, murdering 1 person and wounding 35). No one explained to me at the time that the Confederate flag was a symbol so suffused with racism it can function as a surrogate for a swastika, if a swastika is unavailable. Even black kids watched The Dukes of Hazzard, and I'm guessing that the meaning of the flag and the meaning of the glorification of the Old South was kept from them, at least until they were older.

Like R.D. White's paternal ancestors my maternal ones settled in Virginia and yes, they too owned slaves. While researching our family tree, one of my uncles who still lives in Virginia discovered we're directly related to the James clan, including the infamous outlaws Frank and Jesse James.

Once when I was dating Avril, an African-American physical therapist in Eureka, during a chicken dinner at my place she left a few chunks of dark meat on her plate, then looked at me with a seductively insolent smile and said, "I only like white meat." I laughed, thinking it was a perfectly provocative joke, but then she told me she'd only ever dated one black guy and it didn't work out at all. All her other boyfriends and lovers had been white. When I told her I lived in Oakland for 2 years, she said she wouldn't want to live there. Why not? "Too many black folk," she said. I decided to leave it alone, but

later it occurred to me that her internalized anti-blackness was a form of self-loathing.

I remember a black police officer on TV talking about his department being forced to take a class on “implicit bias.” It was understood the bias was mainly against black people. He balked, “wait, but *I'm* black, so that's not even a *thing*.” Then he started being mindful of his behavior on the job and realized pretty quickly that yes, it *is* a thing, he too was treating people differently based solely on their skin color. He was far more suspicious of black people, assuming them of criminal intent much more readily than white people. Internalized anti-blackness doesn't discriminate, a truth portrayed eloquently and devastatingly by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*, recently banned in Florida by conservative white lawmakers presumably to protect white feelings, to prevent triggering white shame and guilt. I find it difficult to believe any of them has ever read it.

Once Avril showed me a picture of herself and 2 friends dressed for a 1970s-themed Halloween party – bell-bottoms, black tanktops, makeup and big round natural afro wigs, Angela Davis-style. They looked confident, hip and thrilled, but it wasn't clear whether their costumes were a tribute or a parody, whether they were mocking or celebrating their heritage. Maybe both. I quoted James Brown, “say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud,” trying to forget the fact that James Brown was a staunch Nixon supporter. Avril's relationship with her own blackness was ambivalent. When I told her about being related to Jesse James, she thought it was pretty cool. We both assumed he was some kind of sexy rebel, a Robin Hood figure. Later, after Avril and I broke up and she moved away, I learned the truth about my ancestors.

Frank and Jesse's father Robert James owned 6 slaves and 100 acres of farmland in Missouri, which was a border state, split between South (slave) and North (free). Avril's last name is Freeman. The Jameses were southern to the bone. Frank and Jesse were pro-Confederate insurgent guerrillas, vigilantes, gangsters, terrorists. As for Robin Hood, it was just PR propaganda, they never shared a single penny of loot with anyone outside the gang. They killed Union soldiers and scalped them, they killed civilian abolitionists and fugitive slaves, then they killed ex-Union soldiers, Lincoln Republicans, Union sympathizers or any innocent bystander, black or white, who happened to get in their way during a bank robbery. They once robbed a train wearing black, Zoro-like KKK masks. They did more than their share to make sure Reconstruction would fail miserably, that white supremacy as the foundational

ideology would endure, that racial strife and racial violence would remain a prominent part of the American landscape.

Jesse was devilishly handsome, like Bo Duke – hot blonds with white stars in their Confederate blue eyes. These are my ancestors, this is my country, where homicidal racist sociopaths are painted as heroes. When armed white supremacists raided the capital on January 6th 2021, the demonic spirit of the James brothers was palpable.

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After chatting with L.J. one day, I started thinking about skin color. The Washington *Redskins*? Of course Native people felt deeply hurt and humiliated by it. Imagine a game between the Wisconsin Whiteskins and the Mississippi Blackskins. Imagine the Whiteskins captain rallying his troops before their battle against the Yellowskins saying, “we gonna drop a bomb on them yellerebellied yellerskins.” I know, that's a gross exaggeration of American history. Is it?

Thru my north-facing window I see Tony Ren pulling up in his shiny white Mazda convertible with red upholstery, a Chinese-American man in a Japanese car. Wearing white Nike tennis shoes, black Nike shorts, a chartreuse top and a purple Nike hat, a blue racquet bag slung over one shoulder, he's heading confidently to the tennis court. Tony often refers to himself, self-deprecatingly, as Chinese, but he has a swagger about him, an heir of American alpha machismo. Tony's a handsome man with a lovely tan, his rich brown skin slightly darker than Rodney's – they're standing side-by-side at the moment.

During the Gold Rush, Chinamen were seen by white prospectors and miners as extremely undesirable competition. After the Gold Rush, since Chinese laborers tended to be more skilled than their white counterparts and more willing to work for lower wages, Chinese immigrants were seen by whites in general as an economic threat. As sinophobia grew, Chinese immigrants were persecuted. Acts of ethnic cleansing took place throughout Northern California. On February 6th 1885 a white city councilman (they were all white, of course) caught in the crossfire of a gunfight in Eureka's Chinatown, was shot and killed. The next day the white citizens decided to deport all 480 Chinese residents of Eureka, whether they were American citizens or not. They were placed on 2 steamships to San Francisco, and

Eureka's Chinatown was demolished and burned. An alleyway where Chinatown once stood was recently designated Charlie Moon Way, in honor of one of the few who escaped the expulsion and somehow managed to remain in Humboldt County for the rest of his life.

In 1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act barred all Chinese laborers, skilled or unskilled, from entering the U.S. (Donald Trump's Muslim ban was nothing new). Chinese Exclusion wasn't repealed until 1943, when China became a U.S. ally against Japan in World War 2. Then in 1950 China supported the communist North during the Korean War and became a U.S. enemy again.

Chinese Exclusion was enforced in Eureka until 1959. I wonder if Tony knows that less than a lifetime ago he would've been forcibly removed not just from the tennis court but from the Eureka city limits, likely beaten and dropped off in the woods with no food or water. And Rodney wouldn't've been caught dead here in the first place. There were no separate “colored” hotels, restaurants, bathrooms or drinking fountains, though a dingy motel built in the late 1950s still stands beside its original billboard advertising the latest modern amenity, “COLOR TV.”

No one's skin is crow-black, and no one's skin is snow-white. Black and white are labels created in order to exaggerate a difference to the point of diametrical opposition, a diabolical hyperbole. White is affiliated with light, virtue (“that's mighty white of you”), righteousness and superiority, while black is affiliated with dirtiness, vice, depravity and inferiority. The labels solidify and propagate white supremacy and black subservience. They don't clarify a subtle gradation – there are plenty of “black” people with fairer skin than the average white person. Because of the one-drop rule, someone with a black parent and a white parent can claim to be mixed race, biracial, a “mulatto” or black, but they're forbidden to be white, because whiteness must remain pure as the driven snow at all costs.

Rodney told me about one of his daughters, from a previous marriage to a white woman, getting confused while filling out a form that asked for race. The choices were White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous, or Other, and she thought she could only choose one. Why can't I just be a human being on planet Earth? Affirmative action (which the Supreme Court's conservative super-majority recently banned) was a tool for partially leveling a lopsided playing field, providing more access to opportunities historically denied to minorities. Because of the real need for reparations, repairing the

ongoing racial crimes of the past/present, keeping track of race is necessary, as messy as it is. White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous or Other hardly covers the spectrum, especially if you can only choose one. I'd known Rodney for a few years, so I felt comfortable joking, "well, too bad they didn't have a Grey box, but then I guess people would've just thought she was old."

Rodney laughed courteously, "yeah, when you get up around my age, folks don't care no more what race you are, you just *old*," then he added, "naw, but for real E, now I'm old *and* I'm black, so I'm facin' *two* kinds a prejudice."

"Yeah," I said, "I don't think ageism gets enough air-time in our youth-obsessed society."

"I know man, and you know at the Co-Op, when they offer you the old folks discount, damn, that's just insulting. But then I save 10 percent, so I'm ok with it."

"What if they had a black folks discount on top of it," I said, "it'd be like half off."

"Damn, that's good, I'd just walk in there and be like, 'come on now, I'm old and I'm black, so gimme some free shit.' For real tho, there's so many other kinds of prejudice, I mean, like thousands of different kinds. It ain't just race and age and gender and sexual preference, people are prejudiced against overweight people, disabled people, people with mental illnesses, addictions, *homeless* people, my God, they got it the worst, right – those folks are ignored and abandoned, objects of disgust and contempt. And then people are prejudiced against even the littlest things, like dyed hair or makeup or tattoos or jewelry, or what else, they're prejudiced against short people or left-handed people or people who listen to rap music or country music, I mean, anyone who's different from them in any way, it's ridiculous man."

"Yeah," I said, "bigotry knows no bounds. I think language is a big one. We tend to be prejudiced against anyone who speaks a different language than ours, or speaks our language with a foreign accent. I heard there're almost 7,000 different languages spoken on this planet."

"See, right there," said Rodney, "now that's a lotta prejudice."

“And languages are going extinct,” I continued, “at a rate of about one every two weeks. The last speaker dies and that's it, because the vast majority of languages aren't written down. Only about a hundred or so are written down, and those are colonial languages, you know, like English, Spanish...”

“German, French, Italian,” added Rodney, “Portuguese, Russian...”

“Right,” I said, “and Arabic and Mandarin, pretty much any language we could think of. Colonial languages cannibalize parts of smaller tribal languages, then they displace them or they completely annihilate them. Remember the Native American boarding schools, where kids had their long hair cut off, which was a symbol of mourning for them, then they were forced to wear the white man's clothes and speak the white man's tongue. They were forbidden to speak their own native languages, they were beaten if they did.”

“I'm sure they were beaten whether they did or not,” added Rodney. “I think the motto was 'kill the Indian and save the man.'”

“Yeah,” I said, “and eventually their tribal languages died. When a language dies the whole cultural consciousness dies along with it. It's like we have this deep need to belong to a group, a language group obviously, but also a group of like-minded people we have things in common with and wanna be around, but I guess my question is, why does belonging to a group have to mean defining ourselves in opposition to other groups?”

“And then hating on other groups, right,” added Rodney. “Well, human nature I guess, or *inhuman* nature, or *inhumane* nature anyway. While you were talkin' I was thinkin' 'bout class prejudice, you know, how white collar execs are prejudiced against us working class stiffs, and of course blue collar folks are prejudiced against their white collar supes.”

“And in the past,” I added, “blue collar folks were divided against each other. Some became diehards for the union, others thought their best bet was to obey the bosses and not get fired.”

“Or fired *at*,” Rodney made a pistol with his thumb and index finger, then concluded, “you know E, as

long as we keep fightin' amongst ourselves, the powers that be are gonna be the powers that be, I mean, forever.” That seemed a good place to leave it, so Rodney and I lightly touched fists and parted.

...

I confess, talking to Rodney or L.J. or Taylor assuages a bit of the uneasiness associated with my white-hetero-cisgendered-male-middle-class privilege. Plenty of “progressive” white folks voted for Obama partly as a means to assuage their white guilt. Obama likely understood he could take advantage of this phenomenon, but only so much. He knew there was no way he could choose a black running mate, for instance, since that would only scare away many of the white voters he was trying to attract.

I'm mostly Irish on my father's side, mostly English and Polish on my mother's. Though I embody at least 3 different ethnicities, each with its own cultural-linguistic heritage, its own history, they're blurred together into a monochrome white, the white American, with all the privileges and entitlements therein. There's a sinister paradox: an erasure of difference on one level creates an insidiously powerful difference on another, a whitewashing of whiteness (the illusion of a non-ethnic neutrality, like the illusion of a non-accented speech, the voice of Tom Brokaw), a whitewashing which I benefit from immensely, whereas people “of color” continue to be discriminated against because of their non-whiteness, their marked polychromatic difference.

But there's also a hierarchy of whiteness. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries many white Anglo-Saxon Protestants perceived Southern Italian immigrants, those swarthy Catholics, as quasi black and persecuted them. In a black-and-white photograph from the late 1800s a group of working-class Irishmen are standing proudly under a tree from which the body of a young working-class Italian man is lynched. Was he murdered because he wasn't white enough? Did he not speak English, or speak it with a thick Italian accent not deemed American enough? Was it just a case of aggressive competition for limited resources, Western European immigrants fighting for their rightful place in the land of milk and honey, their big-enough slice of the American pie?

During both world wars German nationals and German Americans (“the Hun”) were openly discriminated against. People born and raised in America who'd never been to Germany before were

suddenly objects of suspicion, a potentially lethal threat. During World War 2 a small percentage of German nationals, German Americans, Italian nationals and Italian Americans were arrested and placed in internment camps, but their conditions were humane and even cozy compared to the Japanese internment camps. The German camps were described as little Bavarian villages equipped with concert halls and movie theaters. By contrast, over 120,000 Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans were forced from their homes and placed in settings more like prison camps or concentration camps in desert plots surrounded by barbed wire, towers with armed guards surveilling them 24/7. People of Italian or German descent were perceived, because of their whiteness, as far less threatening than the Japanese, whose Oriental features were apparently so alien as to arouse a sense of paranoia in many white Americans.

Many people cite racism as the driving influence behind America's decision to use atomic weapons in Japan, claiming it's easier to imagine the U.S. military dropping nuclear bombs on cities full of people who don't look like *us*, but the atom bomb was invented specifically to defeat Germany. And during the Cold War it wasn't difficult to imagine the U.S. military dropping a nuclear bomb on a Russian city even though, judging by surface appearance, the average Russian and the average white American are indistinguishable. Although racism is an integral feature of nationalism, when they're in conflict nationalism trumps racism.

In 1936 the U.S. decided not to boycott the Olympics in Germany, though it was clear by then what Hitler was up to. The U.S. did boycott the 1980 Olympics in Russia, suggesting that perhaps communism was deemed a bigger threat than fascism. The U.S. government has always protected (or covered up) its fascist tendencies. At the same time, in order to protect and perpetuate capitalism by any means necessary, it's always demonized anything that might potentially be perceived as communistic. In 1936 Jesse Owens was allowed to represent the U.S.A., winning 4 gold medals for the glorious bragging rights of the nation, but when he returned stateside he and other black athletes weren't allowed to visit the White House (built by black slaves) alongside white athletes because FDR and his white administration were just as racist as almost every other white person in the country.

After World War 1, at the Paris Peace Conference the Japanese delegation moved to include a Racial Equality Amendment to the Treaty of Versailles. The vote passed but Woodrow Wilson, an avowed

white supremacist, exercised his power as chairman and unilaterally overturned the vote. While Great Britain, South Africa and Australia praised Wilson's decision (surprise surprise) relations between the U.S. and Japan turned predictably antagonistic, culminating a couple decades later in the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese-American internment camps, fire bombings of Tokyo and every other major city, and nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the effects of which the U.S. government tried desperately to cover up. When the general public began to get wind of the infernal devastation of the aftermath, the Truman administration's propaganda forces went on the offensive claiming that, despite the unseemly consequences, the bombs were absolutely necessary. If they hadn't been deployed the war would've gone on and on, more and more people would've died. The U.S. government actually claimed that dropping nuclear bombs on cities full of people was a means of saving lives.

It's a bit like the logic of the most powerful lure in the tackle box of capitalist consumerism, the sale – convincing people they're going to save money by spending less than they otherwise would. Saving becomes equated with its opposite, spending – in this case, spending actual lives in order to save hypothetical ones. To argue that it would've been worse if *we* hadn't dropped the bombs requires an imagination more powerful than Dante's: 10,000 degrees in Peace Square, Hiroshima; an entire city lifted off the ground and dropped back down into a flaming, irradiated ash-cloud; 200,000 dead and 80,000 wounded in 9 seconds; shadows of vaporized victims as if photographed into concrete slabs of rubble; the holocaust of countless millions of organisms from bacteria to fish to mammals to birds; blast survivors with melted flesh hanging off their bones; surreal human bodies gruesomely deformed and disfigured in ways previously inconceivable (because the bombs were experimental); the horrors of slow death by radiation poison far more ghastly and unspeakably sickening than anything depicted in *The Inferno*; irradiated food stocks year after year; human beings ravaged with a hundred forms of cancer several decades after the explosions.

Uranium 235 has a half-life of 700 million years. Plutonium 229 has a half-life of 24,000 years. If human beings vanish thousands of years before then, which seems increasingly likely, at least the species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* (Wise Wise Man) will have left behind his radioactive trace.

It remains to this day the U.S. party line, the party line of both parties, that the atomic bombs successfully ended World War 2, but the Japanese military was already essentially defeated before the

bombs were dropped. Echoing the indiscriminate bombing of German civilians in Münster, Hamburg and Dresden, the U.S. military engaged in what they called “terror bombing” of every major Japanese city. In 1945, 330 U.S. fighter planes over Tokyo dropped incendiary bombs including napalm, thermite, white phosphorous and other flammables (foreshadowing Vietnam), killing more than 100,000 civilians, leaving at least a million homeless. More than 60 other Japanese cities were firebombed, over half a million civilians murdered. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were spared in order to stage the spectacle of the grand finale starring Little Boy Uranium and Fat Man Plutonium, a spectacle meant specifically to scare the Soviets. Since there were no military targets in Hiroshima or Nagasaki the nukes had no strategic military purpose. They were initially built in order to defeat Germany, but Germany had already surrendered. By their own admission, what the Japanese leadership was terrified of even more than America's nukes, was the Soviet Union entering the war. Shortly after the Red Army invaded Japanese-occupied Manchuria, which occurred after Hiroshima and before Nagasaki, the Japanese unconditionally surrendered.

However much credit the atomic bombs deserve for ending the war, they deserve all the credit for inaugurating a nuclear arms race. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R., allies during World War 2, became enemies shortly thereafter. During the Cold War the 2 superpowers would go on to build and stockpile tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. In 2011, more than 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and the supposed end of the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia (Obama and Medvedev) signed a nuclear arms treaty which, contrary to the claims of the Obama administration, did not require either country to destroy any nuclear weapons or to reduce their nuclear stockpiles at all. The treaty only limited the number of warheads that can be deployed (1,550 each) and the number of launchers or “heavy bombers” (800 each) that deploy them. If war ever breaks out between America and Russia we can all feel safe and secure knowing that each side is legally allowed to launch only 1,550 nuclear bombs at the other.

...

After World War 1, as part of the Treaty of Versailles, Woodrow Wilson and the Allied Powers signed the Minority Treaties, pledging to all minority groups “civil and political equality, cultural and economic freedom, and religious toleration,” but the treaties only applied to the defeated countries, not

to the victors – Great Britain, France, Italy, and America. It was absolutely out of the question for Woodrow Wilson, the most powerful white supremacist and white nationalist on the planet, to even consider extending the treaties to his own country, founded on slavery and genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes whose enormity is probably impossible to exaggerate. The undisguised, blatantly audacious hypocrisy in the application of the Minority Treaties led to a general disrespect for, and degraded trust in, international law. This disrespect and distrust led eventually to the collapse not only of the League of Nations but of the European nation-state system itself, inaugurating another World War.

There's a tension, a contradiction inherent to the concept of a nation-state. A nation is a homogenous ethno-cultural entity, essentially a tribe. One is a national by birth, and presumably “by blood” and by a shared cultural-linguistic heritage and religious tradition. A state, on the other hand, is a community of citizens with equal protection under the law. A state guarantees equal rights to all its citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, language, religion, etc. In the years leading up to World War 2 the nation conquered the state, national interest took priority over law, and human rights lost out to the principle of national sovereignty, the supremacy of the sovereign will of the nation (*sovereign* as in monarch, as in above the law because God's representative on Earth, as in *Deutschland Uber Alles*).

The division of people within a nation-state into minorities amid a majority is the source of a toxic problem that results in the powerful ethno-cultural national majority stomping upon the rights of powerless minorities. Jews were the most vulnerable minority because Jewish wasn't a nationality. They didn't belong to a particular nation (or country) and weren't protected by a particular state, and they'd already been scapegoated and stereotyped for millennia, so they were the easiest target. The tyranny of the majority led to ethnic cleansing, expulsions, millions of refugees – displaced, stateless, rights-less – creatures who'd lost the right to have rights. The tyranny of the majority led, in the name of patriotism and nationalism, to the holocaust.

...

Madeleine is 85 years old, and she's lived in Eureka all her life. She was only 5 when the war came, but she remembers her father working for the government, walking up and down the streets in his Navy

blue uniform and white pith helmet checking every house, making sure every window was completely covered with dark blankets, no discernible light whatsoever – in case Japanese bombers were passing over. Madeleine's intense bond with her father, and thru her father her bond to her fatherland – her tribal identification with the nation felt to be a matter of existential necessity – has made her a patriot all her life.

The biologist E.O. Wilson argued that natural selection occurs both at the level of the individual gene and at the level of the group, implying that our need for group affiliation and identification is hard-wired, that tribalism is innate. It makes sense. To survive an infant must bond tightly, mimetically, with their caregiver, usually Mom, then Dad, siblings, extended family, clan, tribe. For most of human history we've lived in tribal groups which were ethnically mimetic, each member with the same cultural-linguistic marks, the same spiritual beliefs and practices. But the types of groups humans are capable of forming are limitless. Since a modern nation-state is composed of people with various ethnicities, languages, religious beliefs, etc., its rulers are faced with the daunting task of having to unite all its subjects/citizens under a single ideology powerful enough to ensure that their tribal identification with that ideology trumps their other tribal affiliations. It's probably impossible to exaggerate the unifying power of the ubiquitous propaganda apparatus operating at every level of society (in every institution, thru every media), operating subconsciously, the main symptom of any government's paranoia about disloyalty.

Arguably the most powerful form of ideology on the planet, a national ideology (nationalism) is invented from scratch and ultimately founded on nothing. I mean, no country can claim ownership of any particular human virtue, or vice for that matter, nor can a country somehow embody the substance of idealized concepts like *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It can only wave banners and insist over and over that these symbols, these ideals, correspond to reality, despite everything that happens every day to cut off the imaginary correspondence.

If asked, the average American will say that the flag represents freedom, as if this concept has a kind of glorious meaning in the abstract, completely devoid of context. If we define freedom simply as not being imprisoned, then America is the least free, since it incarcerates a higher percentage of its population (overwhelmingly black and brown males) than any other country on the planet. With only

4% of the world's population, America accounts for 25% of the world's prison population (that's not counting CIA black sites in several other countries in which non-white folks are tortured – we're not allowed to count what we're not allowed to know about).

I know a few Irish-Americans with healthy, prosperous, middle-class lives who identify much more as Irish than American, even if they've only ever been to Ireland once for a week. They're unable to completely identify with one of the numerous sub-cultures in America, and they find mainstream American monoculture profoundly superficial, materialistic, narcissistic, anti-intellectual and spiritually starving. So they wear shamrock charms and daydream about their deep-rooted connection to their ancestral Irish homeland with its ancient Celtic tribal heritage and Gaelic languages. They celebrate St. Patrick's Day and Irish Independence Day zealously, while the 4th of July leaves them cold. They interpret the brightly-colored spectacle as a gaudy facade behind which the truculent, self-aggrandizing, chauvinistic military superpower, the big belligerent bully on the international playground puffs out his chest. They find the fireworks bombastic and don't understand why they should have to lose a whole night's sleep because so many Americans love to blow shit up.

...

To white nationalists, America is the ancestral homeland of their American-English-speaking white tribe because it was chosen for them by their white Christian god. The desire to occupy one's ancestral homeland and worship one's ancestral tribal god can be seen as a particularly Jewish desire, and yet white nationalists are vehemently, often violently anti-Semitic, despite the fact that their religion traces its roots directly to Judaism, its man-god a Jew.

Jesus of Nazareth dedicated his life to resisting the Roman occupation of the Jewish homeland, the Roman oppression and exploitation of the Jewish people. He preached only to other Jews, the agrarian poor, admonishing them against discord, encouraging them to unite in solidarity and compassion to help bear each other's burdens. Jews constituted only about 10% of the population, and they were often discriminated against and harassed by the larger Greco-Roman society, a pagan, polytheistic culture (it was the Jews who introduced monotheism to the world). Jesus was an apocalypticist who preached that the Jewish god (Yahweh or Elohim) would reveal himself soon, descending from on high to vanquish

his enemies (the unholy Roman Empire), then he would raise all the dead and judge them, separating the righteous from the rest (who would be permanently annihilated), then he would establish his new kingdom on Earth, a kingdom peopled presumably by pious Jews like Jesus and his followers. Jesus accused the Jewish leaders in the temple of Jerusalem, the one and only Jewish temple at the time, of collaborating with the enemy to satisfy their own greed. After claiming to be the messiah, the redeemer of the Jewish people, the king of the Jews, Jesus was found guilty of treason (since Caesar was the true king of the Jews, and just about everyone else on the planet) and executed by the Roman Empire, death by crucifixion, a Roman practice which had been going on for hundreds of years before Jesus and would continue for hundreds of years after him.

After his death Jesus's disciples and their followers, along with Jesus's brother James, continued to spread his message. Most Jews probably thought of Jesus as a rabbi and a prophet, a courageous man who stood up to the oppressors and sacrificed his life for his people, but they couldn't possibly believe he was the messiah of the ancient texts because the messiah was supposed to be invincible. The idea that the messiah could be tortured and crucified was unthinkable and besides, the kingdom he spoke of never came, the Romans were still lording it over them. The Roman Empire would continue to reign for centuries.

About 20 years after Jesus died, Saul of Tarsus, a Greek-speaking Jew who admitted to having persecuted the followers of Jesus, had a mystical vision. Somewhere on the road to Damascus a celestial being appeared, and Saul called it the Christos, Jesus Christ. Saul didn't know Jesus in the flesh, didn't know what he looked like. He'd never seen the corpse of Jesus mutilated beyond recognition, so it's difficult to imagine how he identified this angelic being as Jesus, but the experience was so powerful he was instantly converted. He changed his name to Paul and began spreading the gospel. Paul is widely considered the founder, the inventor of Christianity, certainly its most prominent and important missionary, its main PR man, its chief advertizing executive.

He didn't speak Aramaic, and most Jews were unreceptive to his message anyway. Paul had more luck preaching to gentiles, non-Jews, though most of them were unreceptive as well at first, being fully immersed in the dominant polytheistic culture. Realizing he needed to create a broader appeal, Paul insisted that in order to be a Christian it wasn't necessary to be circumcised or to obey kosher laws or

any other overly-restrictive Jewish practices. As the movement began to gain traction, Paul distanced himself and his message from the real-life, earthy, fleshy Jewishness of Jesus. The Jewishness of Jesus was an obstacle, so Paul made it irrelevant. You didn't have to be a poor oppressed Jew to be a Christian, you could be anyone, even a wealthy Greek or Roman; and even more radically, Paul declared that Jesus was no longer just the redeemer of the 12 tribes of Israel, he was the savior of all gentiles, Greeks and everyone else outside the Roman Empire – Persians, Asians, Africans, all of mankind, so long as they believe and follow (Paul's message, not Jesus's).

Like Jesus, Paul believed the kingdom would come during his lifetime. He died around the year 60 and it hadn't come. The kingdom has been extremely persistent in its not coming, it's been not coming for 2,000 years now (talk about *coitus reservus*, wow). In the year 70, after a failed Jewish revolt the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, which inaugurated the Jewish diaspora. Judaism and Christianity would grow further and further apart until eventually becoming completely severed.

During a battle in the year 310 Emperor Constantine had a vision: a shining cross appeared hovering above the battlefield, beside it the words *in hoc signo vinces* (by this sign you will conquer).

Constantine the Great, who later ordered the execution of his wife and oldest son because he was paranoid they were sleeping together, converted to Christianity, becoming the first Christian Emperor of Rome, signaling the end of paganism. The cross and the sword were conflated in a single symbol, the new symbol of Christianity – the sword severed Judaism from the cross. The cross had formerly been a symbol of the terrifyingly brutal authority of the pagan Roman Empire. Its sadistic message was traumatically clear: if you rebel against or resist this authority, you'll be tortured and hung on a cross, a sickeningly visceral admonition to all potential transgressors. Then the cross became a symbol of the terrifyingly brutal authority of the Christian Roman Empire.

By the late 300s Christianity had become an institutionalized state religion, the religion of the conquerors, a tool mightier than the sword. In less than 400 years Christianity had gone from being a small but radical sect of Judaism whose followers were brutalized by Roman authorities, to being a religion of mostly gentiles barely tolerated by the Romans, to being a fully accepted and respected religion of non-Jews, to being the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Jewish identity, certainly the identity of one of its most passionate rabbis and prophets, was hijacked by the Roman Empire and

then used as a weapon to persecute Jews. It's the greatest irony in Western civilization – Christianity, with its fiercely Jewish figure-head who devoted his life to resisting the Roman occupation of the Jewish holy land, would go on to become the most powerful force of anti-Semitism on the planet.

During Constantine's time there were an equal number of Christians and Jews. Now there are roughly 2 billion Christians and only about 15 million Jews. The supremacy of the cross in European culture was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of Jews over many centuries. During the Crusades, Christian militants often demolished entire Jewish villages, murdering every child, woman and man. Inquisitions during both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were times of wholesale terror for Jews (as well as Muslims and all other non-Christians). Jews who refused to convert to Christianity were tortured and murdered in creatively sadistic ways. Even those who converted weren't always safe, since the inquisitors often didn't trust their conversions, believing that Jews were liars who would say anything to avoid being tortured. It didn't occur to them that they too would likely say anything to avoid being tortured. Jews were accused not just of being nonbelievers but of deicide, a patent absurdity on 2 counts: a god by definition can't be killed, and the fact that crucifixion was a Roman practice was well-documented. It wasn't the Jews who killed Christ. It's more accurate to say it was Christianity that killed Jesus (or rather, Yeshua).

Christians came to believe that Jewish sin wasn't just in their belief, or nonbelief, it was in their blood – they were degenerate, inferior, inherently wicked. The propaganda that would lead to the holocaust was being propagated for many centuries. Jews, the quintessential scapegoat, were blamed for natural disasters, for plagues, for poisoning water wells, for anything that went wrong in society. From the late 1500s to the late 1800s Jews in Rome were walled up in a small filthy ghetto.

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Meanwhile the Western European colonial powers were busy expanding their Christian empires and fighting each other for the largest market share of global real estate. The 16th century, the age of exploration, saw the simultaneous rise of nation-state monarchies, royally chartered corporations, banks, large standing armies, and the global Christian missionary movement. Sea voyages to the other side of the world were as expensive as they were perilous, initially funded by wealthy individuals who

stood to lose everything and end up in a debtor's prison. The invention of corporations (the first one dates to around 1532 in Florence) limited liability by spreading out the cost amongst various investors who could only lose what they invested. Nearly 500 years later, corporations are still run according to the ethos of the colonial enterprise.

In 1498 Vasco da Gama sailed around Africa to India and returned with cargo worth 60 times the cost of his voyage, a profit of 6,000%. That same year saw the invention of gun powder, which eventually led to large standing armies capable of waging bigger, longer and more devastating wars than ever before. The first banks in antiquity were temples – the first to issue money were priests or priest-kings. The first Roman mint, in 269 b.c., in the temple of Juno Moneta (where the English word *money* comes from) contained an effigy of the goddess. In the 1500s the first secular banks arose in order to finance larger and larger standing armies with more and more guns and heavy artillery.

Backed by nation-state monarchies backed by corporations, banks and militaries, Christian missionaries saw it as their God-given duty, their heavenly obligation to convert the heathens (Jews as well as other tribal peoples all over the world, including here in Jaroujiji', Eureka). For the creation of Christendom, a global Christian empire, Christianity was used to justify the conquest and enslavement of indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas, and to justify the extermination of “witches” and wickedly superstitious tribal cultures.

Catholic means universal. Roman Catholic Christianity regarded itself as the one true universal religion. All others were false and needed to be eliminated. The Protestant Reformation privatized an unmediated relationship between more individualized Christians and a more personal transcendent God, democratizing the church, but it held firmly to its missionary calling, its imperialistic worldview, the belief that Christianity was the one authentic religion, all others cults of the devil that must be eradicated. Whether Catholic or Protestant, Christianity was the most powerful weapon of Western imperialism up until the atomic bomb.

In 1933 the Vatican signed a treaty with Hitler, allowing him to have his way with the Jews. The Catholic authorities would turn a blind eye, or turn the other cheek, so to speak. They would only protect those Jews who converted to Christianity, thereby renouncing their Jewishness. In other words,

they would only protect Jews who were no longer Jews. But the contradiction, the conundrum remained – only one's faith can be renounced, not one's ethnicity. Had Jesus lived in Christian Europe during the 1930s or 40s he would've died in a gas chamber rather than on a cross.

...

American political leaders often painted the Cold War as a crusade – good, God-fearing Christian capitalism against wicked, godless communism. George W. Bush repeatedly referred to the war on terror as a crusade, implying that it was a righteous battle in which the good Christian Empire with God on its side would prevail over the evil Muslim jihadists. But all 3 monotheistic religions stem from the same Abrahamic tradition. Christianity grew out of Judaism, and Islam grew out of Judeo-Christian influences. Both Jesus and Abraham are referred to with reverence in the Qur'an. Whether they call it Yahweh, Elohim, Christ, God, or Allah, followers of the 3 monotheistic faiths ultimately worship the same deity.

Were Jesus alive today maybe he'd be a Zionist, a right-wing conservative, an Israeli nationalist constantly defending Israel's right to exist. After all, the founding of Israel in 1948 was perhaps the culmination, the fulfillment of Jesus's greatest hope. The 12 tribes of Israel, the Jewish people finally, after millennia of abuse, after a holocaust, now have their own sovereign nation recognized by the rest of the world – and anyone who doesn't recognize it should be destroyed? The country of Israel was meant to provide a people without a land with a land without a people, but that land, like Columbus's America, was already peopled (by Arab Palestinians who'd been there for centuries). The establishment of Israel as a nation-state led once again to the tyranny of the majority (Jews this time) trampling upon the rights of a vulnerable minority – Arab Palestinians.

Were Jesus alive today maybe he'd lead a group of compassionate Jews sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians living under a brutal 75-year-long occupation, and speak out eloquently against terrorism on both sides and the forced uprooting and dislocation of Palestinian families by a growing invasion of Israeli settlements. But any hypothetical contemporary Jesus would certainly criticize Israeli leaders for collaborating with the world's preeminent military superpower, the neo-colonial capitalist empire, America, today's analogue of the Roman Empire (most biblical scholars believe the Anti-Christ in the

Book of Revelations is a coded reference to the Roman Empire). Israel's military is an extension of the American military – its tanks, missiles and fighter planes are all American – and Israel is the key nuclear power in the region, making it the most crucial Middle Eastern ally of the U.S. Meanwhile the powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington, sometimes called the NRA of foreign policy lobbies, ensures that a point of view sympathetic to Arab Palestinians will rarely if ever be presented or endorsed by an American media outlet.

It was a Jesus influenced by Eastern philosophy who spoke about the kingdom of God not as something coming in the future to a particular place to be inhabited by a particular people, but as something located in the human heart. It was this Jesus, not an apocalypticist but a mystic, who said that the kingdom of God is already here, all around us and inside us all the time, but we don't see it and we don't feel it.

Thinking about the history of Christianity reminds me of the Buddhist teacher and writer D.T. Suzuki's response to the question, what do you think about Western civilization? He was silent for a long while, then he said, “I think that's a good idea.”

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Standing at my west-facing bedroom window I see a blue strip of Pacific Ocean, sun-glazed and blazing at the moment, a slightly lighter blue strip of Humboldt Bay, and between the 2 strips a swath of Samoa Peninsula – eucalyptus, Monterey pine and cypress behind the oyster processing plant, an American flag wagging in front of a mountainous stack of redwood logs – long thin limbless headless corpses, their dead umber torsos absorbing sunlight. When I sit down at my desk the strips of blue disappear, covered by phone-lines. I'm staring straight at Madeleine's place, the epitome of middle-class whiteness: a clam-white A-frame house with Navy blue trim and a pretty red-brick chimney, a white picket fence surrounding 3 quarters of it; on the front lawn snapdragons, nasturtium, lobelias and alyssum in a perfect circle beneath an umbrella-shaped cherry tree; a thick cluster of orange and candle-flame California poppies under a maple tree. To the right of a filigreed white metal screen door, a bronze plaque with an engraved cross – beside the cross, jutting diagonally up at a 45 degree angle an American flag asserts its erection.

Patriotism is a dangerous form of prejudice, partly because it masquerades so brilliantly as a virtue. The shame associated with not being patriotic is enough to make those on the fence acquiesce, so as not to be discriminated against, so as not to become pariahs. If enough citizens are perceived to be on the fence, or clearly on the other side, then patriotism can be enforced – compliance, conformity and fealty made mandatory (signing a loyalty oath, pledging allegiance to the flag). In 1892 American school children began pledging allegiance to the flag by holding the right arm stiff in the air (yes, *Heil Hitler*-style). 50 years later, since good American children obviously needed to be distinguished from evil German children, Congress amended the Flag Code and began forcing children to pledge allegiance to the flag by placing the right hand over the heart. When the national anthem is playing it's best to remove your hat, stand facing the flag, place your right hand over your heart and sing along to the glorification of war (the phallic rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air). Don't you dare take a knee, even if you're protesting against racist police brutality and not the military. Shunning, ostracizing, scapegoating will be used to enhance group solidarity, group-think, to tighten the bonds of patriotic tribalism.

Under the Sedition Act of 1918, an extension of the Espionage Act of 1917, nearly 1,000 Americans were imprisoned for writing or speaking in opposition to America's entrance into World War 1 – expressing negative opinions about Woodrow Wilson, the military, the draft or the flag were grounds for arrest.

Between 1985 and '87 I attended Woodrow Wilson Jr. High School in Glendale, California. I remember on weekends practicing back-hops, bar-endos, boomerangs, tail-whips and other bicycle freestyle maneuvers with Scott Tillman, one of the only black kids at school. I'm sure neither of us knew that Woodrow Wilson himself wouldn't've let Scott attend the school under any circumstances. During Wilson's tenure as president of Princeton, no African-Americans were hired as faculty or admitted as undergrads and the campus remained strictly segregated. During his tenure as president of the U.S. his cabinet was composed of mostly southern segregationists like himself.

Persuaded by the debate over the removal of Confederate monuments, 5 years after the murder of 9 African-Americans in a Charleston church (the Wilson family home is in South Carolina, the first state to secede), on June 26th 2020 Princeton University removed Wilson's name from its public policy

school. I can't imagine his name being removed from the jr. high Scott and I attended.

I didn't realize back then how difficult it must've been for Scott, how hard he had to try every day to fit in and be liked. It wasn't just a matter of learning a few fancy bike tricks so people would think he was cool, it was a matter of survival. Scott's diligence paid off. A gregarious guy with a quick smile, big white teeth slightly crooked in a cute sort of way which made people feel at ease, he seemed universally well-liked. But I'm absolutely certain that throughout his life he's had to face the specter of racism in all its hideous guises, thanks in no small part to men like Woodrow Wilson.

Mine was a very average public school education. What I remember learning about Wilson was that he won World War 1 (all by himself?) and that he was instrumental in founding the League of Nations, a precursor to the United Nations. That's it.

Maybe public school students should know that Woodrow Wilson believed in white racial superiority based on “scientific” grounds (American Eugenics was mainstream science in the early 20th century). As a young man he championed the southern “redeemers” and the lost cause mythology while railing against Reconstruction policies which had allowed many African-Americans to be elected to public office for the first time. He vituperated against those damn northern carpetbaggers who stole into the South to help protect black voting rights. (Flash forward to Texas, as I write this Republican legislators are passing bills on voting restrictions which will adversely affect people of color in pretty obvious and insidious ways – all the Democratic legislators have flown to D.C. to ask the feds for help.) Wilson accepted that the Civil War had been lost, slavery was gone for good, no way to bring back the gallant Old South, but certainly southern white leaders should still be allowed to institute segregation in all southern institutions.

During the 1912 presidential election Wilson's sinister scheme was to promise black leaders, including W.E.B. Du Bois, that if elected he would be responsive to the concerns of black Americans. Du Bois took the bait and persuaded the black community to back Wilson, whose nefarious Shakespearean ploy worked – he won the black vote which helped him win the presidency. Within weeks Du Bois must've felt chagrined at being hustled and duped by this white devil in a black top-hat – Wilson immediately began segregating the whole federal bureaucracy: Treasury, Commerce, the Postal Service, all the

armed forces. 7 years later many black soldiers returned from World War 1 and couldn't even enter the buildings they used to work in. Wilson's reign was another instance of powerful white backlash to black advancement. Coinciding with the Great Migration of African-Americans fleeing the terrors of the South for industrial factory jobs in the North, Wilson's reign took place during the worst era of race-based violence since Reconstruction. In the "red summer" of 1919 hundreds of African-Americans were murdered in race riots in several cities outside the former Confederacy.

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During the Cold War in the 1950s a handsome young eloquent segregationist and B-actor named Ronald Reagan, a Wilson admirer, helped hunt down American communists in Hollywood, while McCarthy's nationwide persecution of them on TV was perceived by many as an inquisition, a witch hunt. Blacklisting echoed the witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts in Colonial America portrayed in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* which came out at the height of the "red scare." The whole spectacle was another case of mass hysteria triggering enforced patriotism, demonizing those deemed "unAmerican."

What was definitely not taught in public school during the 1980s was that the American Communist Party (along with the Socialist Labor Party and the Wobblies) spearheaded the labor movement, organized trade labor unions, strikes which often turned bloody when company thug squads attacked. Despite its fractures and factions, despite some its members' iron commitment to supporting Stalin even after he ordered the mass murder of those disloyal to him, it's really to the American Communist Party we owe the whole concept of workers' rights, workplace safety requirements, collective bargaining, minimum wage, an 8-hour work day and a 40-hour work week, sick time, overtime, vacation, maternity leave, etc. But there's never been a genuine socialist workers' revolution in America, nothing to alter the fundamental character of the relationship between capital and labor. The labor movement has won certain concessions but no structural change. Karl Marx remains capitalism's public enemy number 1, its most sapient critic who had a dark foreknowledge of what it would lead to.

Labor unions have been losing power since the 1980s, when the Reagan administration began systematically attacking them, essentially castrating the labor movement. On national TV Reagan threatened to fire all the striking air-traffic controllers if they didn't return immediately to their posts, a

potent admonition to everyone watching. In the 1950s when Reagan was the spokesman for General Electric, conservative elites began waging an enormous propaganda campaign to convince the general public that any government “intervention” in the economy or the workplace (any regulation, any involvement whatsoever) constituted an infringement upon the liberties of *all* Americans, rather than simply an infringement upon the freedom of corporations to exploit their workers, customers, the environment and even the market itself in order to make as much profit as possible.

As much as conservatives talk about regulations crippling our industries, the fact that the hegemony of the 2-corporate-party system has never been seriously challenged by a Labor Party (or the Green Party or any other 3rd party) is proof that the propaganda campaign worked.

With its Marxist critique of industrial capitalism the American Communist Party was largely responsible for exposing the exploitation and oppression inherent to capitalist labor practices, in which workers with no protections and no power (many of them children), alienated from the outcome of their labor, were treated as factors of production, wheel-cogs. As well as championing immigrant rights, the working poor, the unemployed and the homeless, the American Communist Party spread the notion of class consciousness and laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement, advocating for the self-determination of African-Americans. During the Cold War, J. Edgar Hoover (head of HUAC, the House UnAmerican Activities Committee) assumed that blacks were much more likely to be *reds* than whites were, so blacks were persecuted both for their race and their potential political affiliations.

American political leaders typically see the world in black and white terms (a Zoroastrian worldview – light vs. darkness, good vs. evil) exemplified brilliantly by George W. Bush's statement: “you're either with us or you're with the terrorists.” A few decades earlier it would've been: you're either a pro-capitalist American or you're a communist. In Colonial America it would've been: you're either an obedient member of the flock who conforms to Puritan norms or you're a witch.

But the overriding American message remains a contradictory one: extreme conformity on one hand (unite against communism's evil empire, support our troops no matter what) and “rugged individualism” on the other – a persistent insistence on individual rights, self-expression, self-reliance, self-interest (every man for himself). A Billy Joel song from the early 80s, the Reagan era, says it

clearly with a teenage tone: “I don't care what you say anymore, this is my life. Go ahead with your own life, leave me alone.” The GOP is really the GYOP, the *Git Yer Own* Party. No handouts. *Laissez faire* – hands off – don't tax me, don't regulate me, DON'T TREAD ON ME, just leave me *free* to do whatever I want whenever I want. This idea goes all the way back to the American Revolution, but it reached new heights during the Reagan era.

The world's 2 biggest economies faced off in mortal combat (Capitalism vs. Communism). The U.S. outspent the U.S.S.R. which ultimately went bankrupt. If you're determined to exponentially increase an already astronomical military budget, but you've taken a vow not to raise taxes, the question for Reagan (the charming, brilliantly savvy politician who appealed to teenagers and Wall St. brokers alike) was, how do you pay for it? The answer was simple: you slash social programs, really pillage them, in some cases completely eviscerate them, while simultaneously waging all-out ideological warfare on all things communistic (communal, collective, socialistic, public).

With one exception: when a company goes *public*, there's a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a celebration filled with million-dollar smiles. Now the company can sell shares on the open market – with a fiduciary obligation to its shareholders to increase the value of their stock, to increase profits every year. On a finite planet with finite resources, capitalism's foundational ethos is infinite growth – WalMart and Amazon (both non-union employers) on the moon, on Mars, etc.

Middle-class white folks have often protested the development of *public* (taxpayer funded) housing projects – “no, we don't want *those* people living in *our* neighborhood.” Classism and racism come as a pair in the “white flight” phenomenon.

Public bathrooms are often desecrated spaces. The attitude seems to be, “it's not *my* bathroom, I don't have to clean it up. Someone must get paid to do that. Let them do it.” Traveling around Europe as a young man it occurred to me that public bathrooms, public spaces in general, were usually quite a bit cleaner than in America. There seemed to be a sense of collective ownership and collective responsibility. When I spent a semester abroad in England taking classes at the University of London, I was shocked to discover it was a publicly funded university – it belonged to everyone. And with socialized health care everyone had coverage from the cradle to the grave. When social programs get

cut in America, eventually people forget they were once publicly funded.

Reagan was the first governor of California to institute college tuition, which has skyrocketed ever since, like the military budget (remember Reagan's Star Wars defense initiative – he never lost his tribal identification with Hollywood, even if he always suspected it of being infested with closeted leftist commies). As president he slashed and burned public funds for education, health care, child care, welfare programs for the poor, the elderly and the mentally ill. Privatization, the transfer of funds from the public to the private sector, became the new savior for the wealthy – privatization along with deregulation, what Reagan called “the magic of the *free* market.”

Deregulating industries led to environmental pollution and ecological destruction. Reagan once said, “if you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all.” Deregulating financial institutions (letting banks and Wall St. police themselves) led to widescale corruption – the Savings and Loans scandal, a major recession, a major bailout. Manufacturing jobs were exported to countries with few if any labor or environmental regulations (the rise of sweat shops, the rise of global temperatures). Reagan cut the corporate tax rate in half. As the rich grew fantastically rich, the working-class found it more and more difficult to make ends meet. Their wages leveled off in the late 70s and have stagnated for over 40 years now. The result of Reaganomics was the squeezing of the middle-class – highly concentrated wealth at the top, a much higher poverty rate, and those who used to be middle-class are now the working poor, living paycheck to paycheck in a state of perpetual debt which they pass on to the next generation, and the next.

Reagan turned his back on the victims of the AIDS epidemic. From his fundamentalist Christian point of view, homosexuals and drug-addled needle-sharers deserved what they got – it was God's judgment. Reagan supported the official system of apartheid in South Africa and the unofficial system of apartheid in America. Meanwhile he remained widely popular – the Great Communicator, who could charm the birthmark off Gorbachev's skull. Picture him standing in Berlin in front of the whole world saying, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” He seemed almost saintly. Now picture him strolling thru Hyde Park with Margaret Thatcher admiring the rich beauty of the birds. “Look Maggie,” he says, “or may I call you Magpie?”

“O Ronnie,” says Margaret, “that's adorable, please *do* call me that.”

“Well, Magpie, look at those lovely waterfowl, how free they are, how unregulated.”

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union the whole rationale (or rationalization) for America's gargantuan world-wide military apparatus disappeared, but the U.S. government has kept it up ever since regardless of which party has been in power. For over 30 years Republican and Democratic administrations have agreed to implement a 19th centurysque foreign policy of imperialism and economic colonialism. Since the turn of the century the U.S. and its allies have dropped more than 36,000 bombs and missiles on people in other countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, and Somalia – an average of 46 bombs per day every day for 20 years.

Every year the U.S. spends as much on its military as the rest of the world, all other 195 countries combined. It's called “defense” spending, but it's entirely offensive in every sense. America maintains 800 formal (over 1,000 informal) military bases in 80 different countries around the world, most of them in the Middle East, the most oil-rich region of the globe. Russia comes in a very distant second with about 40 bases in 9 countries. The U.S. government sees it as its duty to employ its military in invasions and occupations of multiple countries simultaneously for decades. A marvelous amalgam of arrogance, ignorance and utter incompetence results in civil wars, diasporas and power vacuums – fertile ground for the rise of terrorist groups which the U.S. then must fight, across any and all borders, for decades more.

After the U.S.-led Coalition Authority disbanded the Iraqi army, Saddam Hussein's former Sunni troops – left with no income and no prospects, their country destroyed – in desperate survival mode decided to form ISIS and fight a jihad against their oppressors, the infidels, the evil Western Empire.

The Bush Administration's rationale for the 2nd Gulf War was based on rumors that Saddam had been purchasing supplies to build a nuclear weapon. When the rumors proved false, it was too late, the invasion/occupation was well underway. There was a considerable outcry that the Bush team had lied,

but no mention of the blatant hypocrisy embedded in the initial reasoning. Bush knew he could garner support for the invasion by scaring people with the prospect of a mushroom cloud. The message was loud and clear: if any of you little countries out there try to acquire a nuke, we will destroy you. Meanwhile, yes, we maintain the world's largest nuclear arsenal with thousands of warheads, enough to destroy all of human civilization many times over, and we're perfectly willing to drop these nukes on cities full of non-white people like yourselves, we've done it before and we'll do it again. So, make no mistake, we are entitled to thousands of nuclear weapons, while you are entitled to zero.

Some Bush apologists claimed that Saddam, an unstable autocrat, a crazy military dictator, couldn't be trusted with a nuclear weapon. Was he a good guy turned bad? I mean, he was a trusted ally of the U.S. government throughout the 1980s. In 2006 he was found guilty and hanged for crimes committed against Shi'ite Iraqis in 1982. The weapons, including chemical ones, used against both Shi'ite and Kurdish Iraqis during Saddam's reign were purchased from the U.S. During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s America officially supported Iraq, but it was selling arms to both sides; that is, the U.S. Military-Industrial-Congressional complex was selling arms to both sides, supposedly unknowingly. Remember Colonel Ollie North pleading amnesia: I have no recollection of a paper shredder, I don't recall any documents, I don't remember any paper, I don't recall.

Meanwhile the Soviet Army had invaded Afghanistan, and the CIA was supporting Osama Bin Laden's militia group Al Qaeda, supplying them with weapons and training to fight off the Russians. Later Saddam and Bin Laden would join Stalin as former strategic friends turned foes. The Soviets would get bogged down in Afghanistan, sinking an enormous fortune, nearly bankrupting the Russian Empire, and after a colossal waste of human life their colonial enterprise would fail – just as the British had failed previously, just as the U.S., both Republican and Democratic administrations alike, would try and fail for 20 years.

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Left wingers like Noam Chomsky and Ralph Nader refer to the 2-corporate-party system as a duopoly. It's really 2 factions of the same party, call it the Business Party maintaining the status quo, business as usual, wholeheartedly committed to the perpetual propagation of capitalism as if it were a religion as

holy as Christianity. Fostering a secure environment in which corporations and their investors can flourish is the paramount objective of both parties. Along with financial powerhouses like Goldman Sachs, one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington every year is the Chamber of Commerce, ensuring that the business of the American government is American business. Meanwhile alongside the NRA, lobbyists for weapons manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Boeing ensure that the business of the U.S. government is the business of war. The same industries – big tech (Google, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft), big ag (Monsanto), big pharma (Pfizer, making sure that prescription drug prices in America remain the highest in the world), big coal (determined to prove that “clean coal” is not an oxymoron), big oil and gas – the same behemoth corporations lobby incessantly both sides of the aisle. While elected officials from both parties are beholden to the same corporate interests, the ones that fund their campaigns and put them in power, no one's lobbying on behalf of ordinary citizens. Crony colonial corporate capitalism is the tyranny of an overwhelmingly powerful minority, a system in which the top 10% control 90% of the nation's wealth (the top 1% control 50%) – by design, by public policy.

The foreign policy of both parties is completely indistinguishable (what used to be called “gunboat diplomacy”), and often so is the domestic one. Bill Clinton's Crime Bill echoed Reagan's War on Drugs (initially Nixon's war), by focusing money and energy on militarized law enforcement rather than treatment programs or community investment to create more opportunities for poor people, more access to education, healthy food, jobs and health care. The outcome was overpolicing, racial profiling and the mass incarceration of black and brown people (while Clinton was referred to as the first “black” president) without solving either the drug or the crime problem. It was understood that white-collar drug use and white-collar crime were clearly not the target of these initiatives.

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At a Eureka laundromat last Saturday an older man began chatting at me. He was a maskless veteran with long grey-white hair wearing a peach-colored Hawaiian shirt, blue jeans and black-and-white checkered slip-on Vans like I used to wear in jr. high. I thought maybe we'd talk surfing, but he started going on about the meth problem on the Hilo side of the big island and how corrupt the cops were. His monologue became more political and judgmental until he bared his teeth and said, “and this Nazi

covid mask thing. I tell you what, socialism doesn't work in America. It didn't work in Nazi Germany. It's not working in China.” I lied, saying I was gonna be late for work and started wheeling my clothes toward the exit. He couldn't resist a parting insult: “you're the new normal,” he called out, “whatever that is.” Finally outside in the open air I pulled down my mask and breathed long and deep.

You might think a global pandemic would be a perfect catalyst for promoting the notion that we're all human beings on planet Earth, we're all in this together. You might even be naïve enough to believe it could potentially lead to some kind of universal socialism. *Contraire mon frere*, the pandemic has only re-solidified the age-old divisions between right and left, and between the rich few and the poor many, worldwide. Clearly this man felt that having to wear a mask was a blatant violation of his freedom. Did he feel that way about having to wear a seatbelt, or a helmet on a motorcycle, or not being allowed to drink and drive? The right to potentially endanger the lives of everyone in your immediate vicinity is not enshrined in any Constitution.

Socialism didn't work in Nazi Germany? Maybe only an American would confuse socialism with fascism. Confusing socialism with Chinese communism (with its widespread surveillance, censorship and repression, all of which exist to a lesser degree here in the U.S.) is more understandable considering the enormous propaganda campaign during the Cold War which painted red communist Russia (the Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics) as the evil empire. Maybe the average conservative American sees no distinction between socialism and communism (or between Marxism and Soviet, Chinese or North Korean communism) and doesn't even acknowledge the existence of democratic socialism as practiced by, for one, our northern neighbors. Canada is a social democracy with a capitalist economic system. America can be characterized as a capitalist democracy, an oxymoron. There's nothing democratic about capitalism, it's the most undemocratic force on the planet. Corporate capitalism always tends toward monopoly. The name of the game is to increase the value of your stock every year by cornering a larger and larger share of the market. It leads to a few big winners and many little losers. Democracy, as idealistic as it seems, is based on the principle of cooperation, on equal rights and equal opportunity, where everyone has a voice. Corporate capitalism is a system of institutionalized greed based on aggressive competition, a hierarchical structure with more and more wealth and power in the hands of fewer and fewer as you ascend the pyramid.

A *corporation* isn't a physical body, it's a legal body, a legal fiction. Its charter can never be revoked and it can engage in any economic activity it wishes indefinitely, so a corporation is essentially immortal. A body that can live forever isn't a real body, it's more like a vampire. Karl Marx referred to capitalism itself as a vampire.

Rutherford Hayes, who became president in 1876, declared, “this is a government of the people, by the people and for the people no longer. It is a government of corporations, by corporations and for corporations,” a fact he bemoaned but actually benefited from immensely.

In 1886, in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, the Supreme Court decided that a private corporation is a “natural person” with Bill of Rights protections, including free speech. In 1976, in *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Supreme Court decided to literalize the cliché “money talks” and codify it into law. It ruled that money equals speech – the more money an individual person or union or corporation has, the louder their voice. In the *Citizens United* case of 2010 the Supreme Court reaffirmed that ruling and further declared no limits whatsoever on undisclosed campaign contributions (including smear campaigns). The wealthier you are the louder your political voice is allowed to be, but ironically the rest of us aren't allowed to know who's speaking. The *Citizens United* case led directly to the rise of super PACs, and the rise of Trump.

One monopoly champion (who actually resembles a Roman Emperor), without having to own an actual social space like a park or a community center, owns virtually the whole global social cyberspace, inhabited by billions. To add to his billions, he sells their attention (determined by algorithms that process every click) to the highest bidder. Another hard-boiled capitalist robber baron owns virtually the entire virtual shopping mall, without having to own a single brick-and-mortar shop. As for his employees, there's a 100% turnover rate. The average worker lasts less than a year because non-union working conditions are so brutal, the work pace being set by robots who, strangely enough, don't seem overly concerned when you can't keep up. The emperor of this empire has about as many dollars as there are stars in the Milky Way. Meanwhile here on Earth, in Eureka a one-shoed woman wrapped in a filthy quilt is digging thru a trashcan past styrofoam and Amazon Prime cardboard flaps, for a half-eaten Starbucks scone.

Anti-trust laws have been on the books since the late 1800s, but they haven't been enforced for several decades (since the Reagan administration's attack on all things deemed anti-capitalist). The courts operate according to the tenets of a pro-big-business ideology: if a company can maintain efficiency and keep the cost of its products relatively low, then the benefit to consumers saves the company, no matter how big it is, from being labeled a monopoly. Efficiency means ever-increasing automation, robotics, a growing worship of A.I. with its consequent job losses, rise in surveillance and rise in fear. As a delivery driver in Eureka I find it a bit creepy just how popular surveillance has become. More and more folks seem to need not only a gun but a camera on their front door-bells surveilling anyone who dares to trespass upon their property – transforming love thy neighbor into fear thy neighbor.

As for low prices, a company is only able to undersell its potential competitors (thru predatory pricing) because of its monopolistic power. The bigger the firm, the cheaper it can afford to sell its products. 3 or 4 giant firms control 90% of the market in every industry in every sector of the American economy. As bigger and bigger mergers create a wider and wider wealth gap, the rise of monopolies leads to a monoculture. Suburban centers across the nation tend to resemble each other – the same big box stores, strip malls filled with the same chain stores, the same fast food chains – an entire country chained to the colonial capitalist juggernaut. All at the expense of local and regional diversity and community.

Most of us, blue collar and white, feel overworked and undervalued doing jobs we dislike just to get by, thereby fueling an impersonal, heartless economic system which is ultimately dehumanizing. We might feel better about the personal sacrifice if it was in the service of some collective good, but there's no such thing in America because a collective or communal good is antithetical to the ethos of capitalism, according to which the only good is what increases the profits of a corporation's shareholders. Adding to the humiliation is a sense of powerlessness, feeling trapped, and there's nothing we can do about it because we're dependent on the system. We have to work to survive, to pay the bills, to make ends meet, to not end up on the street where more and more people are ending up every day, byproducts of capitalism.

I might feel righteously indignant, willing to fight to make the system more humane, but no one's going to pay me to be an activist. Whatever we do workwise we're all complicit, we're all contributing to the propagation and perpetuation of capitalism – a total system in America, not just the economic system

but the political and social system as well. Knowing that we're actively supporting, against our will, a system which strips away human dignity is cause for serious dis-ease, pure chagrin.

So what's the alternative? Socialism doesn't work in America? It's never been tried. The closest America ever came to socialism was in the 1930s with FDR's New Deal – we still have Social Security, though it's been heavily pillaged by multiple administrations.

...

Prejudice is literally built into the word *patriotism*, from *patria*, fatherland. Patriarchy is integral to its structure, a male-dominated hierarchical society whose ideology, policies and methodologies one doesn't question. Patriotism is a flag-ship prejudice trailing behind it a flotilla of other prejudices: sexism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia. Patriotism, a form of bigotry which is ultimately egocentric and narcissistic, why is America the greatest country? Well, because it's *my* country. Even though I've only ever lived here, and I only speak English, I know it's true, isn't it, America the beautiful, a bright, God-fearing city on a hill, a beacon for all the other lesser countries to aspire to?

When the Olympics are on, the highlights consist almost exclusively of American athletes winning medals. Apparently almost no one in the country would be interested in watching an event without a single American to identify with. American audiences see athletes in red, white and blue uniforms that say U.S.A. as their representatives, their surrogates. Through the irrational movement of projection-identification, the American viewer experiences vicariously the triumphs and failures, “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat,” of a collective ego. But the typical American viewer usually has little in common with the American athletes as any of the others. In fact, the competitors could all swap uniforms and the American audience wouldn't know the difference – they'd still cheer for the ones that say U.S.A. It's a small step from cheering for that uniform to hoping and praying the U.S. military will kill the enemy, whoever it is.

The typical American viewer is automatically, completely and thoughtlessly committed to their identification with the collective American ego. Watching a race between an American athlete and athletes from 10 other countries, they can easily become so emotionally invested they get goosebumps

and become teary-eyed. They're not only incapable of neutrality but rationality. The collective ego is just as insecure and ungrounded as the individual ego. No amount of gold medals or military conquests will ever substantialize the ego and make it actually exist, make it real.

Whether individual or collective, the mental object called the ego is a psycho-social-linguistic construct, an imaginary introjection, an internalized self-image usually idealized, whose main function is to cover over our sense of lack and make us feel whole and in control. The ego remains perpetually immature and insecure, craving attention, recognition, validation, respectability, reputation and praise. Its mission, a kind of grail quest, is to verify the concrete reality of something which can only ever be a fantasy. Because it's composed mainly of our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, acting and reacting, most of us are oblivious to it, so the holographic ego insinuates itself into the place of the whole being, the whole psycho-physiological organism. As long as we continue, both individually and collectively, to be ruled by the ego (the imaginary monarch of an imaginary kingdom), we'll fail to realize our own humanity and the humanity of others.

Patriotism, or collective egotism, is always akin to nationalism, a form of prejudice by which a human being who happens to be an American national, a U.S. citizen, is perceived as more valuable, as superior to a human being who happens to be a citizen of one of the other 195 countries. Citizens of countries which are allies of the U.S. have more value than citizens of other countries. Within the U.S. the value of human life mirrors the class hierarchy and the racial caste system. The life of a homeless person is typically regarded as having no value or even a kind of negative value. The life of a white male is deemed more valuable than the life of a white female, and both are deemed more valuable than the lives of Latin-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native-Americans, African-Americans, etc. At the other end of the spectrum, white male billionaires are regarded as superior in every sense, their lives more valuable than the lives of everyone else.

Maybe it's easier to be critical of patriotism applied to an imperial power, but harder to be critical of it in relation to a smaller, more vulnerable country, a country facing an existential threat like Ukraine at the moment. But it's possible to be in solidarity with Ukraine, to respect its right not to be invaded and recolonized, without supporting Ukrainian patriarchy or patriotism. One of the main reasons Ukraine finds itself in an existential crisis is that it's not a NATO member. After the Soviet Union collapsed and

Ukraine gained independence, the U.S. decided not to grant Ukraine NATO membership because it borders Russia. Were Ukraine granted NATO status with article 5 protections, then any violation of its borders would be considered a violation against all NATO members – an attack on one an attack on all – so the U.S. would be obliged to defend Ukraine militarily, as if it were defending itself. U.S. officials assumed that granting Ukraine NATO membership would've been perceived by Russia as a provocation, and they certainly wanted to avoid provoking their nuclear nemesis, perhaps a wise decision from a certain perspective; nonetheless, Ukraine was left to the wolves.

This morning in Eureka I saw a Ukrainian flag flying beneath an American flag. Were the Ukrainian flag flying above the American one it would be blasphemy (Thou shalt have no other gods before me). The Ukrainian flag is subservient to the American flag, its symbol a surrogate for American patriotism. The outpouring of sympathy for the plight of the Ukrainian people may be genuinely heartfelt, but it belies an ulterior motive: self-exoneration. It allows patriotic Americans to cast Russia as the evil imperial power and America as the good imperial power, an oxymoron. Nevermind the fact that empires have behaved the same way throughout history, acting unilaterally with impunity, invading sovereign territories at will, killing many and displacing many more. It's very easy for a patriotic American to be not just critical of but vehemently, righteously opposed to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Putin seeming more and more like a reincarnation of Stalin), because it allows them to forget that America does the same thing. It's easier for white patriotic Americans to sympathize with the plight of Ukrainians because *they* look like *us*, at least more like us than the average Iraqi or Afghan. Most Ukrainian refugees have been warmly accepted by European countries and the U.S., while refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen are often turned away.

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In the Eureka Safeway parking lot, a blue bumper sticker on the back of a smoke-black Prius says *Peace Is Patriotic*. I sense an implicit dissatisfaction with the conventional, traditional notion of patriotism, an attempt to rectify it by expanding its horizons, but the attempt is ultimately naïve and futile – trying to pretty up the surface of a concept which is rotten on the inside, rotten to the core. There's nothing more patriotic than war. The greatest patriotic act is to sacrifice one's life for one's

country (the patriarchal, capitalist empire). In the name of defending and preserving the republic, in the game of conquest with the aim of making the country larger and more powerful, war is the most patriotic form of patriarchy. When an American soldier kills someone in a war zone, it's considered honorable and heroic. Whether the victim is an "enemy combatant" or an "innocent bystander" ("collateral damage" considered an acceptable cost of the business of war), it's justified by virtue of the fact that that person is unAmerican and therefore inferior. The only context in which peace is patriotic is in the letters R.I.P. on a white cross above a fallen American soldier's grave, the grave of an eternal hero, an infinite patriot. Increasingly more and more soldiers of color are attaining this status, as wars are always waged by the upper class and typically fought by the lower class, poor people deployed to the Middle East to kill and/or be killed by other poor people.

If peace were really patriotic, then the U.S. government wouldn't've tried so hard to deny John Lennon U.S. citizenship. The ex-Beatle beatnik peacenik, one of the most powerful anti-war icons for the hippie generation, endured a nearly 5-year-long legal ordeal, with the immigration department continually threatening to deport him. He was constantly surveilled by the FBI – they tapped his phone, they tailed him by car around New York City, making it obvious so as to scare him into returning to England. He was near the top of J. Edgar Hoover's list of threats, and he was even closer to the top of President Nixon's list.

What were they afraid of, that John would wave his magic peace wand and turn all American missiles and guns into trees and flowers? No, the main reason is that 18-year-olds had recently won the right to vote, and Nixon was afraid that Lennon would corrupt the youth of America with his dangerous message, persuade them to resist the Vietnam War, convince them that peace was really where it's at, the hippest, coolest, grooviest thing on the planet, and that Nixon was a wicked war-monger. Nixon's paranoia, that Lennon could somehow cost him the election, was unwarranted. He won re-election fairly easily and the war raged on, but Lennon finally won his immigration case and was granted U.S. citizenship in 1976. The Supreme Court decided that the government shouldn't be allowed to deport someone for overtly political reasons simply because it could. It needed a "good" reason. The case became the foundation for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act – yes, many human beings are still legally referred to as *Aliens*. To qualify as a DREAMer, one must not have committed a crime and must have

either graduated from high-school or served in the military. Those who've committed a crime or haven't graduated from high-school or served in the military are apparently incapable of American dreaming.

After the Watergate scandal broke, Nixon was forced to resign and become the poster boy for corrupt politicians everywhere. After his death, Nixon's White House tape recordings were released, revealing the true colors of a power-mad, paranoid, self-absorbed, heartless, sometimes monstrous human being.

We should remember though that Nixon was the last New Deal president. His administration created the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (whose website I use daily to check the surf), the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Clean Drinking Water Acts. Not that he cared about the environment, it's quite clear he cared about nothing but his own power. These successes at the federal level were the fruits of countless, anonymous environmental activists working diligently across the country for decades, ultimately creating a social and political climate in which Nixon perceived it as politically advantageous to pass major environmental laws and regulations and create an agency for enforcing them.

Likewise with Civil Rights legislation, it was the triumph of countless, mostly anonymous individuals around the country, mostly black people of all classes working tirelessly, mostly without pay, for many decades. LBJ is remembered mainly for escalating the Vietnam War, for the great failure of the Great Society, for his uncanny ability to cut backroom deals with recalcitrant Republicans, and for signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act into law, but the foul-mouthed good ol' boy from Texas was hardly the kind of guy who would've joined his black friends to march in the B.L.M. movement (although, to be fair, neither was Abraham Lincoln).

On the other hand John Lennon, artist and activist, a prophet of peace, who definitely would've marched in the B.L.M. movement, lived in America until he was assassinated in 1980, gunned down like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

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Peace is extremely threatening to the powers that be, to the patriarchy. The biggest threat to the British

Empire in India was a thin, bare-footed old man in glasses and a hand-spun, white cloth robe. Peace is subversive, radical and revolutionary because it's the enemy of patriotism. Refusing to fight, all it can do is quietly transform lives, individual human being by individual human being.

It seems backward, the idea that people like Emma Goldman and Edward Snowden should be praised as patriots. If you dedicate your life to resisting the ravages of capitalist labor practices, the oppression and exploitation of the working class, the poor, immigrants and minorities, if you're willing to sacrifice your safety and your life in order to expose horrible government secrets, atrocities, cover-ups, unwarranted spying via vast surveillance systems implemented without the informed consent of the general public in a supposedly democratic republic, then maybe you should be honored as a courageous anti-patriot whose sacrifice made the country just slightly more just.

The problem with bringing radicals and revolutionaries into the fold, under the proud banner of patriotism, is that it neutralizes their message and ultimately negates their polemic (which is what happened to Jesus of Nazareth – co-opted by the very system he criticized and resisted, a system which tortured and crucified him, then later claimed him as its god). When Martin Luther King, Jr. was honored with an eponymous holiday it was announced by Ronald Reagan, who represents the antithesis of everything Dr. King stood for. “A nation that continues year after year to spend more on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” Reverend King made this claim in 1967 during the Vietnam War, but it was even more poignant during Reagan's Cold War era, and it's just as poignant today. King characterized American capitalism as a system in which “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are more important than people,” and he called America in 1967 “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.” Were he alive today, it's hard to imagine he wouldn't make the same claims.

When a holiday was created in his name, King was effectively neutralized, depoliticized, defanged. He became another addition to the myth of American greatness. How great is America that it can produce men such as this, when in fact it was this supposed greatness which King criticized. When he was brought into the pantheon and venerated as the first canonized black patriot, the white patriarchal establishment had covered itself. It now felt itself under no obligation to do anything to address, in terms of policy, King's major concerns: systemic racism, poverty, and the deleterious effects of

American capitalism and American militarism.

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Obsequiousness, automaton behavior (Rush Limbaugh's "ditto-heads") leads to ethno-nationalism and jingoism – white men in raised V-8 trucks spewing black smoke, flying Trump banners and American flags which could just as well be Confederate flags, their meanings having been conflated. *Pater familias*, the familiar patterns of repression, the intolerant swarm of freedom rings.

The ultimate cautionary tale of patriotism brought to a boil is Nazi Germany, but I wonder if patriotic Americans consider the fact that from its inception until arguably the mid 1960s the ruling power in America was something equivalent to the 3rd Reich. Trump's reign was an echo of it: Make America Great/White Again. Make it a great white shark.

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America is the offspring of the British Empire. The child rebelled against its father, winning the Oedipal contest, winning its independence and sovereignty, eventually becoming a far more powerful empire than its father had been.

William Blake lauded the American Revolution, but he feared and prophesied that after throwing off the monarchy America would come to worship the god of mercantilism (he didn't have the word *capitalism* at the time). What he didn't foresee was that America would eventually become the biggest, bloodiest military superpower the world has ever known.

The American forefathers were unanimous in their opposition to a monarchy, so they formed a republic, a representative democracy with a separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. But they kept something crucial they inherited from Britain: an imperialistic worldview, the mindset of a conqueror. The conquest of the North American continent, the genocide of hundreds of millions of indigenous people, was justified by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which echoed the Divine Right of Kings. Just as the monarch is God's representative on Earth, the U.S. government, formed of "the

people's" elected officials, is likewise God's representative (one nation under God). Whatever it does is therefore justified by God. Actually the most dominant secular God *is* the nation – self-justifying and self-serving, accountable to no one but God, which is to say, no one.

The most popular critique of the military draft was that it made young men expendable, eliminating their individual rights and often turning them into cannon fodder. It's unclear whether the Vietnam protests shortened the war, but they did succeed in ending the draft. Now a soldier can choose to sacrifice their life for their country, which is a sacrifice to their god (maybe the modern equivalent of a tribal culture sacrificing animals, including human beings, to appease their gods). During a war the predominant patriotic belief is that "God is on our side," that God's justice acts through the military, the most powerful arm (arms) of the government.

For the past 70 years American wars have been instigated by the U.S. government often in violation of international law, sometimes in violation of the Constitution. But the thought that a former American president or high-ranking official could be tried for war crimes or crimes against humanity is almost laughable. American leaders do whatever they want with impunity, because they know that no other country or group of countries is powerful enough to stop them.

In 1973 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, a North Vietnamese diplomat, for jointly negotiating a cease fire in Vietnam. Le Duc Tho declined the award because there was no peace in Vietnam – the war would continue for 2 more years. Kissinger's critics, armed with thousands of pages of declassified documents, claim he was a war criminal who committed crimes against humanity. Not only was he not a peace-maker, he deliberately prevented peace. At the Paris Peace Accord in 1968 Johnson's diplomats and the North Vietnamese diplomats, led by Le Duc Tho, had agreed on terms and were on the brink of a deal. Kissinger knew that if the peace talks succeeded then the democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey (since Johnson had refused to run again) would very likely defeat Nixon in the '68 election, since the American public was poised to support whichever party could end the war. Kissinger informed Nixon that the talks were about to succeed, so the 2 of them agreed to intervene. Kissinger sabotaged the Paris Peace Accord by convincing the South Vietnamese leadership not to participate in the negotiations. It worked. The peace talks failed, Nixon won the election and Kissinger became the most powerful National Security Adviser in U.S. history,

ultimately accruing more power to himself than the State Department, the CIA and the Defense Department combined.

In 1969, since the Viet Cong had been setting up military bases there, Kissinger and Nixon began a clandestine bombing campaign in Cambodia, a neutral country, a violent violation of both U.S. and international law. 110,000 tons of bombs were dropped, most of them directly on Cambodian civilians, since the Viet Cong bases weren't clearly separated from local villages. Between 1969 and 1973 more than 500,000 Cambodians died in the bombings. Records were falsified and hidden from Congress, leaks being prevented by Nixon's "plumbers" who worked for him through Watergate, after which all of Nixon's henchmen except Kissinger were indicted.

In 1970 Kissinger purportedly helped engineer a CIA-backed coup in Cambodia which saw the removal of the pro-communist Prince Sihanouk. He was replaced by the pro-American Lon Nol, under whose leadership Cambodia abandoned its neutrality policy and aligned with the U.S. Lon Nol ordered the expulsion of all Vietnamese from Cambodia, inaugurating a civil war.

In December of 1972, 129 B-52 bombers dropped 40,000 tons of bombs on North Vietnam. It was called the Christmas bombing, a public relations gesture to convince the South Vietnamese leadership that this time the U.S. really meant it, that it was serious about ending the war. At the Paris Peace Accord in January of 1973 Kissinger signed a peace treaty with Le Duc Tho, agreeing to terms almost identical to those proposed by the Johnson team in 1968. The treaty officially ended U.S. involvement in the war, but Nixon and Kissinger would continue to support Lon Nol's anti-communist regime in secret, behind Congress's back. Targeting Viet Cong militants but destroying whole villages, killing thousands more Cambodian civilians, the U.S. military would drop as many bombs on Cambodia as it dropped on Japan during World War 2.

The destruction of Cambodia led to a famine in 1974, 2 million refugees fleeing into neighboring countries, creating ideal conditions for the bloodiest communist regime in history, the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot, the bloodiest communist dictator in history, to come to power in 1975. After a 5-year campaign of genocide in the "killing fields" of Cambodia, by 1979 Pol Pot's military forces had murdered over 3 million civilians. Kissinger and the U.S. government certainly didn't create the Khmer

Rouge, but their policies in Cambodia created fertile ground for the Khmer Rouge to flourish. The U.S. government certainly didn't create ISIS either, but its policies in Iraq and Afghanistan created fertile ground for ISIS to flourish.

In 1975, as Gerald Ford's Secretary of State, Kissinger gave President Suharto of Indonesia the green light to invade East Timor, suspected of being infiltrated by Chinese communist influencers. Using American helicopters and weapons (legally restricted for purposes of self-defense), Suharto's forces committed genocide, killing more than 100,000 civilians. Again Kissinger managed to keep Congress uninformed of his decision to authorize the action.

In 1971 the revered socialist statesman Salvador Allende, father of the revered novelist Isabelle Allende and friend of Fidel Castro, was democratically elected President of Chile, the country with the world's largest copper reserves. Allende planned to nationalize the copper industry so IT&T, the American copper corporation which had been mining in Chile for decades, would no longer be able to exploit Chile's copper resources to fill its own coffers. With Nixon's approval, because IT&T and Coca Cola (also exploiting Chilean resources at the time) were large campaign contributors, Kissinger orchestrated a CIA-backed coup in Chile, concealing it from both the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. First, courtesy of Kissinger's clandestine connections, came the kidnap and murder of Rene Schneider, the one Chilean general perceived to be the main obstacle to the coup, then in 1973 on September 11 (a date probably more ominous to most Chileans than to most Americans) Allende was overthrown and replaced by Pinochet, the military dictator whose reign of terror would last for 17 years with the full support of the U.S. government.

When Pinochet was arrested in 1996 in London and charged with crimes against humanity, Kissinger might've felt vulnerable, worried the same thing could happen to him, but he remained untouchable and remains so to this day, though he's wanted in several countries around the world. Kissinger agreed with Napoleon that power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. I suppose the satanic seduction of power is even more potent if you can abuse it with impunity.

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Like Napoleon, Kissinger is something like a human being invested with the power of a god. Gods and goddesses have always been personifications of the inexhaustible, transcendent energies of the universe. God doesn't have to be a personification, an anthropomorphic projection, a noun. It can also be the confluence of interacting processes by which all “things” mutually compose, contain and reflect each other – a continuous coming-into-being, a beginningless, endless metamorphosis.

Darwin marveled at the potentially infinite variations of life-forms on a finite planet. Difference, variation, diversity, multiplicity, plurality – these are the foundational principles by which life evolves and thrives. These principles constitute the human condition.

Our irreducible difference from each other is predicated on our irreducible sameness as members of *Homo Sapiens*. Human identity, being a human being must take priority over any and all other group affiliations, whether based on race, class, ethnicity, nationality or tribe, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, age, legal status or criminal record, abilities or disabilities, etc. As anxiety-provoking as it might seem at first, if we can accept the stranger, the other at the core of ourselves, if we can understand self and other as yin and yang – a black fish with a white eye and a white fish with a black eye entwined, encircled – then we can accept and embrace the stranger, the other outside of ourselves. White stars against a black sky, black words against a white page – black or white can be foreground or background, crest or trough, East or West, male or female, inside or outside, but because they only have meaning in relation to each other, mutually exclusive (2 sides of the same coin as opposed to 2 different coins), you can't have one without the other, no self without other.

Even if our openness and tolerance can extend to all beings, the whole biosphere, the Earth that births us all, there's still not much chance we'll solve and survive the current dilemma – the human crisis and the climate crisis are one in the same. It's not that we're not capable of solving it. If an alien civilization was attacking us with chemical weapons, spewing methane, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere in order to cook the planet and kill us off, then every government and big corporation and military on Earth would unite in the name of survival. But we're doing it to ourselves and we're not likely to stop, for a simple reason: those individuals and institutions in positions to really affect positive change have no incentive, no motivation to do so because they benefit most by global colonial capitalism, a system of abusive relationships in which the wealthy and powerful use their

unlimited leverage to capitalize upon, exploit and oppress those with far less wealth and power.

Adam Smith, maybe the favorite economist of both the right and the left, who believed an invisible hand would beneficently regulate the economy if only government intervention were removed, called these powerful individuals “the masters of mankind,” who own the society and either buy off the political leaders who make the rules or make them themselves – thru regulatory capture, controlling the agencies meant to regulate their industries, becoming viruses, parasitically hijacking the political system.

George W. Bush's 2005 Energy Bill was crafted largely by then Vice President Dick Cheney, former CEO of Halliburton, the company that patented hydraulic fracturing, the world's largest producer of fracking services and fracking fluids (a witch's brew of over 1,000 toxic chemicals, many of them known carcinogens). The bill completely exempts the oil and gas industry from having to comply with the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Drinking Water Act. In 2012, after rumors and videos surfaced of people living near natural gas wells igniting their tap water, lobbyists for the oil and gas industry spent 747 million to maintain the exemption to the Safe Drinking Water Act. Ten years later this exemption, known as the Halliburton loophole (a few feet wide and a couple thousand feet deep) is still firmly in place.

The Obama administration sold the natural gas revolution to the public as a clean transition to renewables, a homegrown fuel that would finally break our addiction to foreign oil (and wars). We're supposed to associate *natural* with goodness, cleanliness and safety, but natural gas wells emit astronomical amounts of methane which, as a greenhouse gas, is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Fracking fluids injected into shale formations cause thousands of micro earthquakes, and those fluids have a nasty habit of migrating into nearby springs and water wells. Between 2005 and 2020 well over a million wells were drilled all across the country. The EPA was prevented from regulating their construction and production, and from investigating any air or water quality issues, regardless of how many aquifers were contaminated, how many watersheds, rivers and creeks polluted, or how many hundreds of people across the country could light their tap water on fire (they were bought out by the oil companies and forced to move after signing nondisclosure agreements).

The shale gas revolution, the natural gas boom that began around the turn of the 21st century, is a direct

echo of the oil boom that began around the turn of the 20th, when tens of thousands of wells (completely unregulated, Wild West-style) were drilled all across the country, and that sea of oil underground was sucked dry in about 50 years.

In 2015 the moratorium against exporting gas, which had been in place since the oil embargoes of the 1970s, was lifted, and America soon became the world's largest exporter of natural gas. Most of the natural gas produced in America today is exported to Europe and Asia, to countries with gas prices 2 to 3 times higher than anywhere in the U.S. It makes sense, why would a gas company sell its product domestically when it can make 2 to 3 times more profit selling it overseas? Most of the oil and gas consumed in America still comes from the Middle East. So much for the Obama administration's rhetoric about breaking our addiction to foreign oil (and wars).

Americans love to complain about gas prices. When I started driving in 1989 it cost 95 cents a gallon. During the last spike here in Eureka it got up to \$6.99 a gallon. But Americans pay much less for gas than almost anyone else on the planet, and that has everything to do with the foreign policy of the world's preeminent military superpower. From the second half of the 20th century thru the first quarter of the 21st the U.S. government has supported, financially and militarily, extremely repressive authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in exchange for extremely subsidized oil. Judging by President Biden's recent trip to Saudi Arabia – the world's largest oil exporter, a lucrative U.S. ally, a country with perhaps the worst human rights record on the planet – and by the American government's continued support of the war in Yemen which, strangely enough, doesn't receive much news coverage, that foreign policy isn't likely to change much in the near future, regardless of which party controls the White House.

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To believe that a large percentage of successful capitalists could be convinced to give up much of their wealth and power (investing entirely in renewables instead of fossil fuels, for instance, which would amount to a huge loss, at least in the short term) in order to ensure that future generations will inhabit a livable planet, seems pretty naïve. What if the CEO of a large corporation suddenly became enlightened and decided to do everything in his (it's usually his) power to save the biosphere from further

destruction? As soon as he started acting in the interests of all beings (as opposed to just the shareholders, the investors who own the corporation) he'd be fired immediately.

Imagine (in John Lennon's sense) if enough people could be convinced to give up their cars and start riding public transportation or bicycles, imagine gas stations across the nation with no lines, a surplus of supply with very little demand. If the profits of big oil and gas companies became seriously threatened, which would potentially threaten the whole economy, then the government would find itself in the precariously dubious position of trying to convince people to get back in their cars in order to get the economy back on track. Since the government is convinced that unless the economy continues to grow at any and all costs, unless the GDP and GNP continue to rise indefinitely, the country will simply fall into a ditch and die (isn't it ironic that, as the Gross National Product rises there's no corresponding rise in Gross National Happiness). With its capitalist worldview of cut-throat competition, the government is always paranoid other countries will overtake and defeat *us*. And so, Janus-faced, the government would tell us with one mouth to go fill up our gas tanks while claiming with its other mouth to do everything in its power to “combat” climate change (as if there's an opponent, an enemy – there's not, we are the asteroid).

This precariously dubious position is reminiscent of the Arab spring in 2011, when the U.S. government was forced to equivocate, giving lip-service in favor of the democratic rights of people to petition their governments for grievances by peacefully protesting, while simultaneously trying and failing to hide the fact that they were fully supporting, financially and militarily, the oppressive oil-rich regimes against which the people were fighting.

Those most affected by climate change – the global poor, mostly indigenous people and people of color – are the most powerless. Their activism, as futile as it seems, is a matter of immediate survival. The majority of those in the middle between the 2 poles of rich and poor are too busy working to support themselves and their families. Activism isn't possible because it doesn't pay the bills. The fact that activism remains in some sense a privilege is a symptom of the problem. All of us, rich, poor or somewhere in between, are inextricably entrenched in vast, ineluctable grids and networks – what tangled webs we weave indeed. Here we are, divorced from the natural world, leashed to all these devices, appliances, machines and the fossil fuel industry that powers them; at the mercy of global

transportation networks poisoning the planet and its atmosphere; at the mercy of a few transnational corporations that own virtually every drop of fresh water on the planet; at the mercy of industrial agriculture with its daily tons of toxins; and at the mercy of manufacturing dependent upon robots and sweatshops.

The primary responsibility of a corporation is not to its employees, its customers or the environment, but to its stockholders, the investors who own it. These shareholders are mostly anonymous, scattered here and there, with no interest in the corporation's activities except insofar as they affect its profitability. There's plenty of irony in the fact that a corporation is regarded as a person, a person with little to no personal sense of moral responsibility for any damages the corporation inflicts, because such responsibility has been diluted and diffused to the point of disappearing, lost in the impersonality of the economic system. All of us, to varying degrees, are complicit in solidifying and propagating this system of globalized corporate colonial capitalism which is gradually destroying the biosphere, and yet we don't feel individually responsible for the destruction. But every purchase, each act of consumption is a political act we as individuals, to whatever degree we're capable, need to be mindful of and take responsibility for.

Those willing and able to become politically active in the struggle for social and ecological justice (2 sides of the same coin) must do so with no teleological impulse, no attachment to results, no hope of attaining their goals. Their task is very likely impossible, the problems insurmountable, but they do it anyway, and there's dignity in that. If human identity, with its inherent dignity, doesn't take priority over other group affiliations, if we continue to be ruled by fear of difference (which is ultimately fear of life), if we abdicate our responsibility to be thinking, feeling beings sharing this planet with countless millions of other species, many of which are likely to go extinct before being discovered, the result will be the continual propagation of atrocities.

With the fertile concept of *différance*, Jacques Derrida explained how a word gets its meaning by differing from other words and by deferring its ability to have meaning in itself. A word in itself is inherently meaningless – it can only be defined by other words. Each word, both figuratively and literally (by the letter), is infected with the traces of every other – just as your individual existence is infected with the traces of every other existence. Your life presupposes not only your parents, your

parents' parents, your parents' parents' parents, etc., but the whole history of both biological and cosmic evolution. What is the cause of your individual existence? The entire universe.

Though we define ourselves in and through language, a human being isn't a word, because a human being insists on being inherently meaningful. By meaningful I mean a person's basic need to feel like they matter, like their life matters – that it makes a *difference*, that individual human dignity is a non-negotiable demand.

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A tall thin woman with long orange hair a bit frizzy and scraggly, barefoot, wearing pale pink pajama bottoms and a baby blue top both wrinkled and dirty, pushes a shopping cart south across E Street then along the sidewalk in front of Madeleine's house and stops. The cart's mostly empty, which is surprising, I expected a blanket or a sleeping bag. I picture her in an Eastern European countryside after the war pushing her cart alongside scores of other refugees fleeing the police, the Red Army or the Red, White and Blue Army. She's staring at Madeleine's exquisitely well-groomed front yard, now she's staring up into the burning sky, pushing her hair back behind her ears, combing her hair slowly and carefully with her hands since she doesn't have a comb. I realize she bears a slight resemblance to Joie, my friend from college, the one who was murdered in Yosemite.

Now she's rubbing her chin, cheeks and forehead fastidiously as if applying imaginary makeup. She wants to be beautiful and actually, despite her slightly haggard appearance, apparent homelessness, mental illnesses and addictions, she is. She leaves the cart and walks onto Madeleine's lawn – it's late April, everything's in bloom – bends over and tears out a swath of lithodora loaded with little violet-blue blossoms, walks back and places it gently in her cart. I think she's about to leave but she pauses again, walks back onto the lawn, tears out another swath of lithodora and places it on the walkway at the foot of Madeleine's porch, then she returns to the same plant, tears out another swath and places it on the walkway. She does this about 5 more times til the plant is flowerless, a little shredded stump, Madeleine's concrete walkway completely covered with dead lithodora (stone flower), their indigo blossoms echoing the Navy blue in Madeleine's flag. She returns to her cart and starts pushing it, very slowly and methodically, south along the grey-white sidewalk out of sight.