

# The Legend of the Bush Gang: Imperialism, War, and Propaganda

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This article explores the dialectical relationship between the Bush administration's domestic policies and its deranged "war on terrorism," which is being waged on a number of different fronts, for example, Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, and the United States. The authors argue that the Bush gang is using the external "international crisis" to override the remnants of U.S. bourgeois democracy in order to reestablish conditions of profitability. Perhaps not surprisingly, at least from a Marxist perspective, the supporting repressive (e.g., the Department of Homeland Security's secret police) and ideological state apparatuses (e.g., schools and the corporate media) have played a profound role in building support for the Bush gang's totalizing ambitions.

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The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

—Joseph Goebbels

Gout begins in the little finger of a hand or in the big toes, but once on the way it goes right to the heart.

—Leon Trotsky (1940)

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, moving from its home, where it assumes respectable form, to the colonies, where it goes naked.

—Karl Marx (1853)

Especially since September 11, 2001, the United States has been behaving more and more like a nation-state pushed to the limits of imperial expansion, where fascism and war have become the preferred methods of choice to stave off

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economic collapse and to relieve the agonizing tension of its underlying contradictions. Operating under an official philosophy that maintains its military power should remain “beyond challenge” and that asserts the impeachable right to act unilaterally by means of “preventative” military strikes when feeling threatened, the United States is busy looking for proof to justify its punishment of Iraq while at the same time seeking out every nook and cranny of the globe for surplus value extraction. Here it likens its path to empire to a benevolent paternalism as the seeds it sows in the name of capital’s inevitability are sprouting into grotesque bloom resembling mustard-colored clouds from its bunker-buster bombs wafting slowly skyward or shimmering bursts of radioactive dust kicked up after a hailstorm of depleted uranium shells pulverized some luckless Muslim wedding party celebrating with AK-47s.

The grim reality is that as monopoly interests are imposed on other countries and peoples, underdeveloped client states are being crushed by trade deficits and debt burden, especially through the “tough love” policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The confounding complexity of capitalist social relations in this so-called bastion of free enterprise democracy cannot be erased by the mere realization of its existence but needs to be branded with the designation it has deservedly earned: imperialist exploitation. Exposed as the Benedict Arnolds of the so-called age of democracy are the spin doctors and purveyors of “free market” globalization, who claim that monopoly capitalism, under the influence of the much ballyhooed “information revolution,” spreads capitalist development, boosts the prosperity of the working class, and blots out features of uneven development among national economies (Foster, 2001, 2003; Sison, 2003). Clearly, behind this high-rise rhetoric, nothing is further from the overflowing sewers of truth, its stench-filled tributaries leading from the outsourced factories of Mexico’s *malquiladoras* to the poisonous smokestacks of China’s sprawling factories. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2003) points out, “The American combo of ‘private wealth and public squalor’ is gradually being transferred to the global domain” (p. 315). In the 1990s “Overall human development, measured by the UN as an amalgam of income, life expectancy and literacy, fell in 21 countries during the 90s. By contrast only four countries suffered falling human development in the 80s” (Elliot, 2003).

Like the doomed sailors on the unsinkable Titanic, workers in capitalism’s flagship economy are fast sinking under the weight of recurrent budget expansion and a historically unprecedented military budget. What is important to recognize here is that despite the frantic, last-ditch efforts of the Bush gang and its criminal accomplices, the same historical laws and processes operate in the home citadels of imperialism as in other nations and regions of the world: the laws of capitalist decline. This is the case despite the cunning efforts of U.S. corporations and banks to exercise international leverage (i.e., via the World Trade Organization [WTO]) and regional arrangements to consolidate their world leadership and institutionalize their advantage to maintain U.S. hege-

mony (Pieterse, 2003). This happens regardless of whether we are living in the stakeholder capitalism of an earlier Keynesian era or today's Anglo-American shareholder capitalism. At the present, this endemic feature of imperialism finds its sharpest expression in the downward spiral of the falling rate of profit, which is the germ of other crisis tendencies, for example, the overproduction of capital and the spectacular financial collapses we have witnessed in home markets (e.g., Enron, WorldCom). Scandal-ridden corporations fall apart like Humpty Dumpty, only in their case, they are destined to reappear again, because the structures that enable them to exploit are the same as those that enable the public to forget. Pieterse (2003) remarks,

As if in a vast project of self-colonization Americans have surrendered their forums of public engagement. The reactions of the Enron episode, the corporate scandals and loss of trillions of dollars illustrate the power of the status quo. It has led to a weaker stock market and prompted moves to achieve greater corporate accountability. Yet the indications are that these changes will be marginal because influential players from the Business Roundtable to the Democratic Party have no interest in major reform. (p. 317)

In the United States, the sharp drop in the rate of profit has discouraged business spending, with the indebtedness of corporations at an all-time record and defaults on corporate bonds and bank loans running high (Despeignes, 2003). At the same time, the slump in U.S. manufacturing has resulted in the biggest drop in jobs since the Great Depression, with unemployment and poverty rates getting worse among African Americans, married couples, and suburbanites, particularly in the heartland of the United States, the Midwest. With people forced to deplete their hard-earned savings just to survive, consumer credit and mortgage debt has soared sky high, with household debt running at 120% of disposable income in early 2001 (Despeignes, 2003; Lahart, 2003; Sison, 2003). Forget the bluster encapsulated in Bush's slickly packaged "No Child Left Behind," which actually threatens to condemn students to educational poverty by punishing schools that do not measure up (literally) to criteria set by standardized tests. In 2002, 12.1 million children were officially living in poverty, which is a staggering 16.7% of all children ("Poverty Rate Rises," 2003). The year 2003 has been a year of record homelessness in New York City, with numbers reaching 38,357, almost double the number 5 years ago, and reports show that families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless (Bovino, 2003, p. 25). According to a recent report by the Associated Press (2003), the Agriculture Department has revealed that more and more American families are hungry or unsure whether they can afford to find food; nearly 3.8 million families were so hungry that someone in the family had to skip meals because the family could not afford to purchase food. Not only this, but the United States is falling into out-of-control budgetary deficits due to corporate tax cuts and big increases in military and homeland security spending, the burden of which will fall upon the working class (Sison, 2003).

Long before the tragic events of September 11, when the United States would begin treating future attacks as if they had already happened, the steady culmination of crisis tendencies at the heart of the profit system was guiding U.S. foreign policy toward “hyperpower” status through the use of military force. As Pieterse (2003) notes, “As a hyperpower it [the United States] acts on a narrow understanding of power as military force” (p. 316). Without the counterweight of the former Soviet Union, the United States, under both the Republicans and the lesser “evil” Democrats, was acting like the world’s bullyboy to acquire long-term security for its imperial interests (McLaren & Martin, 2003). Led by Vice President Dick Cheney, a cabal of hawks—what Ritt Goldstein (2003) calls “an extra governmental network operation outside normal structures and procedures”—have hijacked the U.S. government and are running “a shadow foreign policy, contravening Washington’s official line.” Karen Kwiatkowski, a former Air Force lieutenant colonel and recently retired Middle East specialist in the office of the undersecretary of defense for policy, with grave alarm remarked, “What these people are doing now makes Iran-Contra look like amateur hour . . . it’s worse than Iran-Contra, worse than what happened in Vietnam. . . . George Bush isn’t in control . . . the country’s been hijacked” (Goldstein, 2003). Kwiatkowski went even further in her condemnation, describing what she saw as “a subversion of constitutional limits on executive power and co-optation through deceit of a large segment of the Congress” (Goldstein, 2003).

The American strategy, which finds its unabashed expression in a number of U.S. imperial foreign policy think-tank memos and articles as well as official U.S. policy statements, advocated the use of global mechanisms such as the WTO, IMF, and the World Bank to achieve “informal control,” with the invisible hand of the market backed up by the iron clenched fist of the military, if deemed necessary (Socialist Democracy, 2003). Do not forget: The past decade began with Bush padre’s Gulf War and ended with Clinton’s NATO bombing of Serbia (Beams, 2003). In fact, the latest wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq are simply an intensification of the United States’s distinctly neoliberal agenda, which is to impose old-school American values of capitalist exploitation through a policy of “peace through strength.” The most comprehensive statement of this deranged outlook came in September 2002 when the Bush administration published its *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, which asserted the right of the United States to use its military might preemptively anywhere in the world against any perceived enemy that it believes may at some point become a threat to American interests (Socialist Democracy, 2003).

Imperial statecraft has become the guiding fist of American foreign policy. In their response to the social distress brought on by 9/11 and their project of rethinking the ongoing reconstruction of the capitalist world order, ultranationalist geopolitical strategists have become the new heralds of fascism, fusing national security with the recreation myth of perpetual rebirth through per-

petual war: the purging of decadent anti-American “traitors”—especially those from Hollywood—and the conquest of the Black-turbaned barbarian hordes. This is presented to the public as a journey toward the transformation of the homeland into a new moral order premised on the pillars of Judeo-Christian faith. With the exception of a few politicians with both an understanding of and commitment to democracy, everyone in Washington is jumping onboard for the giddy ride to fully incapacitate its capitalist rivals and make the future conform to its current interests. We are not dealing here with the unfolding of abstract laws but a historically specific process of a developing capitalism and capitalist state (Panitch & Gindin, 2003). Here, the “dynamism of American capitalism and its worldwide appeal has combined with the universalistic language of American liberal democratic ideology to underpin a capacity for informal empire far beyond that of nineteenth century Britain’s” (Panitch & Gindin, 2003). Latin America is particularly hard hit by the ideology and practices of U.S. imperialism. Saul Landau writes, “democracy in Latin America might also prove nice if the United States would allow it to occur. . . . Indeed, U.S. concern about democracy shows only when that ancient Greek form begins to function for the poor. In Chile in the early 1970s and in Venezuela today, the wealthy chant ‘democracy’ only when tax policies designed to help the poor threaten their fortunes” (2004, pp.1, 4).

Whether or not Osama bin Laden was responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, it is clear that the Bush gang seized upon the sympathy and fear afforded by that day’s tragic events to push their preexisting reactionary agenda: imperialist aggression abroad and fascism at home, an agenda not even remotely connected to terrorism (McLaren & Martin, 2003). Like Hitler, who used the burning of the German Reichstag (parliament) to justify his goals in 1933, September 11 gave Bush the pretext to arrogantly declare “You are either with us or for the terrorists.” With formalities out of the way, the Bush gang is waging an unapologetic crusade on a number of different fronts (e.g., Afghanistan, Columbia, Iraq, the Philippines, Cuba, Venezuela, and the United States), which is supposed to be all about protecting “our way of life” and defending the “free world” from evildoers (“The Dictatorship of Capital,” 2002). But beneath this craven attempt at fear mongering lurks what Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda chief, infamously termed the art of the “big lie.” The simple logic of the big lie is that people will generally accept a lie as truth if it is a really big one told often enough by authoritative sources. Whereas Goebbels’ lie laid the foundations for the Holocaust, the Bush regime is manipulating the U.S. population into an epoch of imperialist war that threatens to kill millions of the world’s poorest people (McLaren & Martin, 2003).

It staggers the imagination to look back at all of the lies cooked up by the Bush administration to deceive the American public; lies that have been repeated, spun, and “sexed up” by its coalition of big (United Kingdom) and little (Australia) imperialist supporters (Beam, 2003). Before the invasion of Iraq, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell presented evidence from the CIA and U.S.

intelligence community to the UN Security Council that Iraq was armed to the teeth with alleged “weapons of mass destruction.” The so-called clear proof (satellite photographs, intercepted voice recordings, and crudely forged documents) was calculated to create support for a war, deemed in violation of international law. Yet 6 months after Bush declared the war officially over, an official report compiled by David Kay, the CIA’s chief weapons hunter in Iraq, suggests that weapons of mass destruction have vanished like a mirage in the desert. No matter. The U.S. public has blindly lapped up and ingested the lie.

Australian investigative journalist John Pilger claims to have proof that Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice in early 2001 publicly expressed confidence that Saddam Hussein had been contained and disarmed by the UN sanctions (Mulvey, 2003). Yet after September 11, the Bush administration obviously decided to wage war on Saddam because he was found to be armed by weapons of mass destruction. Pilger claims to have uncovered video footage of Colin Powell in Cairo on February 24, 2001 saying, “He [Saddam Hussein] has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors.” Two months later, Condoleeza Rice is reported to have said, “We are able to keep his arms from him. His military forces have not been rebuilt.” Clearly, the Bush administration suddenly changed its tune about Iraq’s status as a military threat when the attacks of September 11 provided them with an opportunity to invade Iraq.

As Dean Rusk, Vietnam-era secretary of state, conceded, the mass media plays a vital role in determining the outcome of a war (Cohn, 2002). Shaping public opinion, of course, is crucial to creating discipline and support for the Bush gang’s crazed and totalizing ambitions. Even before the illegal invasion of Iraq began, the mass media’s 24-hour-a-day “no-spin-zone” techniques of ideological manipulation and control played a critical role in getting people to subjectively identify with ideas that were not objectively in their interests, for example, nationalism, racism, and war (McLaren & Martin, 2003). The cold, hard truth is that the embedded corporate media was not “duped” or “outwitted” by the highly choreographed machinations of Bush Junior’s political advisor Karl Rove but rather worked in cahoots with the administration to placate and deceive the American people (North, 2003). In this respect, what is most alarming is the roar of silence as reporters sit on their hands even as the bloated facts and shredded corpses accumulate in Iraq. The problem is that real investigative journalism no longer suits the ad-based corporate and ideological interests of media barons and heinous ideologues such as Rupert Murdoch, the owner of the Fox Television Network. Pieterse (2003) writes that “the strident conservatism in most US media is so habitual that one hardly notices anymore” (p. 316). These days, it is not surprising that few reporters or editors attach much weight to the notion that government lying and skullduggery is something that needs to be exposed, unlike a short generation ago (e.g., Vietnam

War and the Watergate Nixon era) when the term “credibility gap” was invented and popularized by the mainstream media (North, 2003). As North (2003) remarks, the situation is so bad that even when political lies are eventually brought to light, the immediate reaction is not outright “condemnation, but new and even more insolent justifications in the media.”

Media lies, in the form of spin maneuvers and disinformation campaigns, must be understood as part of a domestic psyop (psychological operation) aimed at producing ideological oxygen for Bush’s war on Iraq and building support for any future adventures. Psyops, as they are called in the military, have always been an integral part of such campaigns in the psychological battle to sway public opinion and deceive adversaries (Leinwand, 2003). Modern psyops include a vast range of actions that frequently cross the line between propaganda and outright deception (Leinwand, 2002; Tyson, 2002). Take, for example, the infamous baby-incubator news story in 1990, which was trotted out as a justification for passing the Senate resolution for Gulf War I under Bush *padre*. Afterwards, it was discovered that this “legend” (spook or intelligence jargon for bogus story) was a complete lie manufactured by Hill & Knowlton, a public relations firm with a notorious record for disseminating and promoting media distortion. Earlier this year, on February 19, *The New York Times* (Dao & Schmitt, 2002) reported that “The Pentagon is developing plans to provide news items, possibly even false ones, to foreign media organizations as part of a new effort to influence public sentiment and policy makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries.” In response to the ensuing controversy that erupted, Donald Rumsfeld told a Department of Defense news conference that he was going to close down the newly created Office of Strategic Influence, headed by Air Force brigadier general Simon “Pete” Worden (Tyson, 2003). Of course, that does not mean that the official Pentagon policy of lying has been forgotten; rather, this function has simply been outsourced to firms such as Hill & Knowlton and the Rendon Group, which are in the business of peddling lies and news-ready disinformation for the mass media (Berkowitz, 2003; Miller & Rampton, 2001). Leo Strauss, the avatar of the “noble lie,” would give Bush’s gang the highest grades since Strauss advocated that lying to the masses was a preferred strategy if it meant a small elite group of worthier minds could use the lies to advance their national agenda. Karl Rove, the president’s political advisor, not only puts Straussian strategy to work, he is also reported to “reread Machiavelli the way the devout study their Bibles” (Maertens, 2004). As Tom Maertens (2004) asserts,

It was the Bush-Rove team that deployed the scurrilous push-poll techniques against Sen. John McCain in the 2000 South Carolina primary. (Sample question: “Would you be more likely or less likely to vote for John McCain for president if you knew he had fathered an illegitimate black child?” In reality, the brown-skinned child with McCain was his adopted Bangladeshi daughter, but the race-baiting worked and McCain was defeated.)

During the invasion of Iraq, Bush Junior reportedly watched with amusement the Iraqi information minister twisting reality into a political pretzel by claiming that the U.S. military had suffered a defeat at the hands of the Iraqi forces. As Maureen Dowd (2003) described the situation:

“He’s my man,” Bush laughingly told TV anchor Tom Brokaw about the entertaining contortions of Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf aka “Comical Ali” and “Baghdad Bob,” who assured reporters, even as US tanks rumbled in, “There are no American infidels in Baghdad. Never!” And, “We are winning this war, and we will win the war. . . . This is for sure.”

Dowd now compares the discourse that Bush is using to describe the situation in Iraq to those of the former the Iraqi information minister:

Now Crawford George has morphed into Baghdad Bob. Speaking to reporters last week, Bush made the bizarre argument that the worse things get in Iraq, the better news it is. “The more successful we are on the ground, the more these killers will react,” he said. In the Panglossian Potomac, calamities happen for the best. One could almost hear the doubletalk echo of that American officer in Vietnam who said: “It was necessary to destroy the village in order to save it.”

It is interesting to see how the tables have turned. As the U.S. struggles to increase its control throughout Iraq, the American public is now growing increasingly skeptical and sour about the war. Officially, the number of troops killed in ambushes and attacks has surpassed the total number of casualties since Bush, sporting a flight suit that highlighted a set bulging *buevos*, flew to the USS Abraham Lincoln to declare the end of major combat on May 1 against the backdrop of a huge banner reading “Mission Accomplished.” Faced with falling support in the polls, the Bush gang has undertaken a renewed propaganda campaign to gain “information superiority” in the mainstream media, which, it claims, has failed to support the war against terrorism by refusing to adequately acknowledge the success stories in Iraq. Coinciding with this, 11 identical letters were published in newspapers in the United States over the signatures of 11 different soldiers, telling about the progress they have made in rebuilding Iraq (King, 2003). When contacted by Gannet News Service, none of the soldiers said that they wrote the letters submitted on their behalf to their hometown papers. Spokespersons for the military also denied any knowledge about the letter-writing campaign (King, 2003). Needless to say, soldiers who spoke out against Donald Rumsfeld and the war in Iraq earlier this year were sternly warned that dissent would not be tolerated among the rank and file and those who did dare to speak out, especially against our commander in chief, would be officially reprimanded. It seems just slightly ironic that these young soldiers, who are told that they are fighting against Hussein’s tyrannical dictatorship to create a foothold for democracy in the region, are denied the democratic right to express opinions critical of the Bush administration, defender of

the world's mightiest and most celebrated democracy. To make matters worse, Bush has not attended memorials or funerals for any of the troops killed during his presidency, unlike his predecessors (Vann, 2003). This is not a mere oversight. Dana Milbank of *The New York Times* (2003) reported that on the eve of the Iraq war, the Bush administration, recognizing the negative effect of dead-soldier "homecomings" in flag-draped caskets on public opinion, issued the following directive to the Pentagon: "There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein (Germany) airbase or Dover (Del.) base, to include interim stops."

If the United States is the greatest world defender of democracy, then why over the past five decades has it funded, advised, and sponsored the overthrow of democratically elected reformist governments that attempted to introduce egalitarian redistributive economic programs in countries such as Guatemala, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Syria, Indonesia (under Sukarno), Greece, Cyprus, Argentina, Bolivia, Haiti, and the Congo? The U.S. government clearly continues to be intolerant of any rival alternative economic system. According to Michael Parenti (2002),

The intent behind Washington's policy is seen in what the US-sponsored military rulers do when they come to power. They roll back any reforms and open their countries all the wider to foreign corporate investors on terms completely favorable to the investors. (p. 80)

Why, for instance, has the United States participated in wars of attrition that included terrorist attacks on "soft targets" such as schools, farm cooperatives, health clinics, and whole villages in places such as Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Portugal, Nicaragua, Cambodia, East Timor, Western Sahara, Egypt, Lebanon, Peru, Iran, Syria, Jamaica, South Yemen, and the Fiji Islands? Why, in the words of Parenti, does the United States have "a record of direct military aggression unmatched by any communist government in history" (p. 81) through invasions and assaults against Vietnam, Laos, the Dominican Republic, North Korea, Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan? It doesn't matter whether the countries targeted by the United States are or have been populist military governments, Christian socialist governments, social democracies, anticolonialist reform governments, Marxist-Leninist governments, Islamic revolutionary governments, or conservative militarist regimes: The goal is always the same. Parenti explains,

The goal of US global policy is the Third Worldization of the entire world including Europe and North America, a world in which capital rules supreme with no labor unions to speak of; no prosperous, literate, well-organized working class with rising expectations; no pension funds or medical plans or environmental, consumer, and occupational protectionism, or any of the other insufferable things that cut into profits. (p. 83)

Echoing the rise of fascism in Germany, the Bush regime and its bourgeois apologists are using ultranationalist propaganda to squelch dissent (McLaren & Martin, 2003). Based on generalized fear (e.g., sudden fatherland color-coded terror alerts, stories about duct tape, and domestic terrorist “cells”) and programmed ignorance (e.g., monopoly control over content in the print and mass electronic media), the imperialist’s propaganda machine is working to eliminate dissent by equating it with terrorism. As we have seen, a well-heeled cabal of feral right wingers, media pundits, religious fundamentalists, and government officials is using McCarthyite methods to engage in a witch hunt and brand people who express opinions critical of U.S. foreign policy as unpatriotic and even as traitors who give “aid and comfort” to the enemy. Media thugs such as Bill O’Reilly, host of Fox’s *The O’Reilly Factor*, are fuelling paranoia and hatred for antiwar demonstrators in the battle for “hearts and minds” (Hart, 2003; Rendall, 2003). Former MSNBC talk-show host Michael Savage even called for the restoration of the Sedition Act to silence dissent. Community debate and dissent is being squeezed out with people expected, “on demand,” as Alan Ramsey (2003) points out, “to join uncritically in simultaneous shows of mass grief and triumphal nationalism.” Sean Penn has to pay around \$125,000 to take out a full-page anti-Bush ad in *The New York Times*, and that is what it costs now to see dissent appear in the mainstream press. Let’s not play naïve—it is obvious that Bush Junior and his right-wing backers do not love free speech, for a host of reasons. Forget the sinister plots of conspiracy theorists and just look at the way the Bush administration dished out vigilante justice to Joseph C. Wilson, former diplomat in Baghdad, after he cast doubt on claims that Iraq had attempted to buy yellowcake-uranium ore to develop nuclear weapons. Not only was he vilified but also his wife, Valarie Plame’s, name was leaked as a CIA operative—all in the name of discouraging others from exercising their right of free speech (Harris, 2003c). Witness the abominable character assassination of Richard Clarke, former White House counterterrorism chief, by the Bush gang for his criticism of the Bush administration’s preparedness for the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The Bush gang seeks to stamp its foreign and domestic agenda with the imprimatur of Biblical certitude. Disagreement with a literal interpretation of the Bible has become a political risk factor for politicians—especially Republican ones—with evangelical Christians casting at least two of every five Republican votes. We need to recognize that Bible study is structured into the president’s weekly schedule, that Bush is regularly engaged in devotional study of Oswald Chamber’s *My Utmost for His Highest*. To better understand Bush Junior, we need to acknowledge that he fervently believes that God wanted him to be president of the United States (Didion, 2003; Harris, 2003b). We need to acknowledge the implications of what it means for Bush Junior to trust in providence. In his January State of the Union Address, Bush urged the people of the United States to place their confidence in “the loving God behind all life and all of history” and noted that America’s “sacrifice” was “for the liberty of strang-

ers.” Its sacrifice was “not America’s gift to the world” but “God’s gift to humanity” (quoted in Didion, 2003, p. 11). When the smoke and uranium dust eventually clear over the Middle East, it might well turn out that Bush Junior is really Nicolae Carpathia, the Antichrist in the end-times Christian fundamentalist *Left Behind* book series. Wouldn’t that be a twist for the Moral Majority? Maybe we’ll see a repeat of the Bush Junior reported in Christopher Andersen’s *George and Laura: Portrait of an American Marriage*, where the boy emperor, yet to be selected our leader by the Supreme Court, launches into an attack on Al Hunt, the Washington bureau chief of *The Wall Street Journal*: “You no good fucking son of a bitch! . . . I will never fucking forget what you wrote!” (cited in Didion, 2003, p. 87).

We are living through a very dangerous, corrupt, and oppressive period in which imperialism has assumed its most mature and brutal character (Trotsky, 1939). We are in the middle of Bush Junior’s Christian crusade to civilize the Arab world, an economic crisis made worse by the tragic events of 9/11, the huge corporate scandals of 2002, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the pernicious right-wing assault on democratic freedoms in the name of homeland security. The most important aspect of this crisis is the surreal concentration of wealth and growth of social inequality, with homelessness, food “insecurity,” and poverty skyrocketing (Shaft, 2003). The Bush gang’s solution is to mix unvarnished “neo-liberal rapacity” with military Keynesianism: tax cuts for the rich, especially on dividends and capital gains, generous subsidies for military research and production, and lucrative purchase contracts in the sphere of military production (Sison, 2003). But despite occasional epileptic fits including the recent jump in third-quarter GDP figures, monopoly state financing for military production and forces cannot but hope to generate a lot of employment or act as a stimulus for economic growth in a sustained way, not, at least, without “continual booster shots” (Gross, 2003).

Unable to hold society in a state of equilibrium, especially after stealing the 2000 election, the unpopular Bush II administration declared its bankruptcy by resorting to fascism and imperialist war. Its advance attack dogs include Rush Limbaugh, FOX TV News, and pundits within the corporate media apparatus. The parasitical character of imperialist societies, which boast of their higher standard of living (most people on this planet live on less than \$2 a day), is exposed through the plunder of oppressed nations, which is nothing short of essential for propping up this predatory system of exploitation. Yet every imperialist war ultimately comes home to roost, with military aggression abroad always met with political repression at home. As Martin Luther King Jr., said on April 4, 1967 in a speech in New York City, “The bombs in Vietnam explode at home” (quoted in Cohn, 2002). An important part of this is an acceleration of the Bush administration’s offensive against the working class, which has a strong racial character in the United States. Take, for example, the killing of Alberta Spruill, a quiet, churchgoing, 57-year-old Black woman living in Harlem, under the pretense of fighting the “war on drugs.” Spruill, a

proud union member of District Council 37 Local 1549, was preparing for work at 6 a.m. when New York City police, acting on a tip and using a “no-knock” search warrant, set off a deafening concussion grenade in her apartment. After the cops launched an all-out Gestapo-style commando raid, Spruill breathlessly explained that she had an acute heart condition but was dragged out of her home and handcuffed anyway before being taken to the hospital, where she was pronounced dead on arrival (*The NorthStar Network*, 2003).

Spruill’s death was not a “tragic mistake” but reflective of the shock-and-awe terror campaign being waged daily in inner-city neighborhoods throughout the United States, which must be understood as a domestic counterpart of the imperialist’s invasion and colonial occupation of Iraq (McLaren & Martin, 2003). At the very heart of this is the chilling fact that for the past 25 years, including the period in which Reagan was ranting and raving about an “evil” Soviet empire, the United States has been the world’s most aggressive jailer, with a greater proportion of its population in prison than any other country including Communist China—and it is growing, right alongside the prison-industrial complex (Goldberg & Evans, 2002; *Prison and Beyond*, 2002). A search for a substantive comparison would take us back to the Stalinist era, when the Soviet Union was under attack from the Nazis. To find a comparison with U.S. imprisonment of Black people, one has to look to apartheid South Africa before Mandela became president (Goldberg & Evans, 2002).

A brief look at recent historical experience in the United States is sufficient to draw the conclusion that the horror of fascism did not die with the madness of the Mussolini regime or Adolf Hitler in his Berlin bunker. As Trotsky (1940) stressed, fascism is a direct product of capitalist crisis, an extreme form of capitalist reaction, adopted as a last grasp to protect the same system of bourgeois rule. Under Bush Junior, fascism is a plebeian movement that plays on the hearts and minds of NASCAR dads, backed by monopoly capital as it eagerly overrides the remnants of bourgeois democracy to reestablish conditions of profitability. Domestically, this means doing away with “old fashioned” democratic freedoms (e.g., individual civil rights and liberties) that were once regarded as integral to the development of capitalism. With only a word or two of explanation, the government can flagrantly ignore the wishes of a significant minority of people. Indeed, armed with a vastly expanded police-state apparatus, the government has proven its willingness to use the external “international crisis” as an excuse to break any domestic opposition under the pretense of national security (Socialist Democracy, 2003). A boulder-sized reminder of who is calling the shots is the repeated use of militaristic tactics at antiwar events such as when riot-equipped police hurled concussion grenades and fired wooden bullets and “sting bags,” which send out a spray of BB-sized rubber pellets and a cloud of gas, to terrorize and injure antiwar protestors and longshoremen at the Oakland docks (Mendoza, 2003). All of this domestic turmoil is occurring at a time when the United States is promising the Iraq people that it will build up the infrastructure of Iraq—schools, hospitals, educational

institutions—so that it can give the Iraq people what it has been unable to give its own citizens.

With nary an obstacle in its path, the Bush gang is able to exercise the full power of the state to crush every adversary, including organized labor, just like the Nazis did when they formed the government (McLaren & Martin, 2003). Strangely enough, advocates of free trade and competition such as Bush Junior have sought to differentiate U.S. capitalism from single-party “dictatorships” and all sorts of “totalitarian” regimes, with special attention now turned toward Cuba, where U.S. officials have stepped up their attempt to destabilize the Castro government by increasing the funding of “dissidents” on the island as well as ruthless terrorist groups of Cuban expatriates who walk the streets of Miami with impunity, and by practically eliminating the visa program for Cuban emigrants wishing to leave (“The Dictatorship of Capital,” 2002). Yet with the building of a gigantic modern Gestapo-like “security state,” what is exposed is a dictatorship of capital, with the Bush regime operating by command rather than by openness and full-fledged participation. By extension, the concept of liberty and freedom for all is turned on its head, with the living-dead mass of ordinary working people “freed” from the burden of secure employment, pensions, affordable housing, health care, and civil rights, while the ruling class rakes in grotesque amounts of money with no limit, regulation, or legal obstruction (McLaren & Martin, 2003).

So we should not pretend in the aftermath of September 11 that “everything has changed” when the state is continuing to obstruct the dispensing of justice for its citizens at home, even as it wages multiple and enduring wars of “justice” and “liberation” abroad. If anything, the passage of the USA Patriot Act last year by Congress, together with the recent slew of executive orders, mandates, and Orwellian security measures enacted by Bush, Ashcroft and Company, indicates that we have entered a reactionary period unprecedented since the 1950s, where every thought and activity is subject to preemptive action. Authorized by the draconian Patriot Act, the newly created Department of Homeland Security, along with its secret thought police, now has the right to wiretap anyone’s phone it wants without a court order, to search any home without a warrant, to hold anyone in jail for 30 days or more without filing any charges (with no phone call privileges) and to secretly snoop into people’s lives by monitoring their finances, purchases, library, or Internet use with sophisticated electronic and computer eavesdropping equipment (McLaren & Martin, 2003). The presence of Big Brother even extends to colleges and universities, where the FBI has recruited campus police officers to monitor rogue students and faculty members (Harris, 2003a). It has even been reported in the press (Sniffen, 2003) that the Pentagon, through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), is now soliciting bids to develop a digital super diary, known as Lifelog, that “records heartbeats, travel, Internet chats, everything a person does.”

Every American should be gravely concerned about the erosion of civil rights in the United States, especially those prepared to speak out against this monstrous system (McLaren & Martin, 2003). In the beginning, the repressive state apparatus was content to set its racist sights on immigrants and people of color, especially Muslims, as evidenced by the Department of Homeland Security's plan called Operation Liberty Shield, enacted as bombs rained down on Iraq (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 2003). Targeting precisely the kind of people who have been victims of regimes that the U.S. was formerly allied with but has now vociferously singled out for condemnation, Operation Liberty Shield authorized immigration officials to round up and detain virtually all asylum seekers from a group of 33 countries including Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and Somalia (Amnesty International, 2003). Stoking racism and hate crimes, such repressive measures were generally tolerated by the public (given that they were selectively applied) but are now being quickly integrated and expanded throughout the entire judicial system, sharply undermining the democratic rights of U.S. citizens and noncitizens alike (McLaren & Martin, 2003).

Despite the hypnotic effect of prowar jingoism and propaganda, public opposition is escalating against the government's attacks on civil liberties, especially the USA Patriot Act (Ferguson, 2003). The act's curator, Attorney General John Ashcroft, was compelled to undertake a month-long propaganda tour across the country in support of it (Caruso, 2003; Teather, 2003). Timed to exploit the second anniversary of September 11, this tawdry road show was designed to convince the broad masses of people to submit to proposals that will even further reduce their civil liberties, with Bush requesting a big boost in law enforcement powers ("On Eve of 9/11," 2003). Typical of the administration's calculated style, Ashcroft gave a series of canned speeches, met only with friendly local officials, and granted select press interviews. At the same time, the Department of Justice was forced to admit that audiences at many public meetings were stacked almost entirely with law enforcement personnel. Caruso (2003) reports the following strategy used to terrorize the public into supporting the government's actions, "As part of the campaign, all 94 US attorneys around the country are encouraged to hold town hall-style events to discuss the Patriot Act and its role in preventing terror."

If all this is not dire enough, the United States has grabbed the lion's share of the spoils in Afghanistan and Iraq, intensifying interimperialist rivalries (Sison, 2003). Aside from ensuring U.S. hegemony, a strong motivation of the coin-operated Bush administration is to share the booty with contractors and backers that have close ties to the Republican Party. It was reported recently in the press that a study by the Washington-based group Center for Public Integrity found "nearly every one of the 10 largest contracts awarded for Iraq and Afghanistan went to companies employing former high-ranking government officials or individuals with close ties to those agencies or Congress" ("Reconstruction Deals," 2003). With just perhaps a faint scent of oil and sewage, Halliburton, a company formerly run by Mr. Cheney, scooped up one of the

biggest contracts worth U.S.\$2.3 billion for its Kellogg Brown & Root unit to rebuild Iraq's oil infrastructure. Other well-connected beneficiaries to share in the looting of Iraq include Bechtel Group, Inc. (George Schultz, secretary of state under Ronald Reagan, sits on its board of directors), which won a cool \$1 billion deal to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, the already bankrupt MCI WorldCom, which scored a scandalous no-bid contract for cell phone service in Iraq, and the union-busting Stevedoring Services of America, lead company fighting the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union on the West Coast docks, which picked up a \$4.1 million contract for operating the port of Umm Qsar (Teather, 2003). Clearly, all these contracts offer high profits worth billions of dollars. Yet, Nordland and Hirsh of *Newsweek* (2003) report that mismanagement and corruption in the rebuilding of Iraq is rife. In the wake of such allegations, companies such as Halliburton are waging a public relations offensive, which has included asking its employees to either phone or write their local newspaper to stem public criticism and bad press about overspending and overcharging (Goldenberg, 2003).

One of the Bush administration's major weapons in the war on terror is educating client populations to participate in transforming their nations into free-market democracies. The better they can be educated, the less chance the U.S. military will have to impose its will on them militarily. For instance, consider the State Department's International Military Education and Training Program. It is a program that arms and trains U.S. satellites and dependencies, preparing foreign soldiers to do the bidding of the United States without risking direct U.S. casualties. According to Chalmers Johnson (2003), in utilizing such a strategy, "responsibility is displaced and consequences diffused. This dislocation has roots in a much older phenomenon, in which empires sought to 'outsource' the enforcement of their political will" (p. 54). Johnson describes the development of this program over recent years:

In 1990 it was offering military instruction to the armies of 96 countries; by 2002 that already impressive number had risen to 133 countries. There are 189 countries in the United Nations, which means that this single program "instructs" militaries in 70 percent of the world's nations. We train approximately 100,000 foreign soldiers each year—most of them officers who then can pass on American methods to their troops. In 2001 the U.S. military taught 15,030 officers and soldiers in Latin America alone. The Pentagon does this either by bringing them to one of the approximately 150 military educational institutions in the United States or by sending military instructors, almost always Army Special Forces, to the countries themselves. The "war on terror" has only accelerated these programs, in many cases replacing the "war on drugs" as a justification, with no discernible difference in pedagogy. The United States claims that such training promotes American values. (p. 55)

One area in which the U.S. military unquestionably reigns supreme is in its ability to deliver instant profits on its contracts. Business contracts cannot begin to compete with military ones. The reason that military contracts are the

most profitable businesses in the country today is that they constitute no-risk, cost-plus deals that guarantee a profit because they operate outside the fluctuations of the marketplace:

The largest contractors are the Vinnell Corporation of Fairfax, Virginia, which on July 2 received a \$48 million contract to train a new Iraqi army; Military Professional Resources, Inc. (best known by its acronym, MPRI), located in Alexandria, Virginia, and owned by L-3 Communications; Kellogg Brown & Root, the Texas company that, long before its merger with Kellogg, bankrolled Lyndon Johnson's political career and that is today a subsidiary of the Halliburton Corporation; DynCorp of Reston, Virginia, which became notorious during the late 1990s when it was discovered that some of its employees in Bosnia were keeping underage women as sex slaves and then selling them elsewhere in Europe; Science Applications International Corporation of San Diego, whose top five executives made between \$825,000 and \$1.8 million in salaries in 2001 and held more than \$1.5 million worth of stock options each; BDM International of Fairfax, Virginia; Armor Holdings, Inc., of Jacksonville, Florida; Cubic Applications, Inc., of Lacey, Washington; DFI International (originally Defense Forecasts, Inc.) of Washington, D.C.; and International Charter Incorporated of Oregon. (p. 56)

Johnson (2003) reports that since 1975, Vinnell Corporation has been licensed by the government to train the Saudi National Guard, a 100,000-man force used to protect Saudi Arabia's violently repressive monarchy. Vinnell also constructs, runs, staffs, and writes doctrine for five Saudi military academies, seven Saudi shooting ranges, and a state-operated health care system. It trains and equips four Saudi mechanized brigades and five infantry brigades. Saudi Arabia funnels hundreds of millions of dollars into leading defense corporations to equip these forces. DunCorp provides personal protection for President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan and will eventually take over the training of the Afghan army. Johnson describes how since the 1990s the Pentagon has been contracting out most of its services, as in the case of luxurious camp Bondsteel in the Balkans, built for the U.S. military on a thousand acres of farmland seized from private owners after the bombing campaign in Yugoslavia in 1999. It cost \$36.6 million dollars to build and its annual operating expenses are \$180 million.

The best business in the global marketplace these days appears to be the business of bombing the infrastructure of a country to the Stone Age and then receiving millions of dollars to rebuild it. When Dick Cheney became head of Halliburton in 1995, its subsidiary, Brown & Root, won government contracts worth \$2.3 billion. According to Johnson (2003), "In the late 1990s, Halliburton rebuilt Saddam Hussein's war-damaged fields for some \$23.8 million—fields Cheney, as secretary of defense during the first Gulf war, had been instrumental in destroying" (p. 57). Johnson notes, "When war becomes the most profitable course of action, we can certainly expect more of it" (p. 58). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that military contractors

are also the biggest war boosters. Of course, this becomes easier to understand when you realize that for them, the “liberation” of a country is synonymous with profit for the military developers of the occupying power:

The biggest of all munitions companies, the Lockheed Martin Corporation, played an important behind-the-scenes role in developing support for Bush’s war with Iraq. In 2002 its former vice president Bruce Jackson became chairman of a “private” lobbying organization, the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. Charter members include George Shultz and John McCain (p. 58).

For many Americans who took to the streets to protest the invasion of Iraq, faith in the United Nations afforded a steady undertow to the imperialist advances of the United States. However, if there was ever a doubt that the United Nations serves as a paramount political instrument for the legitimization of U.S. foreign policy or is little more than a trembling quisling in the face of U.S. imperial strategy, that doubt should by now be erased. The United Nations clearly responds in the last instance only to military power, not the force of diplomacy or the interests of the oppressed. As Tariq Ali (2003) writes:

As for the UN acting as an “honest broker,” forget it—especially in Iraq, where it is part of the problem. Leaving aside its previous record (as the administrator of the killer sanctions, and the backer of weekly Anglo-American bombing raids for 12 years), on October 16 the security council disgraced itself again by welcoming “the positive response of the international community . . . to the broadly representative governing council . . . [and] supports the governing council’s efforts to mobilise the people of Iraq. . . .” Meanwhile a beaming fraudster, Ahmed Chalabi, was given the Iraqi seat at the UN. One can’t help recalling how the US and Britain insisted on Pol Pot retaining his seat for over a decade after being toppled by the Vietnamese. The only norm recognised by the security council is brute force, and today there is only one power with the capacity to deploy it. That is why, for many in the southern hemisphere and elsewhere, the UN is the US.

In our contemporary urban world, a world that is “rushing backwards to the age of Dickens,” that has approximately 921 million slum-dwellers “nearly equal to the population of the world when the young Engels first ventured onto the mean streets of Manchester,” and where by 2020 “urban poverty in the world could reach 45 to 50 percent of the total population living in cities” (Davis, 2004), how can we move forward? In our crumbling urban universe where the global informal working class “is the fastest growing and most unprecedented social class on earth,” and where “only the slum remains as a fully franchised solution to the problems of warehousing the twenty-first century’s surplus humanity” (Davis, 2004), how can we defeated the rock-ribbed custodians of capital?

Capitalist globalization and its imperialist stepchildren cannot be defeated by cooperative efforts on the part of interimperialist rivals. It requires mass

struggle by the working classes worldwide. To defeat capitalist globalization and the accumulation of corporate profits by private owners means developing a philosophy that can help us to organize praxis to this end. Our position as revolutionary critical educators is to support continent-wide mobilizations against the neoliberal offensive and the Washington consensus, whose objective is to turn back all the social rights achieved over the past half century. We advocate a gender-balanced, multiracial opposition to imperialism, to war, to capitalist globalization, to the law-and-order policies that have made a mockery of our democratic freedoms and that institutionalize violence against the most vulnerable groups in our society. We challenge the productivist model of development that puts the future of humanity at risk, and we demand democratic control over choices of development and of production. In doing so, we steadfastly refuse to submit to social liberalism, which controls the institutions of the state in the interests of the minority who own all the wealth, and we work toward a socialist alternative to capitalism so that social needs are satisfied. Here we advocate the politics of internationalism, especially in light of the rise in power of social movements and continental social forums. We refer to diverse groups that include the *piqueteros* in Argentina, the *cocaleros* in Bolivia, the landless workers in Brazil, the Pachakutik indigenous movement in Ecuador, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the Bolivarian Circles in Venezuela. The convergences necessary to give a true credibility to the conviction that another world is possible—a world released from the fetters of capital and all forms of social oppression and exploitation, where wealth will be measured in free time and value as freely associated labor and unbounded creativity, where the earth's biodiversity and ecological equilibria are protected—will not just happen on their own, they must be struggled for and guided by all of our efforts. Here we advocate a critical pedagogy as a means for reconnoitering the world of socialist politics and for casting off our vegetated product-oriented society and time-anchored façade of “everything has a price.” What alternatives to capital we imagine today will set the terms for how we engage reality tomorrow. This is the challenge of researchers, scholars, and activists working together for global justice and peace.

### Postscript

Emblazoned across the American psyche like a movie advertisement on a Sunset Strip billboard, the phrase “We got him” will be forever etched on the template of American popular culture, similar to those indelible phrases “Bring it on,” “Go for it,” or “Make my day.” In asserting that we are all safer now that Saddam has been captured, that the coordinated resistance has been made acephalous, that the tyrant finally has been felled, Bush accords reality with the dubious virtue of being its opposite in clever disguise. Bush neither chooses to

be detained by honesty nor held captive by integrity. In politics, necessity renders truth nugatory. Bush was fully aware that Saddam was not a major threat to the safety of the United States when he ordered missiles and cluster bombs to rain down on the enemy, marinating flesh, severing limbs, and pulverizing bone. And when the shock troops were not chopping down Iraqis like twigs in a wood chipper, and disease and hunger were ravaging the population, the truth of the Iraqi threat was kept from the public through vast networks of deceit and deception that is the common coin of technobureaucratic elite, the White House, and the corporate media. Although Bush knows that the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan has most assuredly made the United States more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, he will never share this with the American people. The spin doctors of the Bush administration think nothing of demoting analysis in favor of the propaganda value of blind assertion, that hyper-masculinist assault on reason that claims that the more carnage we create, the closer we are to winning democracy and freedom for the Middle East. Will it come out during Saddam's trial that American corporations were happy to do business with him in the 1980s, that they sold him anthrax bacillus, botulinum toxin, and other toxic bacteria, that U.S. military intelligence helped him fight his enemies, or that the U.S. government remained friendly even when he gassed his opponents, the Iranians and the Kurds (after the United States helped locate their positions for him via satellite images)? Will it come out that Donald Rumsfeld was happy to shake the mass murderer's hand in 1983? No doubt it will. But not in the mainstream U.S. media, which is owned and controlled by corporate interests. Will the United States make a quick exit from Iraq now that the tyrant has been deposed? Very unlikely. It is too risky for the Bush gang to permit an immediate general election to elect a constituent assembly, because such an assembly might object to current U.S. efforts to sell off the country to foreign corporations or to the continuing efforts to smash what is left of the Iraqi trade unions. Opposition to U.S. imperialism from within the belly of the beast grows even dimmer as the likely Democratic candidate for the presidency, John Kerry, wants to increase the number of troops in Iraq. This is certainly one of the most shameful moments in U.S. political history.

Even though the chairman of the independent commission investigating the September 11 attacks—former New Jersey governor Thomas Kean—has recently stated that the attacks of September 11 could have and should have been stopped (he has stopped short of blaming such failure on the Bush administration), it is unlikely that the Bush administration will open up its classified documents to show the public what it knew about the terrorist threat to the U.S. in the months preceding September 11, 2001. If Bush Junior loses his aura of the invincible war president, he will plummet from his marble balcony like a wounded eagle headlong into the thronging crowds he has so far been successful in captivating by the diplomacy of deception and lying.

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