

CIVILIZATION
UNDRESSED
[2]

LIVING OFF-LEASH

MO LOHAUS

Civilization Undressed

by Mo Lohaus

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[7] Ignorance Lost

[7.1] Liberty under siege

I am reading voraciously now, especially *Harper's* and a book by *Harper's* editor Walter Karp, Liberty Under Siege: American Politics 1976-1988. The book compares and contrasts the media coverage and policies of the Carter and Reagan White Houses. It distills, critically, what I witnessed firsthand; that the TV show of politics is only a very distant relation to reality. If you want to understand how conspiracy between media and government works, this book is for you.

When in reality Carter is doing everything the Democrat-controlled Congress asks to cooperate and move his agenda forward, the corporate news broadcasts the opposite: *Carter isn't trying. Carter is not cooperating. Carter doesn't care.* Source-based journalism assures that a Tip O'Neill, Robert Byrd, or Ted Kennedy—a grubby, oil-smearred operator of the machine—can always be summoned to cue us with a politically correct interpretation of events, woven of self-serving lies that are never questioned.

During the decade after the sixties, the optimism, sincerity and earnestness that had begun to breathe, the populism and sense of human community that had been crawling around and were finding legs, the emerging culture of activism, where public expression of ideas and the collective will to manifest them were standing up and finding a voice, are hit hard across the knees with billy clubs, dragged off-camera, tortured with pain and compliance holds, and edited out of the news

as exactingly as napalm had been before.¹⁶ The public eye is poked and the public brain addled with prescription obfuscations.

I was watching in 1976 as idealism was undermined, and Karp's book confirms what I saw: Carter was the only man of conscience in the oval office in the late 20th century, the last one concerned with the well-being of the citizenry, to whom he felt responsible. His every effort was undercut and scuttled by professional jackals in Congress and the press. He was among the last hold-outs in a culture of corruption, to whom the polity is just a cash crop.

Karp's book is fantastic. It is a political football fan's wildest dream. Karp is a kindly John-Maddenish commentator revisiting the great plays of the past decades using the instant replay and camera angles not shown on television:

There's Carter in the pocket. He's got the snap, he looks to the left...nobody open, then to the right...nothing. He's looking... looking.... Wow does he get creamed! Look at his shin! The bone is sticking out! Ooooh, that hurts!

Let's look at the instant replay: Wide receiver Kennedy is on the left. There's the snap...and he...he is walking. Not running. Not jogging. Walking. Coverage is tight because he is just not trying.

And the sack, let's get that from the other side. Lawrence Taylor is coming on hard, but Byrd and O'Neill can handle him. Wait... they're looking at each other...they're shrugging. They step apart! There's a clear lane between them: Blam! Pow! Kershmack! Does Carter ever get smeared!

[7.2] The truthless man

16) When napalm incinerates people it leaves charcoal statues behind. The landscape of Vietnam was dotted with these statues; too horrifying for coverage by the Western corporate press.

The man who follows Carter to the White House is neither honest nor earnest. Karp calls him “the truthless man.”

What lopping away of knowledge, of curiosity, of truthfulness to produce that public aura of candor and confidence. What lopping away of realism, foresight, even the capacity to govern. Reagan is ignorant, deliberately willfully ignorant, scarcely knows who works for him, rarely asks a penetrating question. William Casey, his campaign manager, his intelligence director, the innermost member of his inner circle, describes Reagan as passive, friendless, “strange.”

“He gave no orders, no commands, asked for no information, expressed no urgency.” So a startled David Stockman observes.¹⁷

Stockman, the budget director, gets no help or direction from a president who promised to balance the budget; a man who has no interest in doing that.

Early on Karp pounds home a powerful truth: *Reagan does not govern*. He is not managing anything. He is not thinking about what needs to be done, doing it, or making sure it gets done. He is an outsider, the guy the public focuses on, the guy who does public relations on TV while the real work, unknown to and unnamed by him, gets done. He is not the President, but the Puppet. But whose? His presidential campaign was just a public relations ploy, and so is his presidency. They are shiny packaging on a product unknown to the audience.

There are two hundred more pages here, revealing the scams of leadership and news

17) Walter Karp, *Liberty Under Siege: American Politics 1976-1988*

over and over, from angles easy to understand. The TV show of politics is misleading staged drama. Karp gives twelve years of examples, with both parties in office. Within months of the book's release he is dead of an alleged heart attack at age fifty-two.

Karp has introduced me to realpolitik; to systematic and intentional lying as the ceremony of public discourse. I see it now in the leering grins and feel it in the condescension of 'the experts' and 'our leaders.' They have everything figured out and we don't. They see through us psychologically. Our convenient and simplistic need-to-believes seem pitiful to them, and as they have no pity, they react with scorn.

Emotionally, I begin to understand cynicism. It goes beyond disbelieving in anything good or virtuous and romanticizes deceiving and betraying. Fooling, using, and hurting others gives cynics a feeling of power. To cynics we are all either self-serving and lying or foolish and self-deceived. In a competition for power and control, all ways and means are justified, and all dialog and explanations opportunistic. Any 'position' or expressed belief is a temporary hunting blind.

The gap between newsmakers and audience illustrates the schism between professional sociopaths and normal folks well: The news is made by and about people who are mostly ruthless pragmatists. It is viewed by an audience who are mostly romantic idealists; who are mostly honest; who do not lie routinely or knowingly, and who mostly believe the story of American values and American identity presented to us. It makes us feel good, and comfortable about who we imagine we are.

Because of our beliefs we cannot conceive that most of those in power are lying about their motives and goals every time they talk.

They are upholding our want-to-believes about what is going on, and our national and personal grandeur. Noticing their lying would disrupt our romantic illusions about ourselves and what we as a people stand for—a sacrifice whose costs we are unwilling to pay.

Our wanting-to-believe romantic stories keeps us from recognizing that the ‘issues’ presented by the news are not the real issues affecting our well-being. The official, corporate-validated ‘issues’ are this semester’s worthless curriculum. They are stage directions in the drama staged for us, helping us have ‘opinions’ no one cares about, and reasons for arguing with and distrusting the people around us who could be our allies; all manipulated alike into reactive obedience by the same shysters, bullies, and provocateurs.

To politicians, lobbyists, and media people in the know, the reality of the situation is obvious: Everyone lies. That is just the way things work. Morality is a public mask. Hypocrisy is the rule. Get what you can for yourself, however you can.

Members of the audience poorly appreciate how little we matter to supposed public servants. We, the American people, do not matter at all. The taxpayers do not matter at all. Our opinions do not matter at all. Our well-being does not matter at all. Our lives do not matter at all. Pretending they do is Politics 101.

[7.3] Turning off the news

Tonight I turn off the news for the last time. What I seek is not there; information about how civilization works and why events are happening. It has never been there. Dan Rather will never tell me what I need to know, because he himself does not know it.

Neither McNeil nor Lehrer will ever bring up the points I want to hear, for we are involved in different fields of study: They argue about the television show of politics; the ceremonial formality. I attempt to understand and describe the actuality.

I am living with my grandmother inside the Washington Beltway, within the circle of lies, in Falls Church, Virginia. She has watched the evening news since long before I was born. She reads *The Washington Post* every day. She reads *Common Cause*, *The Sierra Club*, *Audubon*, and *Greenpeace* magazines too. She was a teacher, and feels it is her responsibility to know what is going on in the world and take constructive action, so that we leave a livable world to our descendants.

I turn off the TV with the remote and continue sitting by her. She is sewing in an embroidery frame, peering through a quilter's lamp; a round magnifying glass surrounded by a fluorescent bulb hovering between her face and the fabric. She often works on projects while listening to the news. Though the news is over, she seethes, rocks, and groans, as its words and images continue to echo through her.

"Misery! Misery! Misery!" she says, grimacing and wincing as if physically pained. "George Bush thinks that...and George Bush thinks that...."

I speak quietly, with surprising force:

"We have no idea what he thinks, Gram."

She looks up. She and I agree on almost everything, and she can tell I am earnest.

"He sure thinks something. What do you mean?"

I am still for a while. A long-collecting understanding is bubbling up to speak. I do not know what it is, or where it comes from, but it speaks through me clearly and directly:

"What he says on TV or in the papers has

nothing to do with what he really thinks or feels, or why he really does things. It is just the TV show of politics, and he is playing a character. He is playing his role.”

She tilts her head and stares at me, listening. I continue.

“We have no idea who he really is or what he really cares about. He has a different emotional metabolism than we do. We know he does not care about being kinder or gentler. We know he does not care about broccoli. But we do not know who he is, what he feels, what he does, or what he cares about. Everything we see about him is what we are allowed to see; what we are shown. We are shown his TV character, his scripted role, making him seem human, making him seem like us. It is just a persona: a mask.”

“Aaagh,” she says.

She is sewing and thinking again, taking it in. It takes a good five minutes, and dozens of stitches, punctuated with little groans and sighs, before it has fully sunk in.

“So you believe the news is mostly worthless?”

“I do.”

“And that the reporters just take at face value whatever they’re told, without thinking about it, and report it...even though it’s worthless?”

“Exactly.”

She starts sewing again. She is rocking and shaking her head. After a minute or so she sighs, stops, holds both my hands, and looks me right in the eyes.

“That doesn’t give me much hope.”

I look at her with love.

“Me either, Gram.”

Without hope I am soon discovering what Bush is really up to: A decade before he is flying to Paris to meet with Iranians and pay them, in arms shipped through Israel, to

continue holding the American hostages until after the election, so that he and Reagan will be elected, and Carter will be ushered out in disgrace. Thus the hostages are released on Reagan's inauguration, and a new era is born.

The book is called October Surprise, and is authored by a White House staffer named Barbara Honegger. It is clear, reading it, that the author was a true believer, a conservative idealist and Reagan Republican who happened to be involved with politics at a high enough level to interact with the stars of the party—and discover they are not moral, traditional, or paragons of American values at all. They are liars, cheaters, killers, and win-at-all-costs egotists who do not believe a word of what they say on TV.

Ms. Honegger is obviously shaken by what she witnessed, and is almost apologetic for having to disillusion folks of a dream she found so beautiful.

One of my friends comes to visit at this time; a brilliant guy with a great heart. He is a serious environmentalist, who knows Brower and Foreman. Guys in suits sit in a car in front of the house the entire weekend he is here. After he leaves my mail is routinely ripped open. This is called 'obtrusive surveillance.' Its message is: *We are watching you, and we want you to know we are watching you.*

While visiting, he gently points out that I can read and write in graduate school and someone will pay me to do it. I request the applications and apply.

[7.4] Sensenbeavis

At night the Salvadorans who have been doing construction all day and the Vietnamese ladies who have been cleaning hotel

rooms crowd the warm room to practice English with me. I work at a language institute, teaching English to immigrants and German to engineers. The engineers are going to Germany to install a cell phone network. The immigrants are either Central Americans or Southeast Asians newly arrived, or high end diplomatic clients with tutoring needs.

I have good rapport with the owner of the agency and am increasingly assigned to high-end clients. Among them are a Saudi prince, a high-ranking Hyundai exec, and a well-connected Turk. My job is variable. Sometimes I do classroom work, sometimes I do bureaucratic interventions.

The Saudi is a big man, African black, and often hung-over. He is a simple guy who likes to party. He has a Mafia driver who has obviously killed before. The guy has a hunted look, but is professional. When I am with the prince the driver is looking after me, too. I wonder how it is that Saudis get hooked up with Mafia bodyguards.

On one trip to Immigration I learn that anyone who has a half million dollars in a U.S. bank account can automatically get a green card or have a green card renewed. Tough immigrations rules apply only to the poor.

I spend significant time with the Turk. He's funny, very smart, and likes to play frisbee. He is related to some of the top people in his government, but is not a politician himself. We spend time recreationally. At one point he tells me that the news we see on television, particularly as regards the Middle East is at least distorted, and often completely fictional. He tells me that during the Six Days War the rout of the Arabs was in large part due to the presence of hundreds of U.S. tanks and aircraft in Israel that the Arabs dared not fire on.

These guys are the first Muslims I spend time with. They and their families are warm and welcoming to me. I always feel comfortable with them, as if I am part of their extended community. This conflicts with my media training of “Muslims are dangerous, cruel, crazy, and should be feared.” But so what; these folks are genuine good humans.

There are a few other bits of my political education that occur here, outside of books:

An acquaintance takes me to visit Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner on the Hill. They have been pen pals and are both stamp collectors. In his office, the Congressman wants to take us to a shooting range where we can fire machine guns at human-looking targets. He is really worked up about shooting guns; full-on raving horny about shooting life-sized mock ups of “terrorists.”

Scary horny. Over the top.

This is 1991, and there have been no terrorist events in the U.S. up to this point. Beavis and Butthead are two years from their birth on MTV, but Jim perfectly models their agitated, compulsive, violent personae. He is so crude and juvenile that he must be someone’s political puppet. I feel ashamed for my friends from Wisconsin.

[7.5] Potomac insights

Near the Hill, in Georgetown, a college friend, an earnest student of history and political science, is enrolled in the International Relations graduate program there; considered the best in the country. He majored in Eastern European Studies; an extremely challenging and comprehensive major. He learned Russian and lived in Russia in order to get a firsthand view of the scene there. He lives and breathes public affairs as I do.

I like him. He is independent, intentional,

and self-possessed; he is graceful about taking points of discussion and getting back to me. He is centered, but playful. I remember him telling me about nailing his thumb to a roof with a nail gun and having to pry the nail out so he could go to the hospital. He's the kind of guy who could do that with a straight face: calmly unnail his thumb from the roof and climb down the ladder. His internal life is rich.

He is an evangelical Christian and a thinker; a forerunner of the alt.right that will arise a decade later. He is a big guy, a basketball player. He used to wear a long jersey at college, a very drug-positive place, that read, in huge letters, *DRUG FREE BODY*. He is not afraid of confrontation. At first I think this is due to his size and strength. I later think the divine grace he lives in plays a part.

We meet on the bank of the Potomac one afternoon and he tells me his story. He is shaken, disturbed, disheartened. He is supposed to be in the best Foreign Relations program in the U.S., maybe the world, and he is being taught garbage. The situation in Yugoslavia is about to become very dire, and he can see it, and where it is going.

The instruction he is receiving is shallow and dogmatic. His professors and classmates have simplistic ideas about the historical, ethnic, and cultural context of the region and are applying crude ideology and metrics to processing it. His professors are interviewed on the news as experts in the region, to his great grief and distress.

He tells me that he and his classmates are being taught to be managers, taught to look past the historical and cultural specifics of the place and its people and see only the expedient. The education they are receiving provides just enough information to set them up as consultants to corporations that want

to exploit the region; just enough training to recognize the local resources, collaborate with the local professional predator class, and open the McDonald's franchise of American business there, using local labor.

“I really like Eastern Europe and its people. This program does nothing to encourage the maturation of my affection as the ability to conduct constructive diplomacy.”

He says he and his peers are being trained to be suits—generic managers who can look past the people and their experience, impose cruel postmodern ideological gibberish, manage poverty-wage laborers, and extract resources.

“The worst part is that they really have no idea—the professors or the students—about the region or its history. Or worse, they do not care. They do not care about the people or the place and what makes them special. They are content with knowing the crude demographics, the ways and means, and the salable assets.”

Essentially, he tells me, Yugoslavia is just one more beautiful woman to deceive, dominate, use ruthlessly, and pimp out for profit.

“It is just crass. These guys are supposed to be the best of the best and they know less than we did as undergrads.”

I leave him feeling confirmed in my intuition about higher education: That we are trained to be functionaries who do our jobs; the jobs assigned to us. We are not trained to determine if doing our job does the job well, or what its repercussions are for other people or the natural world.

We are educated to be suits; middle managers without empathy or self-scrutiny. We are perverted by assigned assumptions and instructed perspectives. We are trained to be puppets like Congressman Sensenbeavis: vain, aggressive, self-pleased simpletons.

We constitute bureaucracies incapable of rigor, vigilance, or integrity; unable to deviate from business-as-usual or to prevent its consequences: genocide, homelessness, oil spills, or the abduction and rape, buying and selling of teenage girls by our ‘security forces’—soon to come in the former Yugoslavia by U.N. Peacekeepers, American contractors, and the so-called Russian mafia who procure for them.

All can be blamed on incompetence or flaws in workflows. All can be excused with Nixon’s old standard:

“Mistakes were made.”

[7.6] The Gulf War

The Gulf War has begun and there are drums in Lafayette Park. The drummers, rainbow hippies, follow President Bush wherever he goes, beating the drums 24-7. I am with a friend and her mom, who works at the Government Accountability Office, at the first big demonstration. We gather at the National Gallery with a sea of other folks and march to the White House.

I have never seen so many people. We fill Pennsylvania Avenue eight lanes wide, from the National Gallery to the White House. I look back and see nothing but people for about a mile. Organizers estimate three million; the news says 300,000 and gives us six seconds.

These are concerned, educated people; thoughtful, giving people trying to participate in a democracy, and assure representative government. These are the very people I grew up with; government workers and professionals with advanced degrees whose voices and actions do not impinge the occult architecture of power.

When I listen closely to the music in my

headphones I hear REM singing about the “Congress where they propagate confusion” and “operate the educated; primitive and loyal.” Loyal to what? A desperately optimistic world view where our democracy is not a mockery and our opinions matter?

I feel betrayed at this protest, not by anyone here, but by our assumptions and gullibility. I will forever after distrust mass activities that emotionally unify us to coerce catharsis. This protest seems an extension of both professional sports and formal education: a deliberate, cunning charade; a cleverly choreographed social ritual; a formality whose meaning and purpose we do not intuit.

The power we should be channeling into our collective survival—figuring out what we need to do to have food, shelter, energy, and information uninfluenced by our social controllers—is wasted on what the Romans called ‘circuses’—contrived public entertainments. The power we should be putting into community building, cooperating, informing, expressing, and empowering ourselves through coalitions with our neighbors, developing a real sense of being a team with our sister citizens, preparing for battle with our political manipulators, is channeled into guys in tights—the National Football League—symbolic warriors in costumed armies; or here, in waving signs and yelling slogans that no one important is listening to or cares about.

We should be warriors in real life. Instead we settle for mock battles and symbolic heroes, and settle in as an audience of spectators; of abstract insignificant talkers and thinkers deluded and occupied by narratives of identity. We feel that if we act symbolically, it is enough. If we can convince ourselves that we are right, moral, or good then we, in some way, get into Heaven, because being

symbolically right is the best we can do. The understanding that there is no heaven, that we have to actually, successfully build Heaven on Earth does not land with us.

Just as college provides us with a completely sanitized and sanctioned arena for intellectual activity, where the wild animals of true dissent have been carted off to private zoos, and hyperheady theorists replace them, the protest provides a completely sanitized and sanctioned arena for political activity.

In college our interaction with information is mostly symbolic, and has no bearing or traction on our daily lives; here at the protest it has no bearing on the exercise of violence or event-chains of resource allocation that shape our world. Just as in college, the power of our feelings and thoughts is strategically channeled and intentionally squandered on formalities: Our feelings do not matter. Our thoughts do not matter. Our opinions, that merge the two, absolutely do not matter. $0 \times 0 = 0$.

Going to political rallies—the sanctioned quasi-intellectual-football-game-expression of energized thoughts and feelings—does not matter either. We do not matter. Our ‘free speech’ does not matter. And the more we hallucinate that our opinions and words matter, the more divorced from political actuality we are. They are all we have—our opinions—so we make them matter. We make them important to us. We make yelling our opinions a symbolic victory. We succeed in feeling that we matter by surrounding ourselves with people like us, who confirm that our yelling is doing something, who reflect to us that we are right and good and moral and that our opinions matter.

We have successfully self-soothed. We have gotten out of our isolation and felt more powerful. In some way this is a victory, but

we are mistaken in thinking that it is enough or that it impacts the workflows of civilization. We are fools; self-deluded fools, sleepwalking through a simulacrum of living, reassured by others with similar need-to-believes. When we adjust our avatar, our public character, to make it feel powerful, we feel successful, as if we have really done something. We have beaten back our anxiety by feeling part of something. We have decompressed our terror by venting our anger symbolically. But the causes of our anxiety and terror remain unchanged.

Like children at a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese, we have been given hats, bull roarers, and party whistles. We make noise, eat sugar, and play pointless, uncreative games in familiar ways while screaming and yelling ourselves hoarse. Our protest is a socially sanctioned way of getting aroused with strangers, emotionally ejaculating, and feeling relieved. Drained and exhausted, we go home with our party hats, icing-smearred faces, and rotting teeth, and fall sleep.

[7.7] Sandboxed

A last epiphany before leaving DC happens in a phone conversation with my father while reading Honegger's book. We discuss the book and the period. One of his friends participated in the mission to rescue the American hostages in Iran. The helicopters burned in the desert without ever having contact with Iranian troops.

His friend, a career military man, was badly shaken: The mission had unequivocally been sabotaged from within the Department of Defense on multiple levels. People he had known had died.

His story echoes and parallels Honegger's: A loyal party man, in a life spent believing the

myth of American virtue, values, and righteousness, is shaken to his foundation by interacting with devices of actual American policy, and corruption beyond comprehension.

His story dovetails with what Honegger has testified: George Bush, former CIA director, through his connections in the Department of Defense, orchestrated the failure of the rescue mission....

If this can happen, if a non-president can give orders obeyed by the military, if he can arrange sales of weapons to a nation currently defined by the State Department as 'enemy' and under embargo, what meaning does the chain of command have? What meaning do 'Congress', 'checks and balances' and the 'rule of law' have? If he can learn about a secret mission ordered by a president and cancel it, what meaning does 'commander in chief' have?

Carter was in a double-blind dramatization. He was an actor who did not know that someone else was directing the movie. He was sandboxed. He could not see beyond the scenes in which he played. He could not conceive the massive scale of the production as a whole. To the directors and producers he was only a bit player, a stooge, a self-important nobody, a loser. He was Truman in *The Truman Show*. Except he did not quite wake up and leave the set.

He was neither President nor Commander-in-Chief. He was an autonomous marionette whose strings were used only lightly, but whose scenery and encounters were rigorously chosen; a completely sincere and responsible man, set up for impotence and abuse, in charge of a partial chain of command, whose majority was managed by others.

Who are those others? And how long have they been in power? At least thirty years, when Bush's father, Prescott Bush, was

Dwight Eisenhower's advisor and handler:

To prepare for his peace summit with Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev, Eisenhower cancelled all spy flights over the U.S.S.R.. He did this months beforehand to avoid any incidents that might interfere with the peace process. It was during this time, when no flights were supposed to be happening at all, that U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers was 'forced' to land in the Soviet Union because he 'ran out of gas.'

His flight was ordered by another chain of command, one that assured that he flew against the President's orders and ran out of gas; undermining the peace process, for which it had no use.

Curious? Read The CIA's Greatest Hits.

[7.8] Noise from the left

I put everything in the back of a truck and drive across country. I arrive in Eugene, Oregon, where I will be attending graduate school, knowing no one, and perfectly happy. I soon find myself living in a fabulous rustic household with folks who feel like old friends.

The information quotient has risen markedly. We get *Harper's*, *The Nation*, *Z*, *Utne Reader*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and the ever-informative *Eugene Weekly*. We get *NPR* and *Pacifica Network News*. The politically interested folks in the house busily cross-pollinate.

I read Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States and Noam Chomsky's Deterring Democracy and Manufacturing Consent. These books are a crash course in what the history books omitted; the details I intuited were missing from the International Relations curriculum; the unfortunate but all-important events that the dead-eyed

robots on the evening news systematically omit. This is the real history of how civilization works, not the romanticized and ideologically photoshopped version.

Zinn quotes Columbus' diary entries, and I meet Native Americans through his eyes:

“They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features.... They are so naive and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone.... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for when I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane.... They would make fine servants... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want....”

‘Servant’—from the Latin ‘servus’—meant slave. African captives sold on the Wall at Wall Street were advertised as ‘Negro servants.’ English paupers or criminals given the choice of hanging or slavery became ‘indentured servants.’ Columbus met new people and immediately assessed their potential as slaves.

Zinn summarizes:

“Because of Columbus’s exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread of the Europeans’ intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians,

after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.”

Let's make a full stop here and disillusion ourselves of civilized prejudices. The Spanish raped and killed freely, for fun. They made sex slaves out of the local women and children wherever they went. They amused themselves by torturing those who resisted them in bizarre, horrible public spectacles. They cut off limbs and genitals. They hung and stretched to breaking. They put weapons in body holes and twisted. There are thousands of recorded cases of this.

Current dictators, death squads and their first-world military advisors are working from long tradition. This was historically consistent. This was not the aberration of a few bad eggs. This was systematic. This was methodical. This was the basic interaction involved in conquering and colonizing others: Raping, torturing, and killing them publicly to terrify their associates into submission.

The dominant narrative tells us that the Europeans were 'more civilized' and were bringing civilization to 'the savages.' The dominant narrative tells us that the Europeans were bringing the ignorant to God. We should do our utmost to understand who the custodians of this narrative are and what their motives are. We should, on pain of repeating the horrors of the past, strive to understand the psychology of those who lie to and brutalize us—the owners and operators of civilization—and understand our own psychology in going along with their methods and rationalizations.

We are the Native Americans. We are conquered and colonized people. The Europeans were conquered and colonized by the Romans. When Caesar defeated Gaul, one million of the defeated were made slaves. Those

who submitted to Roman rule were like the Native Americans who submitted to Spanish rule; broken and internally splintered; forced to swear into a narrative provided by our rapists and brutalizers: that they were more civilized than we, that they were doing us a favor by domesticating us, and that we are happier as part of their system.

Our thoughts—the ones provided to us, the ones officially sanctioned, the ones required of us under pain of torture or death—were thus terminally divided from our feelings—our natural response to what was happening. War divided and conquered us internally. We have been, ever since, the dissociated slaves of a system that has us carrying out its methods unconsciously.

The better we overlook our internal division and apply our duality externally—by overpowering others and ignoring their feelings—the more successful we are. This, in ‘civilization,’ is appropriate behavior. This is ‘fitting in.’ This is politically correct. This is correctly polite to those who administer and franchise the way of living in which we are enmeshed. We match the perverted predators who punked us into their system. We become externally referencing. We turn (vert, verso) to what is around (per, peri) us for a sense of identity. We take the emotions of those we control and dominate as confirmation of our importance and power.

In the Caribbean this program is in rapid deployment: In some areas the genocide is nearly total. On Hispaniola, a native population of 250,000 is reduced to 500 in less than sixty years. African slaves are imported to restock the plantations. The death toll in the Americas is estimated at between 40 and 150 million, killed not with bright bombs or sanitary gases, but with war dogs: Irish wolfhounds and English mastiffs in armor;

hundred to hundred-and-fifty pound dogs trained to chase down and disembowel human prey. Spanish blades and bullets, horses hooves, dogs jaws, disease, and famine all work together.¹⁸

Those who survive learn the culture and customs of their conquerors. The natural society where people are loved and mutually supported is forgotten; it becomes a mere legend. Competition and mutual predation become the new normal. As Fanon said, in The Wretched of the Earth, civilization progressively distills brutality and duality: the more civilized and advanced, the more dissociated and traumatized.

[7.9] Biological weapons

Further north, in the English colonies, almost three hundred years later, the flavor is similar. Ben Franklin is fond of quoting Cannassatego, an Iroquois of his acquaintance:

*“If a white Man, in traveling through our country, enters one of our cabins, we treat him as I treat you; we dry him if he is wet, we warm him if he is cold, we give him Meat and Drink that he may allay his Hunger and Thirst; and we spread soft furs for him to rest and sleep on; we demand nothing in return. But, if I go to a white man’s house in Albany, and ask for Victuals and Drink, they say ‘Where is your Money?’ And if I have none, they say, ‘Get out, you Indian Dog!’”*¹⁹

Franklin was aware of the civilization being destroyed. He saw the great paradox occurring around him; that the New World was a paradise of opportunity for desperate

18) See David Stannard’s American Holocaust and John and Jeannette Varner’s Dogs of the Conquest.

19) Bruce Johansen: Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois, and the Rationale for the American Revolution

people seeking a better life, and an agony of suffering for those who had been living here happily, and welcomed the newcomers kindly—only to be shot, lied to, intentionally sickened, poisoned like dogs, starved, and driven off to marginal lands to die in whatever way they could manage.

Blankets infected with smallpox were given to North American Indians as gifts, and wiped out entire villages. Millions of buffalo were shot and left to rot so those who relied on them for food would starve to death. Treaty after treaty was broken by the Europeans so they could have more Lebensraum. These things are not mentioned in the textbooks I was given, or in Little House on the Prairie. Starving, desperate people are sent to new lands to kill off the locals and replace them as slaves of the empire. They are sent to build infrastructure, then they too are replaced.

I feel relieved to learn all this. I feel relieved to understand that there is a reason for my deep intuitions and feelings. I feel relieved to understand that violence is central to the seemingly relaxed society in which I live. I remember countless weekends wandering in the mall as a teenager. It was a really big mall, with polished brown cobblestone flooring. I wandered mostly from high-sugar restaurants to book stores, to toy stores. The sugar was for numbing. The books and games were all about fantasy and abstraction; doing whatever I could to dissociate from my uncomfortable direct experience and invest my attention, emotion, and imagination in something more comforting and creative, in hallucinations of freedom, wisdom, or happiness.

It comforts me to begin to understand what I have been living in; how it is completely brutal and dishonest about itself.

How it compels us to rationalize, believe, and hope because of what we cannot admit. I am only able to touch this hundreds of years in the past, as it happens to people I do not know, in places I will never visit. That is as close as I can accept. I cannot yet name or understand that it is happening to me, but admitting what is happening to someone somewhere is healing in a minute homeopathic way.

In learning about how civilization spreads I am obliquely learning about what really goes on behind the story of the news. Today countries are converted to 'democracy' just as native people were converted to 'Christianity.' The news is today's update to the fairy tale of history. Every day history is written and formalized by civilization's apologists: news suits, commentators, and academics who have been duped and domesticated, who have no choice but to think the thoughts assigned to them, because the fear of being deviant and calling down the wrath of this all-pervasive, scientifically distributed violence machine closes out most options for honesty or scrutiny.

I have been lied to all my life by history books and news suits; it is a relief to know what they were lying about, what is really going on, so I can formulate a response to it.

[7.10] War is a for-profit venture

From Deterring Democracy I get a clean summary of the 20th century's shenanigans in the use of violence for profit. It is a late 20th century update on the earlier, insider whistle blowing by Smedley Butler, the most-decorated Marine in history, up to his time:

War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority

of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its 'finger men' to point out enemies, its 'muscle men' to destroy enemies, its 'brain men' to plan war preparations, and a 'Big Boss' super-nationalistic-capitalism.

It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long.

I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents. ²⁰

My take-aways from Butler are several:

First, civilization is a racket. War is only its operating system. All its institutions apply war's methodologies. Lying and violence are the two strands of its DNA.

Second: War is for profit. Its ideologies, when promoted by empires, are purely dishonest advertising and public relations. It is all about taking slaves and grabbing booty.

Third: The Big Boss is super-nationalistic-capitalism, a collaboration of international cartels and transnational corporations. Nations are mere proxies for the world's most wealthy; they generate profits through military power. The U.S. is not the world's greatest superpower; it is just a vehicle for an international community of unthinkably wealthy people to exercise violence on others through the decoy of a nation with citizens. We, as those citizens, believe we are acting in our own interests, killing and dying for noble causes when destroying other nations and enslaving them. Our completely cynical remote controllers know better. Cost benefit analysis reveals the true beneficiaries.

Fourth: The programming that puts our

20) Smedley Butler: War is a Racket, 1935.

mental faculties in suspended animation is trauma-based. Military training almost kills us. Our new personality is tough, insensitive, and resistant to perception or behavior at variance with those of the homogenized herd. We become robots: self-righteous, aggressive, dangerous robots, all of us: military and civilians alike.

[7.11] The real Pearl Harbor

Layers of reality are beginning to resolve. As I read more deeply, more living witnesses come to testify in person: One of my new friends served in the navy during the Vietnam War, as a communications officer for the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, in Hawaii. He had eyes-only clearance until he looked too deeply into the records and turned himself in as a security risk.

What did he see?

He saw that the White House knew the attack on Pearl Harbor was coming and ordered the ships into port so that they would be easy targets. The top brass wanted to get into the war, provoked the attack by cutting off Japanese access to oil in the Pacific and seizing Japanese assets, then waited, and allowed the attack to happen.

The Japanese code had been broken, and the attack was tracked from its beginning to its completion. Thousands of service people were sacrificed for 'the higher good' of getting the U.S. into the war in the Pacific. I later see a History Channel program confirming this.²¹

Another friend was a highly decorated green beret in Vietnam and spent most of his time behind enemy lines. He said that

21) Mark Willey: [Pearl Harbor: Mother of All Conspiracies](#); or Robert Stinnett: [Day of Deceit: The Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor](#); or on YouTube: The History Channel: [Conspiracy: FDR and Pearl Harbor](#).

a major priority of the war was controlling opium traffic from the golden triangle and importing heroin to the U.S.. Heroin was imported on military aircraft, through military bases, in body bags with the dead.

The so-called War On Drugs is in full force in 1991, and the admission that the U.S. military is a primary agent of drug trafficking reminds me to begin rethinking drug policy with more historical context; remembering the Opium Wars, remembering Vietnam, anticipating the coming war in Afghanistan, home to the world's largest poppy fields.

The real breakthrough—in understanding the current relationship between government as supposed enforcer of morality and its direct involvement in organized crime—comes months later, the following spring, when I meet a retired CIA agent with a powerful story to tell.

[7.12] An ancient option

It is one of several used bookstores just jammed with lost treasures; lovingly gathered and organized by topic; interstellar portals where information appears with the same magical directness as in the symbolic tableaux of dreams. These cosmic libraries are charmed and mysterious pockets of fabricated space, postmodern Vedic temples, with the same pulse and drone of infinity growling in the air.

The book is falling from the shelf as I walk by, with a light blue cover showing a white falcon above a desert. It is falling in slow motion, giving me just enough time to lunge and catch it. It is Journey To Ixtlan, by Carlos Castaneda; an anthropologist's log of encounters with a Native American metaphysician, Juan Matus.

I open to this section:

Little by little you must create a fog around yourself. You must erase everything around you until nothing can be taken for granted; until nothing is any longer for sure, or real. Your problem now is that you are too real. Your endeavors are too real. Your moods are too real. Don't take things so for granted. You must begin to erase yourself. ...Begin with simple things, such as not revealing what you really do. Then you must leave everyone who knows you well. This way you'll build up a fog around yourself.

I am already doing it. I have left everyone who knows me well and do not reveal what I really do: investigate civilization. Hearing that what I am doing has a sense to it begins to restore my confidence and purpose. It begins to work on me immediately, deconstructing my prejudices, rearranging my beliefs, softening my certainties. A three to four year depression begins with this book; it shakes everything I can stand to look at out of my tree and onto the ground.

I begin to realize being smart does not matter and that having smart opinions does not matter. I begin to realize academic success does not matter and being respected, admired, or liked by those around me is not worth much at all. Grasping the essence, the real, is crucial, and it is not an intellectual exercise, but a practical one.

The real game is spiritual. The real game is recognizing abstract, impersonal truths and validating them through action. The real game is empirical, and the experiential scientists of the past have left notes. The real game is evolution, personal evolution; helping the socially programmed idiot die and encouraging the wise natural animal to grow.

My days are numbered in graduate school.

It is one thing to realize that my 'reality' is built on lies, but it is quite another to be told how I collude in building my own prison and fastening my own chains: by maintaining an inner dialog and story of self that match what is socially acceptable.

The old Indian tells and shows the sophisticated graduate student that he, and his civilized world, are deranged, vicious, and disastrously disconnected from the operative organizing force that gives purpose and satisfaction in life; a force with which we can be in constructive relationship. He calls it 'the Spirit.'

In this book and in its sequels I find a coherent map of consciousness and perception; a pragmatic guidebook to human experience, drawn with skill, rigor, and accuracy, beside which the most erudite writings of the western canon are only near misses, and the vast bulk of scholarly discourses are crayon scribblings by toddlers.

Castaneda was similarly impressed:

His words created visions of myself succumbing to something awesome and unknown; something I had not bargained for, and I had not conceived existed, even in my wildest fantasies.

He has run into a metaphysician with practical understandings of patterns that create events. He has run into someone who consciously and demonstrably participates in those patterns. He has run into a tradition that has produced Christlike people every generation for thousands of years, who consider themselves not moralists, but artists, and who have accumulated careful procedures for activating and occupying our full human possibilities.

Matus dissects the perception and behavior of civilized people elegantly, unerringly, and with humor. I hear no dogmatism in his

words, no unconscious agenda, no superiority, no emotional or psychological weakness to protect—he speaks with insight, care, and precision. His map is so good, and his insight so authoritative that I must take him seriously. He not only names the civilized sickness as descriptively as Nietzsche, he has seen what is outside of the house, and knows how to get out and get well.

His world view, revealed here and in Tales of Power, The Fire from Within and in The Power of Silence, is so practical, elegant, and relevant that graduate school is ruined for me. His words provide a map of life that can be actioned effectively, allowing for experiential integration and the restoration of presence.

By comparison, the scholars and theorists I am tasked to read for class are idiots. They play no-stakes games with semantic cards. They are unconscious maniacs doing what I did at age nine: hiding in abstraction and hallucinating importance. I have already exhausted that. I cannot waste my life doing what they do. I have finally met someone who knows what he is talking about—life, and all its possibilities—and it is thrilling.

Our perception of reality, says Matus, is a function of emotion, energy in motion, assembled through a point of fusion, a personal assemblage point, representing our emotional setting. Reality, logic, and the ratios of our rationality all arise from our emotional setting. All that makes sense to us is a function of what we are willing and able to feel.

Our logic is authoritative only on the island of our editing; the island to which our current emotional setting gives rise. Civilized people organize consciousness around a position of self-reflection driven by self-importance and self-pity, that paints and taints all we perceive:

The position of self-reflection forces the assemblage point to assemble a world of sham compassion, but of very real cruelty and self-centeredness. In that world the only real feelings are those convenient for the one who feels them.

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This is civilization and the arrangement of consciousness that creates it. The way to exit this reality, he says, is to assume a mood of ruthless responsibility for one's actions:

A ruthlessness which is not cruelty, but which is the opposite of self-pity or self-importance; a ruthlessness which is sobriety. ²³

I have my marching orders. Ω

22) Castaneda: The Power of Silence, Washington Square Press, pp. 154-6
23) Ibid.